
The Condensed Lam Rim

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5 May 2010

As usual we can do some meditation, so please adopt a comfortable and upright position. Likewise, try to generate a state of mind that is clear and bright and fresh. It is important and beneficial for us to have a good motivation. When our motivation or intentions are not clear and a little bit tainted, then whatever we do also becomes tainted, and does not work out so well. Whereas if we have a clear and good motivation or intention before we begin an activity, then the result will also be good. So it is essential that we pay attention to our intentions.

The great master Shantideva mentioned in his works that before doing any activity, first check the state of your mind. If the state of your mind is clear and good then you can engage in talking or doing physical activities. But if you find that your state of mind is disturbed, then for the time being it is better not to say or do anything for a while. What Shantideva is referring to when he mentions a disturbed state of mind is a mind which is influenced either by strong attachment, intense anger or hatred, or a sense of competitiveness. If we find that our mind is influenced by any of these negative states of mind, then Shantideva advises that it's better not to say anything or engage in activities temporarily, as the activities will be disruptive.

When we scrutinise our life and look into the main causes for any disruption, whether it is internal or external, we will find that it is our state of mind that determines the course of our life. Negative states of mind causes external disruptions. Likewise our internal disturbances are also caused by our negative state of mind.

When we find this to be true, then we know we have the responsibility to prevent ourselves from being influenced by a negative state of mind. If we can avoid being influenced by a negative state of mind, then naturally disturbances and problems will subside. When we are free from external and internal problems, then we have achieved the ultimate state of well-being. This is a good situation to be in.

When there are no problems from the outside and no problems from within, then naturally we will have a calm and peaceful state of mind. This is called a peaceful state of being.

To take one particular negative state of mind, for example anger, we find from our own experience that it is definitely a cause for a lot of disturbances. When we look into the cause for a lot of the problems that we face in life, for example relationship problems and conflicts with others, we find that anger is one of the main sources of

these disturbances. We would notice this clearly if we paid attention. To summarise, if we give in to anger, if we allow our mind to be influenced by anger, then we would be in a perpetual disturbed state of mind, a disturbed state of being. Thus, what we need to do is to resolve to protect ourselves from anger by not giving in to anger.

While we acknowledge the destructive effects of anger, we may also feel that we gain some temporary gratification or benefit from anger. When we express anger it may *seem* that we get some sort of result. But that is a temporary and minor result in comparison to the long-term destruction that anger actually causes. So we need to really think about the long-term consequences for ourselves. Anger does not benefit us in the long term. There will be no real benefit. Anger only causes destruction.

We are normally accustomed to looking at short-term effects or goals. In being obsessed with short-term goals, we seem to not really pay attention to the long-term effects of any particular situation. This is a big fault that we get caught up in. We must pay attention to a long-term benefit. As mentioned earlier, anger is something that destroys our long-term goals so we must really protect ourselves from it.

When we consider these facts and start to analyse and think on these points, we can begin to see that our knowledge of being able to distinguish the right from wrong within ourselves (analytical wisdom) starts to expand. We become more and more knowledgeable in how to deal with ourselves better.

Now, if we consider the positive effects of meditation, first of all we need to notice that our normal state of mind is distracted. We have a very distracted mind; it is as if our attention is dispersed in every direction. The result of that is that we don't have much strength in our mind. We are not focussed. Due to a distracted mind, we find that whatever we do is not very effective; we don't get good results. Meditation practice involves intentionally withdrawing our pre-occupation with external distractions; we start to bring our mind within and bring our focus within. When we engage in meditation practice, and through the familiarity of bringing our focus within, our mind's potential becomes much stronger. Because our mind is focussed on one point, then it becomes much more effective in whatever we do.

