
The Condensed Lam Rim

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9 June 2010

We'll take some time for meditation. For that purpose we find a comfortable, relaxed posture. As explained regularly, the practice of meditation involves placing one's entire focus on a particular object and keeping the focus on that. That is what meditation means.

When you consider the purpose of engaging in the practice of meditation, we must first take notice of the fact that we all have the positive potential to have wisdom, clarity and kindness in our mind, and we also carry the potential to exhibit them. These are all natural, inborn qualities that we already have. The purpose of the practice of meditation can also be understood as a way to protect these positive potentials. If we don't protect them we can lapse from positiveness and then start getting into difficulties in life.

It is important that we recognise the inner qualities we have, particularly the inner wisdom or intelligence. That is what we need to further cultivate or develop, particularly at times when we may be feeling a little distressed or unhappy. We all also have a natural ability to lift ourselves, our spirits, up again. We have that natural quality within ourselves. If we fail to recognise it then we can't utilise it. We feel helpless and hopeless when we don't recognise that we have the quality to lift ourselves up. It is important to recognise and identify that and to further cultivate it within oneself through the practice of meditation.

Taking the responsibility for our own well-being involves intentionally putting some effort into analysing the positive potentials within us. That serves as a means to encourage us to further develop our wisdom and intelligence. That is something that we have within us but we need to identify and recognise it. That recognition then becomes the means for us to feel encouraged; as mentioned we all have the right to feel happy and joyful and our wellbeing is our inborn right. If we take responsibility for ourselves we can definitely contribute to our happiness.

When we analyse our state of our mind we will notice what causes distress and unhappy feelings within us. These feelings are preceded by a state of mind where we begin to feel a little dull and unclear. If we let that state of mind to be as it is then it will lead one to feeling confused and depressed.

If we can recognise that state of mind we can make an attempt to bring ourselves out of that dullness and restore a clear state of mind. Our intelligence, what we call wisdom, ultimately becomes a form of protection for us. It is the wisdom within oneself that helps one to maintain one's composure, and to be strong. That is the

best inner potential we have. That wisdom within oneself is likened to the one who shows us the actual path to follow.

When we feel indecisive and a little bit confused it is because we have not utilised the full potential of our wisdom and intelligence. These are the times when we feel that we are not able to make a decision, or we are a little confused and so forth. If we take the responsibility to utilise the intelligence or wisdom within oneself then that would help us to make the right decisions and protect us from confusion and so forth. That is how it serves as a means to show us the right path.

Just as intelligence or wisdom is an essential element or inner quality that we need to protect the clarity of one's mind is also essential. Without clarity we won't be able to embark on important things in our life. Kindness is also an important element within oneself. Without a sense of kindness within us we lack one of the most essential elements that contribute to our wellbeing. Kindness is particularly important in our relationships with others. Our relationships with others are based on a kind attitude. The good relationships that we have with others are based on a kind attitude within us.

When people refer to an individual as a good person they are referring to the kindness of the other person and other good qualities that that person exhibits. It is in relation to these qualities that a person is thought to be good and not their looks. If someone is good looking, then that attribute is a physical feature that doesn't necessarily relay the inner quality of the person. When someone refers to a person as a 'good person' that usually relates to an inner quality not just how he or she looks. That is how we can understand this.

We have identified the essential truth that the qualities we need to cultivate within ourselves are wisdom, clarity and kindness. If we look into the factors within one that weaken these inborn qualities we would find that it is the afflictive emotions or delusions.

For example, when anger arises in one's mind it immediately causes the mind to become unclear. The intelligence or wisdom that we naturally have is weakened. If we make any decisions at that time it is most likely that they will not bring about good results. That's why I regularly stress that when you find yourself to be in an angry state of mind it is better not make any major decisions—wait a while and don't make any hasty decisions while you're in an angry state of mind. This is because we lack intelligence or wisdom in a moment of anger. Anger is clearly a delusion that obstructs and hinders the clarity and intelligence within oneself.

Just as anger obstructs the intelligence and the clarity in one's mind, attachment is another delusion that obstructs the calmness and peace within one's mind. Whenever we find ourselves in a confused and disturbed state of mind and feel unsettled it is due to delusions within one's mind becoming manifest. There are individuals who say, 'Once upon a time I used to be quite easy-going, carefree and joyful person. I seem to have lost that now; I don't know what has happened'. If we actually pay attention to what has happened, we will notice that the delusions have become more prominent in one's mind and consequently

we lack a sense of joy and happiness. It is the delusions that obstruct a sense of joy and happiness within oneself.

