
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation, by sitting in an upright comfortable position. Just as we adopt a comfortable physical position, we also need to generate a positive motivation in our mind before we meditate. This is something we need to understand.

If we already have a positive motivation such as love and compassion in our heart and mind, then we don't need to generate any further motivation; we can just leave it at that.

Generating a positive motivation means intentionally changing a negative state of mind to one that is positive.

Generating a positive motivation allows us to be clear about our goals, and what we want to achieve. It reminds us of what we wish to achieve in our meditation practice. So, it can be an aid to further strengthen our goal or it can also benefit to set our practice in the right direction.

Thus, as we sit comfortably, it is equally important to make sure we have a positive state of mind; this is essential. Adopting a comfortable physical posture is generally much easier than adopting a positive state of mind.

Controlling the physical body is easy, but it is not easy to control the mind. There's a story from the Buddha Shakyamuni's own life that illustrates this point. There was a king in ancient India who entrusted one of his generals to tame elephants, which is a difficult task. In training the elephant, the general was able to bring a certain amount of control over the physical movements of the elephant, but then suddenly the elephant when wild. The elephant must have smelt a female elephant in the distance and it ran in completely the opposite direction. The king summoned the general and was about to punish him. He asked, 'How come you did not tame the elephants according to my orders?' The general responded, 'My orders were to physically tame the elephants, which I was able to do. But there is no way I can control the elephant's mind. It is only the Buddha who can control and subdue the elephant's mind'.

That story illustrates how difficult it is to control the mind in general; however it is the most essential part of our being that needs to be under control. Even if we have control over our physical body and we can sit for a long time, if we don't have control over the mind then we have not been able to control ourselves entirely, we've not been able to subdue ourselves. Just like the story of the wild elephant's mind that was difficult to tame, we notice when the mind is infatuated with desire or attachment, then it is very difficult to control. Our mind

seems to take us in whatever direction that attachment draws us.

We must pay attention to controlling our mind. If we don't pay attention to our state of mind and just allow it to be influenced by any delusion, then it is really difficult to control it. That's why we must pay attention to subduing the mind.

Thus, we need to set both our physical and mental composure appropriately. In meditation, we need to clearly identify the objects that we are focusing on. There are certain objects that we need to focus on and others that we need to distance ourselves from. Not every object should be taken as a meditation object. There are some objects that are appropriate to focus on, and others we need to intentionally avoid focusing on and to distance ourselves from them. Generally the teachings mention that we can use any object as a meditation object to develop calm abiding, however for it to be effective, it needs to be an object that doesn't attract us towards worldly thoughts.

If our normal state of mind were to be naturally focused inwards, then we could rest assured that there's not much need for any effort to do anything else because that is a stable state to be in. But if we check our natural state of mind and we find that it is mostly in turmoil, distracted and influenced by delusions or sensual worldly thoughts, then we need to change this.

If our mind is in turmoil, then that is an indication that our normal state of mind is influenced many delusions. So we need to reverse this, and settle the mind by intentionally not allowing it to be influenced by delusions. We need to focus on an object that does not cause delusions to arise in the mind. This will naturally cause the mind to settle.

A natural consequence of focusing on an inner object is that the mind starts to become more relaxed. It is as if the mind gets a break from all the disturbances and then naturally falls into an equilibrium or peaceful state. The reason why we experience a calm state of mind is because our mind is not being influenced by manifest delusions, which temporarily subside.

When our mind experiences a certain level of peace and tranquillity from the temporary cessation of delusions, then we can really understand how an arhat's mind is in a perpetually tranquil and peaceful state. That is because they have overcome not only the manifest level of the delusions, but the very root of the delusions, which has been completely eradicated from their state of mind. Thus an arhat experiences a perpetual state of peace.

We could experience something like that if we were to weaken the delusions in our mind. When we are not influenced by delusions in our mind, then our mind can be happy.

If we find that our mind is naturally becoming more peaceful and more subdued when we meditate, then this is a clear indication that our practice has been successful. As the great masters of the past have said, a clear sign of the meditation practice taking effect is that the mind is less influenced by delusions and becomes more subdued. Our meditation practice needs to be a practice that is

geared towards tackling the delusions in our mind. The practice itself should be used as an antidote for overcoming these delusions. This is the real purpose of the meditation.

We need to strive towards a subdued mind that is not influenced by delusions, otherwise we will constantly be in a disturbed mental state that does not contribute to our well-being. So we must resolve to apply a proper technique.

In attempting to apply the antidote for the delusions in our mind, it is advised that we first clearly identify what particular delusion is the strongest in our mind. This is what we need to deal with initially, this is our priority.