As we gain familiarity with the practice of meditation, where we are intentionally bringing our attention and focus within, we will begin to find that whatever activity we engage in becomes more effective. This means that whatever results are achieved from the activity are much more fruitful because our mind is not completely scattered. Our mind is more focussed, so we get a positive result. This is true, even for mundane activities. From our own experience we may have noticed that when we are focussed on an activity, even a mundane activity, for example when we are focussed on the job that we are doing, we get a better result. And we also find that the job at hand becomes much easier to deal with. Whereas if our mind is pre-occupied with so many other things going on, then it is difficult to really engage in the task at hand. If we are not focussed on the present task,

then it becomes more difficult, more strenuous, and we don't get good results. Leaving aside the great positive benefits of a focussed mind in the spiritual practice, what we call the Dharma practice, even with mundane activities we find that we need that focus and attention to achieve what we want to achieve.

The faults of a scattered and inattentive mind are all too obvious when we look at their impact. If we really think about our life, we notice that most mistakes happened when we were inattentive, when our mind was completely scattered and not focussed. Whereas when things are going well, when we have successfully fulfilled a task, then our mind would have been attentive and focussed. For example, if we were to do some writing for half an hour with a scattered mind, we would notice that when we re-read what we have written that there would be a lot of mistakes. But if we write for only for 10 minutes with a focussed mind, then that ten minutes of writing would be much clearer and would have fewer mistakes. With this practical example we can see that our state of mind definitely makes a difference when we are doing something. If we engage in a task with a scattered and inattentive mind, we are much more likely to make many more mistakes, versus a focussed and attentive mind.

Likewise, the practice of meditation is not merely to have a focussed and attentive mind but rather to bring about a more subdued mind, a calmer and more peaceful mind. This is the benefit of meditation. When we consider the positive effects of meditation, this will become a strong impetus for us to commit ourselves to actually engage in meditation practice. We realise that meditating is a means to bring our unsubdued mind to become more subdued. Meditation helps to make a scattered and attentive mind become more attentive and more focussed; an unsubdued mind to become more subdued; and a chaotic and disturbed mind to become calmer and more peaceful.

The practice of meditation involves familiarising our mind with what is called a virtuous object—a positive object. The reason why we find ourselves mostly in a disturbed state of mind is because our mind is usually focussed on negative aspects or is completely influenced by distractions. Then we get the negative consequences of that. Whereas when we slowly become familiar with focussing on a virtuous object, then we will be able to naturally place our mind and our attention on more virtuous and positive things in life. Thus the mind will naturally experience well-being and calmness. This is how we should understand the practice.

For the purpose of meditation we adjust our physical posture to be upright and relaxed. Likewise, with our motivation, we can generate a positive motivation along these lines: "I definitely wish for all beings to have happiness and all beings be free from suffering, and thus I need to take the responsibility of bringing about happiness for all beings and freeing them from all suffering. That is something that would be wonderful if I could do it. In order to do that, I need to first subdue and control my own mind. Ultimately, for the purpose of benefitting other beings, I need to temporarily engage in the practice of subduing my own mind. Thus I will now

engage in the practice of meditation." This is the most appropriate and positive motivation. With this motivation we will also be generating love and compassion as well.

Love and compassion are essential in our lives. They are the essence of all religions. When we look into any authentic religion, they all express the importance of generating love and compassion. So we can safely say that they are the real core or essence of every religious faith.

The Dalai Lama once mentioned that he met a Spanish Christian monk who was doing retreat in a remote area for about six years, eating meagre food, just simple bread. His Holiness mentioned that he asked this monk, "What were you meditating on when you were in solitude for six years?" And the monk answered, "I was meditating on love." His Holiness said that when he mentioned that, his whole expression was very, very gentle. His Holiness said that it was noticeable that he was meditating on love.

His Holiness was relating this story to point out that the practice of generating love is predominant in the Christian tradition as well.

His Holiness also mentioned another time somewhere in India when he met a Muslim practitioner and there were very clear signs that this Muslim practitioner was practising great love. Thus His Holiness said that in the Muslim tradition there is definitely the practice of love.

For us Buddhists, talking about love and compassion is obvious. We mention it a lot. The main point is that when our mind is imbued with feelings of love and compassion, and when our intention or motivation is imbued with that sense of love and compassion, then whatever activity we do will be influenced by love and compassion. Love and compassion are only constructive, not destructive. They will always ensure a positive outcome in whatever we do. This shows the positive effect of such a noble attitude.