When we use our intelligence or wisdom to analyse in this way and are able to recognise and understand that it is the delusions that cause that stress and the trouble in our mind, we see the need to apply our practice to limit our acquaintance with objects that cause the delusions to arise in our mind.

Rather than acquainting oneself with an object of delusion, if we intentionally make an effort to acquaint ourselves and make ourselves familiar with an object that lessens the delusions within us it will definitely benefit one's mind. When we engage in the practice of meditation we are acquainting ourselves with an object that lessens, or at the very least doesn't cause, delusions to arise in the mind. The immediate result we experience is that the mind will become very calm and tranquil.

It is really important that we scrutinise and analyse our mind acutely so we can pinpoint what causes us distress and turmoil. As I mention regularly, due to our acquaintance with a delusion if we bring to mind an object that causes that delusion it brings about a heavy feeling within us. This happens even if we are in a joyful or happy state of mind. We feel very heavy, burdened and troubled.

We seem to periodically go back again and again to an object that causes us distress. It is as if we are obsessed with it because there are times when we just don't let go. A particular incident may cause one to feel distressed and we keep thinking about it again and again. So it brings about distress and a weighed-down feeling within us. It is important that we try to recognise this and cut it off by not associating ourselves with the object that causes us distress. It is really important to first recognise this and then limit our association with the object.

Until and unless we recognise the conditions that cause us to feel distressed, weighed-down and unhappy for what they are and change our attitude towards them it seems we can't overcome them. If we don't make an effort to change our attitude it seems that we can't come out of it, and we are stuck in whatever is causing our distress. The way to deal with it is to change one's attitude. Then one will be released. One will cultivate a strong mind not to associate with those conditions.

There may be people who feel that this doesn't apply to them because everything is quite fine, 'I'm not really troubled and wouldn't consider myself a distressed person. Things are fine'. Even if one is temporarily in a good situation, things can change and a situation may occur later on that may cause distress in one's mind. Individuals have come up to me and said, 'What you mentioned in the past seems to be very true. Now I can understand that point you were making.' So those who may be enjoying a temporary good situation now will find it worthwhile to prepare for a time when there will be causes for distress. To make that preparation now when things are fine is a worthwhile investment.

We can now engage in the practice of meditation. We relax our physical posture. We develop a state of mind where we completely distance our mind from distractions and bring it inward. After bringing the focus of our mind

inward if we choose to focus on an object that causes the delusions to arise in the mind it will cause distress to arise and our mind will immediately feel weighed down and unhappy. Therefore we need to choose an object that does not cause delusion and distress our mind.

The object that we choose to focus on for our meditation now is the breath. We place our entire focus and attention on the breath. We just focus on the breath coming in through our nostrils and then leaving our nostrils. We place our full awareness and attention on the breath coming in and then leaving. Even if it's just on that level, being fully aware of the breath coming in and leaving our nostrils, and keeping our full attention on that will definitely help our mind. That's how we will spend the next few minutes. (*Pause for meditation.*)

That would be sufficient for now. It is good to regularly spend some time in this meditation. If we are in a state of distress and make an attempt to focus on our breath for just one or two minutes we will definitely feel some release from that distress. It may, of course, initially be hard to keep our attention and focus on the breath for too long and it's not really advisable. Just take a break for a while. Then after the break spend another one or two minutes. In this way we can develop familiarity with focusing on the breath.

The main point, as I emphasised earlier, is to recognise that there are the cause and conditions within oneself to restore a happy, joyous state of mind. Recognising those causes and conditions and then applying some effort in further cultivating them is important in our life.

The reason why I emphasise that it is important to recognise the inner causes and conditions for a happy and joyous state of mind is because if we don't make that attempt we might fall victim to relying on outer sources. Outer sources *do* give us some joy and happiness but it is a temporary sense of joy and happiness. When the conditions or objects that are temporary conditions for us to feel joy and happiness change we feel loss and great sadness and despair in one's mind if we have not paid attention to cultivating the *inner* causes and conditions for happiness.