To tackle the strongest delusion in our mind, we need to identify what causes it to arise. What external conditions, what kind of objects cause that strong delusion to arise, whether it's attachment or anger? Once we identify the particular object, we notice that as soon as we think of it or interact with it, it causes a strong emotion to arise in our mind. Initially, we try not to be preoccupied with that object, we try not to allow our mind to be influenced by or drawn to that object. In the meditation practice, the very attempt of withdrawing our mind from all external objects can serve as a model to withdraw our mind from any object that causes a strong emotion or delusion to arise in our mind. This is how we tackle the delusions in our mind so our mind doesn't become strongly influenced by them.

Having covered the general aim and technique of meditation and how it subdues the mind, now we focus on our breath. Choosing the breath as an object to focus on is very effective in overcoming the overly excited or overly distracted mind. This technique is useful for helping to subdue or overcome a distracted and excited mind. Now this is not to say that the practice of focusing on the breath becomes the actual antidote to overcoming all distractions, but nevertheless it does reduce the intensity of a distracted mind and allows the mind to become a little bit more focused.

For us beginners, we need to first settle down the mind before dealing with the more subtle and obscure levels of our delusions and distractions. It is the busy or distracted state of mind that causes a lot of mistakes in our lives. The practice of merely focusing on the breath is effective because, by its very nature breath doesn't have any colour or shape, which makes it a suitable object to help settle the mind. Because it lacks colour and shape, it has less chance to excite the mind. There are specific objects in meditation that are effective in overcoming particular delusions, such as focusing on the faults of an object of desire in order to reduce attachment to the object. However, here we adopt this technique to settle down the mind.

In order to make the practice effective, we need to develop a strong determination in our mind to not allow it to be influenced by other distractions. The distractions referred to in the teachings are the superstitious thoughts in our mind. When the teachings refer to not being influenced by thoughts in general, that implies not to be disturbed by superstitious or disturbing thoughts. Primarily this refers to the disturbing thoughts. However

when we focus on the breath in meditation, it is advised that we don't allow our mind to be influenced by any thoughts, either positive or negative.

Positive thoughts are thoughts or emotions that are imbued with love and compassion. Even though thinking about or feeling compassion is positive, for the purpose of gaining the familiarity of single-pointed focus and attention on an object, it is advised that we temporarily let our mind be. It's of course difficult for our mind to be completely immersed and influenced by pure love and compassion anyway, so for beginners the advice is to temporarily let go of even positive thoughts, and definitely all negative thoughts and all forms of distractions, and just temporarily keep our full attention and focus on the breath itself. We need to be focused on an inner object, in this case the breath. But we don't just focus on the gross level of our breathing such as the air that we breathe in out, but rather trying to be in tune with the more subtle level of our breathing, the wind energy within us. This wind element is much more subtle wind energy than the gross air. It is good to be mindful of the subtler level of wind energy that we have within and try to get in tune with it. This subtle inner wind energy we focus on is more appropriate as an inner object. As we breathe naturally, try to get in tune with the more subtle wind energy by being completely focused on the breath.

(Pause for meditation)

Specifically, it is the inner wind or inner breath that we need to focus on rather than just the physical air coming in and going out as the breath, which is an external object. The inner object is the subtle wind or air which is more aligned with our mental thoughts. As we breathe in, we imagine subtle air coming in and then as we breathe out subtle air also goes out. It is within this subtle level that we try to completely immerse ourselves. It is as if we have immersed ourselves with the wind element itself. This is a more appropriate way to focus on the breath.

4.2.2.1.2. The actual way to take the essence

4.2.2.1.2.2. Training the mind in the stages of the path held in common with beings of the medium scope

4.2.2.1.2.2.4. Resolving the nature of the path that leads to liberation

4.2.2.1.2.2.4.2. The actual resolution of the nature of the path

4.2.2.1.2.2.4.2.2. The type of path one cultivates to overturn cyclic existence

4.2.2.1.2.2.4.2.2.3. The way to train in ethics

Following the topic from our last session, we are covering the explanation of morality or ethics. As explained previously, the mind of restraint is what is defined as morality or ethics, when we refrain from engaging in the ten non-virtues. For example, applying the mind of restraint towards killing, refraining from killing; or applying the mind of restraint towards stealing. Likewise, refraining from sexual misconduct and all the negativities of speech and mind.

