
The Condensed Lam Rim

ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བརྒྱུག་པ་སྟེ།

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It is good to spend some time in meditation. For that purpose we sit in a comfortable, relaxed position. Likewise, we set our mind to try to develop a clear and brighter mind with a sense of joy.

Meditation is generally defined as a technique that involves choosing an internal object to focus on. Once one chooses an appropriate internal object one familiarises oneself with paying full attention to that object. While that is a general description of meditation we need to know that when we meditate on love or compassion, it is done by generating that state of mind within oneself and familiarising one's mind with the feelings of love and compassion. This it is unlike the earlier description where we focus on a distinct object, which is not necessarily a state of mind.

When we refer to an object of one's love or compassion that would, initially, be a separate object such as other living beings who are experiencing suffering. However meditation on love does not mean just maintaining one's focus on sentient beings who are experiencing suffering. It would be inappropriate if one were to understand meditating on love in that way. Rather, while the object of one's love and compassion are other sentient beings who are suffering, the actual meditation involves generating love, a sense of how unbearable the suffering that they are experiencing is and developing a keen wish for them to be free from that suffering. We also familiarise ourselves with the wish for them to be happy.

When cultivating an understanding of impermanence, which is the transitory nature of things, as well as the selflessness or emptiness of things, then it is a case of familiarising one's mind with the attributes of impermanence or emptiness of the object. One chooses an object and familiarises oneself by focusing on that aspect.

What we can conclude from the descriptions of meditation in general, and particular, is that what is common in all is that meditation involves focusing on an object that does not cause negative states of mind or delusions to arise within oneself. It involves focusing on a virtuous object, an object that in its own nature is virtuous. When one has chosen an appropriate virtuous object to focus on then, by the very fact of maintaining a focus on the virtuous object, it will naturally oppose its opposite, which is non-virtue. The more we become familiar with the focusing on virtue the more we will naturally be inclined to refrain from non-virtues. That is how meditation helps us on a practical level.

The literal meaning of the Tibetan word for meditation, *gom*, is 'to familiarise one's mind'. Thus, meditation

practice is a process of familiarising one's mind with virtue. When we choose a virtuous object and familiarise our mind with that then, naturally, the mind will become more and more imbued with a virtuous state and that lessens the influence of the delusions on our mind.

The opposite of a virtuous mind is a mind that is infested or influenced by the delusions. We have already experienced the ill effects of the delusions taking over our mind in whatever form, and the effects of that. This is what causes all the problems, all the turmoil in our life. Whatever difficulties and problems we may have experienced so far in life are all due to the delusions, or negative states of mind, or attitudes within oneself. The reason we give in to the delusions and are influenced by them is none other than our familiarity with the delusions. Because of the fact that we are already very familiar with experiencing or expressing negative states of mind or attitudes within oneself it seems that, without much effort, we will experience the delusions arising in the mind.

We can experience ill effects when a delusion such as attachment arises in the mind. We are not referring here to experiencing the ill effects of general attachments. We are referring to intense attachment to an object where the mind is completely being obsessed with the object of attachment. In that instance, one actually feels the pangs of being obsessed with the object of attachment. One doesn't feel settled. One is not in one's right state of mind and is completely obsessed and influenced by the attachment. It is similar with anger. When we are completely obsessed with anger towards any object then our mind will be completely under that influence. We will experience the pangs of anger within ourselves. This is not a comfortable state of mind to be experiencing.

We all, to some degree, experience the pangs of desire or attachment and the pangs of anger. That is the result of having been influenced, or being totally familiarised, with those states of mind either in the immediate past or from past lives. Even in this life we might have been quite familiar with these delusions, trusting them and giving into them.

If, at this stage, we can recognise these states of mind as being detrimental to our well-being and that they are not useful we can try to engage in a meditation practice that is the opposite to them and try to familiarise ourselves with a virtuous state of mind, rather than giving into the negative state of mind. In this way, with practice and familiarity, we will slowly begin to experience a positive effect from meditation and we will not be completely influenced by attachment and the like.

To initially assume that we can completely overcome desire, attachment or anger in our mind will be too much to expect, especially if you have been very familiar with them. One will, however, begin to notice that one will be able to distance oneself more and more from these delusions or negative states of mind. One will not give into them as readily. At the very least if one can recognise them as being a negative state of mind that gives one encouragement not to allow one to be influenced by them. One will gradually definitely experience some of the positive effects of meditation.