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

4.2.2.1.2.2.4.2.2.3.4.3. The need to quickly confess should one be sullied by wrongdoing and downfalls

We will cover some subject matter from the text as we have not been able to do that for a while. Having first explained the causes for infractions that make us lapse from moral ethics, the text then explains that we recognise these lapses and then try to apply a remedy to

them. The third subdivision in this category is 'in the event that we do incur an infraction, then not to leave it as it is, but apply the remedy to purify that'. The outline explains that when we find ourselves committing any immoral acts we need to recognise that and apply the remedy of purification practice.

There are various different practices for purification. The main point is that whatever the purification practice, when it is accompanied by the four opponent powers, it is a very powerful means to purify one's breaches of moral ethics. We went into the details of the four opponent powers previously.

Purification practice is essential if one finds that one has difficulty in one's practice of meditation and so forth. There are times in the practice of meditation that we might find that without any apparent reason we just feel very dull and heavy, weighed down and in a dark state of mind. This is the effect of the imprints of negativity that have been stored up in our mind from previous times. There may also be occasions where, without any particular external causes or conditions, we feel a little bit sad or depressed. We may find we are in a situation where there is no one to blame yet we feel a little bit weighed down and unhappy. This is also a clear sign of the consequences of negativities in one's mind.

The text explains that there are two types of bodhisattva practitioners: those who are 'ordained' and those who are 'lay'. There are bodhisattvas who practice tantra as an ordained person and others who practice tantra as a lay person.

The text explains that bodhisattva practitioners of both the sutra and the tantric teachings need to equally abide by ethics. The main point is that except for some particular creed in the vows or rituals of an ordained person—all other forms of ethics have to also be abided by the lay tantric practitioner. That being the case, an ordained bodhisattva tantric practitioner will definitely need to abide by all the vows, particularly the self-liberation vows.

What is being emphasised here is that one needs to practice moral ethics in relation to the self-liberation vows as well as the tantric practices in unison. One can't breach one with the intention of practising the other. For example, it would be a fault if those who are practising moral ethics think that tantra doesn't relate to them and neglect the practice of tantra. It would also be a fault if those who practise tantra as a lay practitioner think that the self-liberation vows do not apply to them and neglect those. In both cases the emphasis is on the practice of ethics.

The emphasis here is to practice the tantric path and the sutric path in unison. Ethical discipline in relation to the self-liberation vows is mainly explained in the sutric teachings. One cannot ignore the sutric teachings with the claim that one is practicing tantra. Likewise one cannot ignore the tantric teachings with the claim that one is practicing the sutric path.

The teachings quote one of the Kadampa masters who mentions that in a time of famine when other resources are scarce everyone comes down to the basic, staple food diet, which in Tibet is barley. Barley may be considered as

a staple diet and not really a delicacy. However, in a time of famine everyone would have to rely on barley in order to sustain himself or herself. This is an analogy for the fact that whatever practice one may be engaging in it has to be based on ethics. Ethics is essential like barley at the time of famine. All forms of practice have to be based on ethics.

The Buddha's teachings are based on non-violence. So the essence of ethics is non-violence. Refraining from harming others is really what ethics is all about. Whatever practice one is engaging in it has to be based on that sense of not harming other beings.

The great Kadampa master Dromtonpa says that the teaching of ethics being the companion of the mantra vehicle and the mantra vehicle being the companion of ethics exists only in his guru Atisha's lineage. What is being pointed out here is the uniqueness of Atisha's teaching that tantra and sutra are companions to each other, not in contradiction.

The teaching then quotes from the great master Atisha himself where he says, 'When things of great import or unexpected events befell us Indians, those who upheld the scriptural collections would assemble and determine whether these things were proscribed in the three scriptural collections or were at odds with them. Based on this we made decisions.' What Atisha is mentioning here is that whenever a decision had to be made it was based on whether it was in accordance or at odds with the scriptures. If it were in accordance with one of the scriptures of the three baskets then it would be followed. If it were at odds with the teachings of the three baskets then it would be avoided. That is how the Indian monastics made decisions.

The teaching then explains that this concludes the practices that are in common with the medium scope beings. What follows are the teachings relating to a practitioner of the great scope.

We can now safely assume that we know how to practice in accordance to the medium scope. (*Geshe-la chuckles.*) However, since we do not want to practise the small or medium scope but strive to practise the great vehicle path, that is explained next in the text. So, we can look forward to that.

We can end the session for this evening. Before we conclude we will again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time the object of our focus will be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. We try to maintain our focus completely on the sound. As we end the recitation of the mantra we can try to maintain our focus just on the vibration or after effect of that sound itself. Try to keep that space within oneself for a time.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version
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