Morality is applying the mind of restraint, which highlights the distinction between the general act of not killing versus an intentionally applied restraint of not killing. The act of not killing is a good deed. However, it is not classified as the morality of not killing. In order for

the act of not killing to become the morality of not killing it needs the extra element of intentional restraint. When we intentionally develop the restraint and commit ourselves to the act of not killing, then this is a much more powerful action. The virtue that we accumulate from that is much greater than the virtue from just passively not engaging in the act of killing. This is how morality becomes a virtuous practice.

A great Khadampa master called Geshe Kham-Lungpa said that people who engage in virtue, particularly in relation to the ten virtues, and encourages others to engage in the ten virtues, can be considered a real virtuous friend or an authentic spiritual teacher.

It doesn't matter what aspect they have taken on, they are a real spiritual teacher, whether they are ordained or lay, or have long hair or short hair. It's all irrelevant to what they stand for, which is engaging in the ten virtues themselves and encouraging others to do so. This is the real mark of an authentic virtuous teacher.

This is a profound instruction. When someone practises the ten virtues themselves and encourages others to do so, it is an incredible deed.

Furthermore, Geshe Kham-Lungpa refers to these people as noble. A noble person engages in noble deeds and encourages others to engage in noble deeds. According to the *Abhidharma* text, those who engage in noble activities and encourage noble activities in others are called noble beings.

Further more, such a being can be also referred to as a yogi, because when their activity accords with yoga and encourages others in the activity of yoga, then they are called a yogi.

Applying virtue is what we refer to as a true yogic practice, and is also applicable to an adept who practises ascetic practices. Practising the ten virtues would be considered a fitting practice for a true ascetic.

Indeed, when people engage in the practice of refraining from committing non-virtues such as refraining from the three non-virtues of body—killing, stealing, sexual misconduct—and the four non-virtues of speech—which are refraining from lying, slander, harsh speech and gossip—as well as the three non-virtues—which are covetousness, harmful intent and wrong views—then they are known as a worthy person. We can see how noble and great such a person really is.

The practice of ethics or the practice of Dharma refers to engaging in these virtuous practices in a practical way.

The four subdivisions of this topic of training in ethics is subdivided into four, the first explains the benefits of ethics. Initially when the benefits of ethics are explained, then that will encourage us to actually practice ethics.

The text explains briefly the benefits of the practice of ethics. A quoted from Nagarjuna's text reads, 'Ethical discipline is like the ground supporting animate and inanimate worlds, it is the foundation of all good qualities'.

Nagarjuna's passage explains the benefit of ethics with an analogy about the ground that supports animate and inanimate objects. The animate refers to living beings

such as ourselves—humans, animals and all living forms. Inanimate refers to the environment such as trees, crops and flowers. Animate beings and environmental inanimate objects are all dependent on the ground. Without the ground as the basis, none of this can be supported. Using that as an analogy, Nagarjuna explains that ethics is similar in that ethics serves as a support or basis for all the good qualities we develop within us.

The next quote is from a text called *The Tantra Requested by Subahu*. This text explains: 'Just as every harvest grows without fault in dependence on the earth, so too do the highest virtues depend on ethical discipline and grow by being moistened by the water of compassion'.

The meaning of this passage is similar to the explanation given earlier, using a similar analogy illustrating how faultless harvest depends on the earth. Likewise the source of all virtues, liberation and enlightenment, depend on ethical discipline. Just as conditions such as water are needed for external crops to grow, likewise, the water of compassion is needed to develop inner virtue. Virtues are positive qualities developed on the basis of ethical discipline and need to be moistened—just like the seed needs to be moistened with water—with the water of compassion.

Ethical discipline applied with compassion becomes a cause for the mind to become gentle and naturally kind. Someone who puts an effort into practising this becomes a person who is appreciated by others. This also leads to developing a clear and bright state of mind. We can achieve all this by refraining from the ten non-virtues. And it is not that difficult. If we sincerely commit ourselves to intentionally refrain from killing, this is the morality of not killing, and to intentionally make the commitment not to steal is the morality of not stealing. Likewise, with all the rest of the non-virtues, when we make the mental decision not to engage in the negative deed, then we are practicing morality in relation to that deed.

Rather than generally referring to ethics in general being the basis of all good qualities, if we refer to ethical behaviour as something outside of ourselves that is something 'out there' in general, then that is not benefit for us. But if we can relate this to our inner being, if we can relate it to ourselves and how ethics serves as a basis for developing qualities within us, then we have derived the meaning to serve as a personal advice; a personal instruction. This way of thinking about ethics is what will benefit us.

Before we conclude for the evening, we shall again spend a few minutes in meditation, this time focusing on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we maintain focus on the sound of that mantra, we just try to remain in that focused state of mind for a short while after the recitation. This is also a very good practice.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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