The positive effects of meditation can be also described as developing the intelligence to recognise that the main source of our problems and difficulties is something that arises within one rather than being completely outside. So far we have not been really accustomed to looking for the source of our problems within. We naturally seem to immediately point the finger outwards and think that it is something external that it is causing our problems. The reality is that while external conditions may contribute to a certain extent for us to experience some difficulty, the real source lies within oneself. It is basically the combination of something seemingly going wrong externally but then, we internally give into experiencing the influence of either attachment or anger. This combination is what makes us feel turmoil and difficulty within our mind. When we are able to recognise that the causes of our turmoil and difficulties actually lie within our own mind and that they do not entirely depend on the external situation it is like half of the problem is already solved. We will be able to more successfully manage the situation when something occurs. We will be able to handle it better knowing that.

We need to try to understand how the source of our problems does not lie entirely in our external conditions but mostly depends on our internal situation. This will be clearer if we take a particular example. Take the example of an object of attachment, which we can define as an attractive object that is appealing or pleasing. Normally we might think that this object has an intrinsic quality of being attractive and thus appealing. If one doesn't understand how this view actually starts in one's own mind one may give in to thinking that an attractive object will always remain attractive. 'How can I ever overcome my attachment to beautiful objects, if there are always going to be beautiful objects?' However, we need to take into account that there are meditation practitioners who have specifically meditated upon the antidotes to overcoming attachment, such as contemplating the natural faults of the object. When a meditator, who previously would have felt very strong attachment and desire towards an object, has reached a certain level of affinity with focusing on the faults of the object; later when they come into contact with the object they will not feel as much desire towards the object.

Now the object hasn't changed. What has changed here is one's attitude or state of mind in relation to perceiving the object. This is an example that we really need to take into account and contemplate on, what appears from out there is very much dependent on our attitude, and how we look at things. This is true for both attachment and anger. When we see an object that causes anger we might think that it is entirely because of the faults of the object. That's how we would relate to the object, always experiencing anger when we see the object. But if we familiarise our mind with overcoming anger we will begin not to experience that. This is how we actually begin to train the mind and begin to see that there is a difference and that we can definitely overcome the delusions in our mind. It is really dependent on our state of our mind rather than on the object.

The practical approach of the explanations given in the teachings seems to be valuable not only to Buddhists but

even those who wouldn't consider themselves Buddhist. Non-Buddhists seem to be astonished by the accuracy of these practical explanations of how emotions arise and how to deal with them. For example, someone who wouldn't necessarily consider themselves Buddhist had related to me that they were astonished to find in the sayings of the great master Atisha a passages where he says that 'The best instruction is to check one's own mind', which means to investigate one's own mind; and that 'the best affinity with others is to develop compassion for others wellbeing' and 'the best companions are within oneself which are called introspection and mindfulness'. The person related to me that they were astonished to find the accuracy and truth of these passages and that the best instruction was investigating within one's own mind rather than spending time and energy looking outwards. They explained to me that looking within oneself is very empowering to recognise certain things within oneself. The positive and negative things in one's mind become very clear and very vivid when we do this self investigation or self analysis.

Mindfulness and introspection are tools that we need in meditation. Describing mindfulness and introspection as our best friends refers to the fact that we cannot completely rely upon external friends. They can help us to a certain degree but there comes a point and time in life where external friends can't really help us. However the real source of help comes from within oneself by having developed mindfulness and introspection. When one develops these states of mind within oneself they become the real source of companionship and strength within oneself. So, even a non-Buddhist has related to me the truth of this. Those of us who are already keen to practice in this way should take it to heart. This person said to me that it did not occur to them prior to reading that passage that one's best friend could be something that is inside of oneself.

As we mentioned earlier the internal best friend is mindfulness and introspection. More details about these are contained in the passages from the text that we are going to be reading soon. Even though we may not have time today this is what will be coming and we explain in more detail in the future. But now we come back to the time for meditation.

For the purpose of engaging in the practice of meditation we need to adopt the correct physical posture. Primarily we need to pay attention to our state of mind. We intentionally withdraw our attention or focus from external things and our thoughts and bring our full attention and focus within oneself. Bringing our focus and attention within means not allowing ourselves to be influenced by thoughts and external objects and keeping our focus completely within. As we bring our focus and attention within ourselves we place that attention and focus upon the chosen object which for us now will be our own breath. As we breath naturally—inhaling, exhaling—we keep our full attention focused on the breath itself. We will spend the next few minutes in meditation in that way. (*Pause for meditation*),

If one were to spend some time and energy to regularly practice meditation, just as we have attempted to do in our short session now, it will definitely contribute to a clear bright state of mind, a sense of well-being and a sense of joy within one's mind. There is definitely a benefit in that way.

