
The Condensed Lam Rim

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7 July 2010

As usual we can spend some time in meditation. As regularly explained, meditation involves focusing on a virtuous object. Thus, familiarising one's mind with a virtuous object is meditation. The main point of the technique, which is to familiarise one's mind with virtue, is so that we can maintain a positive state of mind.

The meditation technique is also one of the best means to protect one's mind. If one were to ask what does our mind need to be protected from, the answer is the distractions. We are protecting the mind from focusing outward and being influenced by the distractions. Meditation prevents us from the influence of the distractions and thus protects the mind.

When we consider the state of our mind we can recognise that there are certain elements of our mind that we need to protect, nurture and further develop. This is something we should be able to notice for ourselves. If we engage in the practice of meditation with that understanding then when the meditation technique has been appropriate, it serves as a means to bring about a sense of joy and happiness. When the meditation technique becomes an effective means to protect the mind it involves protecting the joy and happiness that we have—basically the good qualities in our mind. Thus, meditation acts as an aid to protect the joy and happiness in our mind.

As the technique of meditation involves withdrawing our mind from the distractions and focussing inward, for as long as we maintain an inward focus, our state of mind will not be affected by the distractions.

As we gain more inner focus it also enhances our analytical wisdom. Analytical wisdom is a particular intelligence within oneself that focuses on analysing our state of mind, differentiating the positive states of mind from the negative states of mind, and then adopting the more positive states of the mind. As our ability to analyse the mind increases we naturally become more adept at maintaining a virtuous state of mind. That also comes from being able to focus and familiarise oneself with virtue and positive attitudes within oneself.

As we develop analytical wisdom, the distinction between the useful qualities that we need to adopt and the negative states of mind, the various delusions that we need to discard becomes very clear. Having been able to clearly see this, what allows us to maintain the positive qualities within oneself is mindfulness and a clear wisdom. Mindfulness and wisdom will enable us to maintain the inner focus.

Even though there are causes within one that can bring about negative states of mind or disturbances, a lot of the conditions that cause disturbance are external. When we come into contact with external distractions they become a condition for us to feel disturbed and distracted. As we practise meditation and develop an inner focus we are able to distance ourselves from the external conditions that cause

disturbance and distractions. Even though mindfulness and clear wisdom are internal factors, the conditions for one to lapse from mindfulness and wisdom can be external distractions. It is often the distractions that cause us to lapse from mindfulness, and intelligence or wisdom.

For example, an external condition that causes us to lapse from mindfulness and intelligence or wisdom is alcohol. When someone is intoxicated it is clear that their mindfulness or awareness becomes weakened to the point of losing any sense of awareness and mindfulness. Intelligence is also weakened and one will not be able to make good decisions when one is affected by alcohol. This is very clear. Furthermore, there is no question about how other substances such as drugs will affect the mind and cause one to lose one's mindfulness and intelligence. These are examples of external conditions that cause one to be in that state.

When it is very clear that substances such as alcohol and drugs affect one's state of mind in that way one will voluntarily take the initiative to be wary and protect oneself from abusing substances. That comes about naturally when one has the awareness or understanding.

To summarise, the main point that I am trying to emphasise this evening is how the technique of meditation benefits one. What has been mentioned specifically is that meditation serves as a means to protect one's mind. This protection comes from the understanding or intelligence of knowing what to adopt and what to discard. There are clearly certain states of mind or attitudes that are useful and that we need to adopt, and there are certain minds or attitudes that are detrimental to our well-being and that we need to discard.

The positive states of mind or attitudes that we need to adopt are, for example, mindfulness, clear awareness, wisdom or intelligence followed by compassionate or loving attitudes towards others. These are the positive qualities that we need to adopt by any means. These are essential things that we need for the betterment of our lives. When we have developed these qualities they become an unfailing companion. This is something that we need to pay attention to.

In fact, there are many individuals who have confided in me that after many years of having heard or thought about loving compassion that it had finally dawned upon them, in relation to some sorts of difficulties in their lives, that loving compassion is essential and beneficial in their lives. This is something that many people have personally confided in me. It is definitely something that we can recognise as an essential quality to adopt.

While some of us may associate and relate to these positive qualities we might still find ourselves having the tendency to neglect these qualities or allow ourselves to be distracted. It is hard, of course, for beginners to be fully committed and develop in a positive way. Initially we might sometimes blame external influences such as friends and external factors as the causes for us to become distracted. One must, however, take the initiative to really begin to see what is most useful and most beneficial in one's own life and what is detrimental to our well-being, and slowly try to reduce those influences. That is something we need to take the responsibility for.

As we utilise the meditation technique in our lives and it become a means to develop our analytical wisdom or intelligence, the negative states of mind that oppose our positive states of mind become clear.