As mentioned earlier, we adjust both our physical posture and our motivation to be in a good state. And within that combination of appropriate physical and mental state, we need to then make the commitment to engage in the practice sincerely for the next few minutes. This practice helps us to develop our concentration. We first make the commitment to withdraw our attention from all forms of distraction—external and internal. "Internal" means any sort of thoughts. Completely withdrawing from all of that, we bring our focus inward. We bring our focus inward and place it on to the chosen object (this keeps our mind centred), which is our breath. When we inhale and exhale naturally, we try to bring our full attention and focus on the breath.

(meditation)

If you have a good question you may raise your hand. Good questions are ones that I can answer with a smile on my face. For example, during a test, if the questions in the test are questions that we are readily able to answer, then we can write with a smile on our face because there is no hesitation; we don't feel stressed about it. But if the questions are tough and difficult and we struggling trying to find answers to them, we won't have a happy

joyful expression on our face. We would be stressed. This is something that we can relate to and people might have some experience with. So I am likewise suggesting that you not ask complicated and convoluted but good questions!

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

4.2.2.1.2.2.4.2.2.3.4. How to train in ethics

4.2.2.1.2.2.4.2.2.3.4.1. Instructions on the four antidotes for abandoning downfalls

If there are no questions then we can continue from we left off in the text. We have come to the outline “how to train in ethics”. This follows the earlier explanations of the benefits of guarding ethics, the short-comings of not guarding ethics, and particularly the benefits of guarding ethics at the present time. Now the text goes into explaining “how does one actually train in ethics?”

When the actual benefits of observing ethics were explained in detail, and the disadvantages or the faults of not observing ethics have been explained, then naturally we would ask how do we train in ethics? The text follows that line of query and goes on to explain the training of ethics.

If we know the benefits and the faults of certain aspects of a practice, but we don't know how to engage in that practice, then there wouldn't be much benefit for us. So we need to know how to train in a particular practice that has benefits.

The text goes into explaining that, in order to train in ethics, first of all we need to guard ourselves from the four causes of an infraction. There are four conditions that become the cause for us cause break our commitments or precepts.

The first is not knowing, which is one of the main causes of an infraction. If we don't know what the precept is, then there is no way for us to be able to guard that precept.

The remedy for not knowing the precepts is to listen to and understand the precepts. A precept as explained here in the text is an ethical code. For example, in order to not engage in the ten non-virtues, which are a breach of an ethical discipline, we must first of all identify the ten non-virtues. And then we practise the opposite of the non-virtues, which are the ten virtues. In order to not engage in the ten non-virtues, we must first of all understand what the ten non-virtues are. This was explained earlier. By recognising what the ten non-virtues are, we can then make the attempt to avoid engaging in the ten non-virtues, which means we are then observing the ten virtues.

We need to know what the precepts are in order to engage in the practice of observing the precepts. If we

don't know what the precepts are to begin with, then there is no way that we can engage in the practice of keeping those precepts.

The next cause of an infraction is called the lack of conscientiousness, which is the cause for us to breach a moral code. As the text explains, a remedy for lack of conscientiousness, also referred to as carelessness, is to train in mindfulness, which helps us to understand what behaviours to adopt and what to cast aside. Even if we know what the precepts are, we still need to observe the ethical codes. Adopting a sense of carelessness or lack of conscientiousness will be a cause for us to breach the moral ethical codes, which means it is a cause of an infraction. In order to prevent that, there is a remedy for lack of conscientiousness—we must train our attitude towards mindfulness. We must train our mind to constantly remember what the precepts are; to constantly be mindful of that. We must not forget what we need to adopt and what we need to discard. In order not to forget, we need to develop mindfulness. Furthermore, we must develop introspection, which immediately examines the three doors of our body, speech and mind, and understands when we engage them in a wrong way. Introspection is a state of mind used in this case to check the actions of our body, speech and mind. We can then refrain from the negative actions of our body, speech and mind.