By familiarising oneself with overcoming attachment through meditation, one would not feel strong attachment or desire towards the object. It is the same with anger. For example anger arises due to feeling uncomfortable and unhappy within oneself; that is when one would feel anger arising. So if in any incident we allow our mind to be unhappy then that will be a cause for one to become angry. But if we were to maintain a sense of joy and happiness within one's mind and not allow one's mind to be disturbed then whatever occurs will not cause us to become angry.

For example, if a mother loves a child dearly and the child says something that is a little bit inappropriate it would not affect the mother too much. The mother will not take it seriously and will not take it as being a personal insult. The reason the mother doesn't get angry is because the sense of joy in the mother's mind has not been disturbed. Thus the mother does not allow the situation to make her feel angry. However, if her husband says a similar inappropriate thing, that may cause a lot of hurt and anger. This is because one is not accepting these same words from the husband. It may seem more inappropriate or whatever. Because the mind is affected and unhappy it is a cause for anger to arise. (*Geshe-la laughs*)

What is being pointed out here is that whether one gets angry or not is very much dependent on one's state of mind, whether one's initial state of mind is joyful or not. We can all relate to the fact that when we are in a happy, joyful state of mind incidents that otherwise would have made us upset or angry do not affect us as much. But if we are already in a grumpy, unhappy state of mind the slightest incident may cause us to feel upset and get angry. That definitely shows that it depends very much on our state of mind; being either joyful and happy or down and unhappy. This is also very true in relationships. In relationship if one can work towards maintaining a sense of joy and happiness in relation to one's own partner then incidents that occur with the partner will not affect us to the extent of making us extremely angry and upset with them. That will help to maintain a good relationship.

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

4.2.2.1.2.2.4.2.2.3.2 The shortcomings of not guarding ethics

In the topic that we are covering from the text we have come to this outline, 'The shortcomings of not guarding ethics'. The teaching explains that there will be great benefits if one makes commitments to observe ethics. However, after having taken certain vows and made commitments, if we were not to observe and keep them then there will be great faults deriving from that as well. There is a particular sutra in which the Buddha explains that for some ethics becomes a source of happiness, while for others ethics can become a source of misery and suffering. Further on it explains that one who observes and keep ethics well will experience happiness as a result, whereas those who transgress and breach their commitments will experience suffering.

In referring to ethics in general here, we need to understand that the teachings are mainly referring to the ethics that were explained earlier, such as the ethics of refraining from the ten non-virtuous deeds and observing the ten virtues. That is what it applies to.

We need to understand this passage as a personal instruction to one who has actually made a vow or commitment to observe and uphold the ten virtues. For example, if one has made a vow to refrain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct and so forth and one were to breach that vow there will be negative consequences from that. While there is great benefit from observing the vows that one has taken, if one were to breach that vow there will be also negative consequences.

Those who may not have taken any particular vows can take this as a personal instruction to understand that there is definitely a benefit from avoiding those misdeeds such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct and so forth. Even if one hasn't made any particular vow or commitment, the mere fact of avoiding these is a good thing and one will experience wellbeing from that. If one were to engage in these deeds of killing and stealing and so forth, there are negative consequences for one. That is something quite obvious that you can relate to.

In relation to the ten non-virtuous acts and the opposite, one will also need to understand that the ten non-virtuous acts are referred to as non-virtuous by their very nature. Regardless of whether one has made a commitment or vow to avoid killing or not, if one were to engage in the act of killing they will incur the ill effects of that.

Practically speaking in terms of the law, if one were to murder someone one will definitely be punished by the law. It is the same with stealing. If there has been a theft to a certain degree, the law will definitely take effect and one will have to experience the repercussions of that as well. With sexual misconduct, the Buddha has not set the requirement for lay people to abstain completely from sex. For lay people the requirement is not to engage in sexual misconduct. For ordained people, the vow entails refraining from sexual activity. In either case, engaging in sexual misconduct, like adultery, will definitely lead one to experience negative consequences. It is good to understand that regardless of whether one makes a commitment or vow or not, that these deeds are by their very nature negative and cause ill. That is to be understood.