For example, there is no doubt that compassion is the utmost positive quality within oneself and is one of the most essential qualities for maintaining companionship with others. What opposes one's compassion towards others is anger. When anger arises it immediately affects whatever compassion one has towards another. Thus it is clear that anger obstructs, opposes or hinders the positive attitude of compassion being expressed and felt within one. Meditation practice is an aid to protect and maintain one's compassion towards others. By recognising that anger is a negative state of mind that opposes compassion we can attempt to protect ourselves by withdrawing our focus from an object of anger, and not allowing the mind to be influenced by anger. In this way we can protect ourselves from anger.

Likewise mindfulness, or our state of awareness, can be affected by strong attachment for another person or object. That again affects the mind. As mentioned previously, alcohol and drugs also affect the awareness of the mind. This is commonly accepted. If you go to a doctor or any therapist they would all agree that alcohol or drugs could be detrimental to one's well-being. When we recognise this we need to take measures to avoid the influence of such substances.

We need to practise compassion with our close companions. The way to begin developing compassion is with those who are close to one's life. This is the way to develop compassion. As we express compassion to those who are close to us it strengthens the relationship and the harmony between them and us.

The reason I point out these things again and again in my meditation sessions is that I feel that there is real point here, and that if you were to get that point it will definitely help your lives. It is a matter of changing one's attitudes and acknowledging the positive ones and adopting them and then a transformation in one's life will begin to take place. That is why I spend the time on emphasising these points again and again.

When we adopt the meditation technique in our lives with this understanding there is no question about the positive effects that will take place, which is a joyous and happy state of mind. There is no doubt about that occurring. It will definitely occur as a result.

Furthermore, as the meditation technique naturally enhances our mindfulness and our intelligence and wisdom then, when we are not in a formal meditation session and in our everyday life we will have a residue of that sense of mindfulness and wisdom within us. Even in our ordinary, normal, daily activities we will be able to maintain the awareness that anger is detrimental and whenever the conditions for anger to arise occur, we will be able to remind ourselves of the ill-effects of anger and protect ourselves from the influence of anger.

Now we have come to the point of actually engaging in a meditation practice. The meditation practice that we adopt in this session uses the breath as an object of focus. The particular benefit of using the breath as the object to focus on in one's meditation, is that it will help to lessen the distracted mind; a mind which is full of conceptions and superstitious thoughts. Meditation focussing on the breath is beneficial in protecting one from all the different superstitious thoughts that are distractions. As beginners we can assume that most of us are influenced by the distractions thus taking the initiative to engage in the meditation practice of focussing on the breath will be very beneficial. The

technique involves a personal commitment of not allowing oneself to be influenced by the distractions during the time of one's meditation and bringing one's full attention and focus inward. Having brought one's focus inward one then places it upon the breath itself and maintains a hundred percent focus on the breath. We will engage in the practise in this way for the next few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*).

That should be sufficient for now. Just as we have attempted in our short meditation now, it would definitely be beneficial and useful if one adopted a meditation technique regularly in one's life. The technique itself is quite simple. One of the main things is to maintain a continuous focus on the breath itself. The breathing should be regulated in a proper way so that the inhalation and exhalation is equal, and free from long inhalations and short exhalations or short inhalations and long exhalations. We need to have an equal in-and-out breath. The breath also needs to be free from sound. We need to make sure that we breathe in a very silent way and that the breath is not laboured but has a natural rhythm. So the technique is focusing on the breath in conjunction with regulating the breath.

This technique is definitely very useful in quietening the mind. Those individuals who are affected by a very distracted, very busy, mind or have lots of anxiety will find this technique can really help to quieten their mind. It is worthwhile adopting this technique in our daily lives rather than allowing ourselves to be in a distracted state or allowing anxiety to take us over. If we can adopt this technique in our life, even for two minutes, it would be useful and beneficial.

4.2.2.1.2. The actual way to take the essence

4.2.2.1.2.3. The way to train the mind in the stages of the path of beings of the great scope

4.2.2.1.2.3.1. The link

4.2.2.1.2.3.1.1. It is illogical to disregard the welfare of others when seeking to accomplish one's own aims and thus, from the very beginning one must enter the Mahayana

We may be able to cover a few lines from the text. The main outline or topic that we are covering is the way to train the mind in the stages of a being of the great scope. The two subdivisions are the link and the actual path. The link has been divided into four subdivisions. The first is, as mentioned before, 'It is illogical to disregard the welfare of others to accomplish one's own aim, thus from the very beginning one must enter into the Mahayana path.'

