
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Meditation is very important in our life because we all wish for peace. When we meditate we are naturally inclined to experience a peaceful state of being. This type of peace doesn't specifically relate to a country, land or physical place being peaceful; it relates to the state of mind.

Conventionally we might relate 'having peace' with being in a peaceful country free from wars and conflict, or a country that is free from the dangers of natural disasters, or thieves and criminals. Such a place may be referred to as a peaceful place. But when we really consider what peace means, particularly in relation to our own happiness, it is actually a state of mind. When we talk about the joy of being at peace, this relates to a state of mind.

In relation to the external environment being peaceful, Australia comes at the top of the list among the different nations in the world. Rightly so, because we notice that Australia has much less crime, conflict and wars than other countries. In terms of government and social benefits, Australia also compares well. And in terms of people, when generalised, we can definitely say that Australians are kind-hearted, hard working good people. Of course, there are always individual instances of people being unruly and so forth. But when we talk from a general point of view, yes, Australia definitely comes to the top of the list in relation to being a peaceful place.

However, when it comes to peace within the mind—whether individual Australians have peace within their minds—that is something hard for us to claim. I cannot say for sure if this is the case.

However this is something that we really need to consider. We need to work towards a peaceful state of mind. Even when all the external conditions are good, if we find that we still lack a sense of tranquillity, ease or peace in our mind, then that is something that we need to question, and we need to investigate the cause. What is missing? How can we get a genuine sense of peace within our mind?

The way to investigate these questions is to bring our focus inward and place our entire focus within our own mind, so we are 100% looking within ourselves. It then becomes clear which states of mind or attitudes contribute to the well-being and peace in our mind. A kind, genuine, considerate state of mind—a positive state of mind—contributes to our mental calmness and peace. Likewise, when we further investigate and look within our mind, it will also become clear what kinds of states of mind or attitudes prevent a peaceful state of mind. Certain attitudes, as soon as they arise, can make us

agitated. These negative states of mind, or attitudes, are something that will arise. The ability to analyse and clearly recognise the different states of mind—those that contribute to our well-being and those that harm our well-being—that particular intelligence is called analytical wisdom. This acute wisdom is developed by focusing within and investigating our state of mind.

Negative states of mind have control over us. Being under the domain of these states of mind will lead us to doing things that are harmful to us and others. These negative states of mind bring about mental unrest and unease, as well as lead to harmful consequences for both ourselves and others. But if we allow ourselves to be influenced by positive states of mind, then we will feel a sense of well-being. We will experience a clear, bright state of mind, feeling peaceful and at ease. So if we had a choice, which state of mind would we choose to follow? Do we have a choice? The answer is yes, we do have a choice. So, do we follow the negative states of mind and attitudes that bring us harm? Or the positive states of mind that bring us well-being? As hard as it may be, due to our lack of familiarity with positive states of mind, with consistent effort the positive states of mind will become more and more natural and easier to develop. Protecting ourselves from negative states of mind will also become easier.

Thus, through our intelligence—particularly the analytical wisdom—it becomes clear that we need to adopt whatever is useful and beneficial for us and discard whatever is harmful and detrimental to our well-being.

When we use our analytical wisdom to distinguish between what is harmful for us and what is beneficial, then we would naturally adopt what benefits us and try to avoid what is harmful. When we find that something is harmful in the physical world, then we would naturally protect ourselves from that harm. We don't voluntarily wish for any harm. We have a natural tendency to protect ourselves from any kind of external harm.

Likewise, we need to apply the same measures internally, in our minds. We need to protect ourselves from whatever causes us harm internally, that is, our negative states of mind. For example, for our own well-being we need to protect ourselves from a negative state of mind such as anger. Anger is something that we all experience as being an uncomfortable state of mind. As soon as anger arises we all feel uncomfortable; that is our experience. Thus there is no one who would voluntarily want to be angry. Because it causes unease in the mind, there is no one who says, "I want to be angry. I enjoy being angry. That is something that I like to do."

Nevertheless, we may initially find that it is difficult to try to overcome anger. When anger arises, it is towards a situation or object. If it's an object, as soon as we think of it, it makes us uneasy. One method to reduce the anger is to try to forget about the object. As much as possible, try to do things so that we do not think about the object that makes us angry. As soon as it comes to mind, and we start feeling angry, then immediately recognise that, "If I give in to anger, if I allow my anger to be expressed or felt, then it will cause me unease. Furthermore it can lead

to negative, harmful consequences. Thus I must be very careful not to allow myself to be influenced by anger.”