The text quotes here from another text, *The Root Tantra of Manjushri*.

*If these persons who recite mantras spoil their ethical discipline,
They would lose the highest of attainments,
Also middling attainments,
And the least of attainments.*

This says that people who recite mantras and then spoil their ethical discipline will lose the highest attainment, the middling attainment and the least of the attainments. What this is explaining is that even if one were to engage in seemingly high practices of recitation of mantras and so forth, if one were not to observe one's ethics then one will not achieve the attainments. One will not get any of the benefits. As explained in this text, and many other texts, ethical discipline is the very basis or foundation of one's practice. It is on the basis of ethics that one will be able to engage in all of the rest of the practices effectively. That is to be understood as the basis of our personal practice as well.

The verse from *The Root Tantra of Manjushri* further reads:

*The master of the sages does not say that faulty
Ethical discipline achieves the tantric path.
Breaking ethical discipline is neither a situation nor
a destination
For those going to the city of nirvana.
For these miserable children,
Where is the achievement of the tantric path?
For beings who have faulty ethical discipline,
Where are the happy realms?
Since they will attain neither high status,
Nor the highest bliss,
What need is there to speak of their attaining
The knowledge of the mantra vehicle thought by the
Conqueror?*

In essence what is being explained here is that if seeming yogis engaging in high levels of tantric practice do not hold onto their ethics then there is no real achievement. They will not achieve any tantric path realisations. The Buddha has explained that it cannot be achieved. It goes into more detail here explaining how none of the attainments can be achieved if one were not to observe one's ethics. The main point being emphasised again here is that ethics is the foundation of all the good qualities that one needs to achieve on the path leading to enlightenment. As will be explained again further and in more detail, ethics is the very foundation of all our practices.

The next outline is, 'The great benefits of guarding ethics in this present time'. This refers to the belief that these are considered to be degenerate times and observing ethics now is highly beneficial and much more meritorious. The text quotes from another sutra called *King of Concentration Sutra* reads:

*I set forth trainings
For the householders wearing secular clothing.
At that time these monks
Did not have even these trainings.*

Thus, the Buddha said that in these times when even monks do not completely maintain the five fundamental

trainings of lay practitioners, efforts in the training of ethics now bear even greater fruit. This refers to the five precepts that a lay person can opt to take. The five precepts are refraining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and engaging in alcohol and other intoxicants. These are the five lay person vows.

Referring to the monks not having these trainings does not mean the actual fact of not having the training but rather refers to the merit that is gained from that training. What is being explained is that the merit that lay people would get from observing these five lay precepts now is greater than the merit that ordained monks would have gained from observing all of the vows at the time of the Buddha. It is implied that at the time of the Buddha it was much easier to observe those vows, whereas at this degenerate time it is much more difficult to observe the vows. So lay people who observe these vows gain much more merit than ordained monks or nuns obtained from these vows previously. What is being stated here is the great merit and benefit one will achieve from observing these vows.

Now whether one has made a commitment for life or not, one can in one's daily practice as a lay person make conscious commitments. For example, when one wakes up one could make a commitment to oneself that, 'Today I will make sure that at any cost I will refrain from taking the life of other beings. I will refrain from killing.' Furthermore one can make the commitment that, 'Today I will definitely not engage in any acts of taking what is not mine'. That is refraining from the act of stealing. Likewise one can commit oneself to refrain from lying and engaging in intoxicants. If one were to actually make these vows and observe them, even for one day, it is said that due to the power of making that commitment the virtue and merit one gains is really unimaginable. One can gain great expansive merit from that. This becomes a very high level of practice. Observing these ethical vows becomes a very high level of practice in itself.

In relation to not committing these negative deeds, one needs to understand that, as explained in the teachings, there is a definite difference between making a conscious commitment to not committing these negative deeds and just not doing those acts. Someone might think that, 'Oh, I don't kill anyway. What's the point of making a commitment? There is no need to make a commitment because I don't kill living beings.' But apparently, as explained in the teachings, there is much more powerful merit and virtue in making a conscious commitment. Refraining from a non-virtuous act becomes more powerful that way.

We can conclude for the evening. We can again spend a few minutes meditating. This time we focus on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. We maintain our full attention and focus on the sound of the mantra. When the actual recitation stops it is good to remain in that focused state of mind for a few minutes. That becomes the actual meditation practice that we engage in.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA
Edited Version
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