In our last session we covered the explanation the text gave about training one's mind in conjunction with the medium scope practices. What one needs to try to adopt from that is seeing that the medium scope is an impetus for one to engage in the Great Vehicle or Mahayana path. That entails understanding that entering the Lower Vehicle or the Hinayana path is mainly focusing on one's personal gain but actually does not fulfil one's ultimate potential. Thus it is worthwhile to consider entering the Mahayana path or the Great Vehicle path.

In presenting this topic the outline says that in order to fulfil one's own aim one should not discard others' welfare. Do you understand the meaning of this point or not? Do you find there is a point made here? The understanding that is derived from this point is that in order to fulfil one's own aim one should not discard the welfare of others. That is

implying that to fulfil one's own aim one needs to take the welfare of others into consideration. This means that if one made the attempt to take others' welfare into consideration and worked towards the benefit of others, one's own goal will be naturally fulfilled as well. That implies that even if one were to consider one's own goal it cannot be obtained when one neglects the benefit and welfare of others. So following the Mahayana path is essential to achieve one's ultimate goal. This is what we need to understand from this. Thus, thinking of the welfare of others is essential for one's own well-being. You may assume that thinking only about yourself and neglecting others will fulfil your goals, but that is not the case.

We can use an illustration on a small scale. If you attempt to achieve something with your partner on the one hand but neglect them on the other, then it is questionable whether you will be able to achieve what you set out to do together. The goal needs to be achieved in conjunction with the other person. If we were to discard them and neglect them and only think of our own interest then we will not fulfil the purpose. The goal of the work being done in combination with others will not be fulfilled. Thus, even on a small scale this is very clear. To abandon or to neglect one's companion is detrimental to one's own well-being.

To take it to a bit larger scale, if someone who is employed to work for the community discards the welfare of the community or the society then that would be detrimental for their own long term well-being. That would be disastrous. For someone who is elected or entitled to work for the community or society to discard the welfare of the community or the society would really mess things up. This is very clear. There are many examples of that.

The advice that these teachings are giving is very applicable on a practical level. It is related to the welfare of the society and community as well. Therefore we can assume that the Mahayana teachings are a very democratic system.

The main point of the explanation given in the earlier parts of the text under this outline was that by seeing the downside of following the Lower Vehicle path one must be committed to entering the Great Vehicle path.

As mentioned in our earlier session one must not misinterpret this explanation and assume that the Lower Vehicle is being denigrated and considered as an inferior path. That is not the point. If one could develop the qualities that are obtained in the Lower Vehicle path within oneself that would be wondrous; those are great qualities. However, as great as those qualities and achievement may be, they still obstruct one from engaging fully to accomplish the welfare of others and benefiting sentient beings. That is the point. Even though the qualities of Lower Vehicle are great, they are an obstacle to achieving the goals of the Great Vehicle that are to take upon oneself the welfare of others and to benefit all living beings. This is because the Lower Vehicle's main aim is to seek self-liberation.

It is for this reason that the teachings give the advice to shun or abandon the Lower Vehicle path. The text quotes from another great master's text, *The Compendium of the Perfections*

*Once you have abandoned for ever the two Lower Vehicles,
Which possess no power to provide for the welfare of the
world,*

*Enter the vehicle which the Conqueror Shakyamuni
compassionately taught.*

This consists only of helping others.

What is indicated here is that having seen the shortcomings of the Lower Vehicle one needs to abandon the aim or purpose of the Lower Vehicle but not the qualities of the lower school. The reason one needs to abandon the aim and purpose is because they possess no real power to fulfil one's ultimate potential. Following the lower vehicles does not provide one with the power or ability to provide for the welfare of all sentient beings. For that reason Shakyamuni compassionately taught the Great or Mahayana Vehicle, and this vehicle indicates that the sole purpose of entering and following the practises of this path is to benefit other sentient beings. There is no selfish focus or interest on oneself but rather a compassionate attitude towards all sentient beings. The ultimate goal is to fulfil the needs of other living beings.

It is indicated here that the noble beings called bodhisattvas have endeavoured to enter the Great Vehicle path as that path that does not entail any selfish interest. It does not have the slightest selfish motivation but involves complete dedication for the welfare of other sentient beings and because of this a bodhisattva enters the Great Vehicle or Mahayana path. From this understanding we also get a sense of the greatness of the bodhisattvas, and get a glimpse of their endeavours and great commitment. We can also sense how great the bodhisattvas' deeds are.

At this point if anyone has a good question, we can address that.

Question: Two months ago there was a rat in my house. I captured the rat and moved it to a place where there is food, somewhere near to a restaurant. Somehow the rat was taken by a bird. Is the karma on me or is it on the bird?