The main tools presented here to overcome lack of conscientiousness or carelessness, are mainly mindfulness and introspection. These are the two most essential tools that we need to adopt and use as a means to develop a conscientious mind, a mind that is careful in observing ethics. The importance of mindfulness and introspection can never be underestimated. Every aspect of the teaching always emphasises that we need to develop mindfulness and introspection. They are the most essential tools, especially for meditation.

Mindfulness and introspection are the main tools to overcome the obstacles to our meditation. In terms of our own well-being, first of all we all acknowledge that, in essence, we do have many good attributes to our credit. In terms of our physical activities, we definitely have many nice gestures that we can display that make others happy. In terms of our speech, we have many positive attributes of speech that we can make others happy, not only humans but even animals. We can relate to humans and animals alike with our pleasant speech. In terms of attitudes, we definitely have many positive attitudes. So when we look inside ourselves, we can acknowledge that essentially we all have goodness within ourselves.

We all have the potential and we all do display goodness in our everyday lives. We say things that make people feel at ease and happy. Our company can be appreciated by others. So in this way, we have so much to share, we have so much goodness within ourselves, and such great potential within ourselves.

The main thing, after having recognised and acknowledged our goodness and potential, is to protect it. That is the main thing. The teachings advise us that we all have goodness within ourselves—none of us are inherently negative, we all have positiveness within

ourselves—but we need to protect it. It is our responsibility to protect that goodness within us, that good potential we have within ourselves. The way to protect our goodness, our good mannerisms, our good speech as well as our good thoughts is through mindfulness and introspection, or as one translation says, vigilance. This is what we need to do, we need to protect our goodness by every means. Mindfulness and introspection helps us to be conscientious in our actions, on a physical, verbal and mental level.

Our mannerisms are what make others feel either at ease or uncomfortable. When we relate to others with pleasant speech and the appropriate physical mannerisms, then others feel comfortable around us and like our company. They will naturally want to be around us. Whereas, if we talk and act inappropriately or in a disturbing manner, then naturally people will want to keep their distance from us. They will shy away from us. For example, when we need to care for others, it becomes even more important that our mannerisms are appropriate, in speech as well as physical mannerisms.

For someone who takes care of an elderly person or a sick person, it is obvious that when the caretaker is gentle with the patient, gentle in speech and gentle in their physical mannerisms, then the patient will naturally want to receive their help. They are readily drawn to such a person, and like to be in their company. But if the caregiver is abrupt and unkind in their mannerisms, then the patient would not want to be around them. These are clear signs that, in order to help others, in order to be of service to others, our mannerisms are an important consideration.

In order for our body, speech and mind to have appropriate mannerisms, it is said that we need to be conscientious about whether what we are saying, what are thinking, and what are doing is appropriate for others. A conscientious mind helps us to always maintain appropriate mannerisms. And mindfulness and introspection help us to maintain a conscientious mind. They are also the most essential tools for meditation.

There are some people who claim they have been meditating for more than ten years, but they hadn't even heard about the tools of mindfulness and introspection. No wonder they are not getting anywhere, because they did not recognise the main tools needed to overcome obstacles in their mind. In our tradition, it is explained very clearly that the most essential tools to overcome the obstacles in our mind during meditation are mindfulness and introspection.

A general definition of mindfulness is: a state of mind that constantly remembers the chosen object of meditation. Introspection is a state of mind that keeps constant vigilance, noticing if our mind is focussing on an object or not. When it notices that our mind has started to become distracted and moving away from the object of our focus, it brings it back again to the object. Introspection acts as a guard and checks whether our mind is focussed on the object or not. When we further develop and cultivate these tools in our mind, then we develop a strong sense of analytical wisdom, which is the intelligence of distinguishing between what is

appropriate and not appropriate. This is useful for meditation as well as in our daily life.

Before we conclude for the evening, we will spend again a few minutes in meditation. This time the object of our focus will be the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra. As we recite or hear the sound of the mantra, we keep our mind entirely focussed on the sound of the mantra itself. When the recitation comes to end, we'll just remain in that focussed state for a few minutes, just maintaining a focus on that sound of the mantra for a while. This is a useful technique to settle down and centre our mind.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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