Answer: If it was only one mouse that you are worried about, I know there are some people who keep them as a pet. If it is only one mouse then there is no danger of it multiplying and there might have been an option of giving the mouse some food and keeping it as a pet. I know of others who feed a mouse as a pet. For example I remember the late nun Lena New (Tenzing Konchok) used to have a small pet mouse. I don't know the story of how she got that mouse but apparently she had saved it from some mishap. She used to take it with her wherever she went. She would take it out of her pouch and show it to others. Apparently the mouse also had a strong bond with her. It would crawl around without any fear of others. There are many people who apparently not only keep mice as pets but become good friends with them. That is quite a nice thing to do as an alternative. *(laughter)*

I regularly emphasise that if one has a good companion one must, at every cost, try to maintain one's companion. If one were to befriend the mouse then one naturally would think of protecting it. For example, on one of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's visits here as I was about to leave a public talk a woman came up to me and asked me to bless something. She showed me a small kangaroo that she had. It was clear from this woman's care for the kangaroo that she had a strong affection towards the kangaroo and likewise the kangaroo seemed very comfortable with her. This case indicates that regardless of the external form because both possess a mind, showing affections towards another with a mind can lead to a strong bond being formed.

This even happens in the animal world. Many people might have heard of the story that some time ago an old tortoise and a hippopotamus became friends. You would think that a tortoise is a very isolated creature that is usually tucked in its shell but the tortoise would stick out its neck and rub the

hippopotamus and the hippopotamus and would actually rub its head on the tortoise. In that way there was strong affinity or bond between them. This is something noteworthy that we can think about and it is worthwhile to consider.

Question: Geshe-la, you mentioned in a session earlier about focussing on the subtle breath. Could you explain what the subtle breath is?

Answer: The main point I was trying to emphasise in relation to focusing on the breath was that one needs to try to reach the point where one brings up an image of the breath within oneself and maintains one's focus on that image of the breath. That is the main point I was emphasising.

The external breath needs to be regulated so that one does not feel the air coming in and going out. There may be some individuals who, when they initially try to meditate, have laboured breathing. You can hear their breath going in and out. Their breathing is not well regulated. At the point when one settles down one's breathing is very gentle and one does not feel the air on one's nostrils. It's as if one is not breathing, which means that it's very, very calm and very, very settled. One then goes beyond that and focuses on the image of the breath within oneself.

This, of course, is not something that comes about easily. Someone who has meditated for many, many years confided in me and said it is actually very, very difficult to get to the point of focusing on the image of the breath. Counting our breath is often an aid to placing our focus on the image of the breath. We count the 'in breath' and the 'out breath' and this is a way it helps one to just focus on the image of the breath itself. The main point is just imagining the breath coming in and going out and keeping one's focus on that. Keeping a count of the breaths is more a focus on the awareness of the breath than a focus on the physical breath itself.

If one were to be concerned with the physical breath, the actual air coming in and going out, it can cause a distraction because one may be more involved with the external breathing. If we go further and just imagine the breath coming in and going out and keep count of that our mind becomes sharper, more focused and acute.

There seem to be many ways of presenting breathing meditation. Another system may present it in another way. I'm not too sure of the ability of some who claim that they focus on the breath with a certain kind of technique. For example, I heard someone saying that they meditate on the breath which is like the breath of a mouse. Apparently that breathing is more like sniffing (*laughter*). So that is quite a physical thing, when sniffing one has to breathe quite forcefully. That does not correspond to the explanation given in our Buddhist text. This person who confided in me about this technique of meditation has a close affinity with me. This person said that they learnt this from other traditions.

It is not for me to say that this is wrong. I cannot object because he had some sort of tradition that he is following. Some may have urged him to correct what he is doing and said that what he is doing is improper technique. Personally, I don't have that habit. I don't like to correct people if they have followed a particular tradition. The main thing I feel is that if it helps them to be focused then that is the main point. If it helps them to keep their mind focused then whatever tradition it may be that's fine. I'm not going to contradict their tradition.

According to another meditation technique a person was also holding a very smooth stone in their hand at their navel. He asked me to hold one of the stones too and it seems that it has some sort of benefit. The person who holds the stone seems to be very quiet and becomes more focused. Even from the Buddhist point of view a stone or pebble can be an object of one's meditation. There is no fault in that. But what the Buddhist technique particularly describes is going beyond the stone or pebble, and bringing up an image of that stone or pebble in one's mind and focusing on the image of the pebble or stone. There seems to be some traditions that dictate focusing on the physical object itself. This is a different tradition prescribing a different method.

Before we conclude this session we can again engage in a few minutes of meditation. This time we will focus on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. We again make the commitment to maintain our entire focus on the sound of the mantra itself. When the recitation stops we try to maintain the focus we have on the sound for a few minutes. That will be a good practice for our meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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