I do this myself. Whenever there seems to be a danger of a negative state of mind arising within myself, I speak to myself and say, “Geshe Doga, be careful.” If anger is arising, then I have to tell myself, “Anger is arising. Be careful. Be mindful. Don’t allow yourself to be influenced by it.” This is not a casual statement but really a part of my practice. I am intentionally being mindful at all times about the negative states of mind arising within me, which I am wary about. Personally, I feel that it is definitely useful to be vigilant within ourselves at all times. And that is what I am sharing with you.

All of these techniques fall into the practice of meditation, which is nothing more than familiarising ourselves with positive states of mind. Meditation is a technique of becoming familiar with a positive state of mind. And indeed, it is a matter of familiarising ourselves with whatever it is that we wish to develop within us. To become spontaneous and natural, we need to acquaint ourselves with that positive state of mind.

An example of a negative state of mind is anger. The reason why anger seems to arise so spontaneously and naturally is because of the familiarity that we already have with anger. We don’t need further acquaintance with anger. We are so familiar with anger that it arises before we seem to even know it. We don’t have to prepare for it; it seems to be very spontaneous and instinctively arising. This is because of our familiarity with it.

Now what we need to do is to familiarise our mind with what is called non-anger. Non-anger is a state of mind which is opposite to anger. The more we familiarise ourselves with negative states of mind, the stronger they become within us, and the more they control us. It is hard for us to reverse that situation. An example given in the teachings is of an alcoholic being addicted to alcohol. Once you are addicted to alcohol it is hard to reverse that situation. This is an analogy, but the familiarity of the negative state of mind is much deeper on a subtle level.

The way to familiarise ourselves with the state of mind called non-anger, is by seeing the faults of anger. The more we familiarise ourselves with the faults and disadvantages of anger, the more we will be inclined to avoid being under its influence, and then we will be more inclined to adopt a non-anger as a state of mind. But when anger arises, rather than seeing the faults of anger, we seem to immediately think about the faults of the object that we’re angry with. But the more we think about the faults of the object that we’re angry with, the more angry we feel. We have to reverse that situation. As soon as anger arises, we can immediately try to recognise the faults and the disadvantages of anger. As we familiarise ourselves with that, then we can slowly become familiar with avoiding anger; and non-anger will dominate our mind.

When you are angry with an object, you exaggerate its faults. This causes anger to arise even more strongly. With attachment, it is the opposite. Attachment is explained in the teachings as being a negative state of mind, even though it is harder for us to initially recognise

attachment as being a faulty or negative state of mind. As the great masters such as Dharmakirti have mentioned, the harm that attachment causes us is great.

When attachment arises, the reverse situation to anger happens, and we exaggerate the good qualities of the object. The object appears to be exceedingly attractive and appealing to the extent that we see the attributes or qualities of the object far beyond the reality of the actual qualities. The more we focus on the exaggerated qualities of the object, the stronger the attachment develops within our mind. When we initially experience attachment, unlike anger we may not immediately experience unease in our mind. But if we look at how attachment or desire escalates within ourselves, then we can see what it leads to.

It leads to so many instances of suffering and unhappy states of mind. For example, when the object that you are attached to, if it’s a person, starts to become interested in someone else, then we have a sense of losing them that causes a lot of suffering in our mind. This can also lead to jealousy. If someone else seems to be fond of the object that we are attracted to, then jealousy can arise in the mind and that can cause us a lot of pain. There are so many examples that can illustrate the faults and suffering of attachment. Therefore it is necessary for us to also familiarise ourselves with a state of mind called non-attachment. The more we familiarise and acquainted with non-attachment—which opposes attachment—the more we begin to experience a real sense of calm and ease within our mind. This is how we need to train ourselves in opposing the negative states of mind.

When we relate to the practice of meditation as a means to analyse and scrutinise the state of our mind, then we can recognise positive states of mind and familiarise ourselves with that. By recognising the negative states of mind to avoid, we can avoid being under their influence. This is a meditation practice and serves as a means to protect our mind.

This is an important point to understand; another benefit of meditation is that it serves as a means to protect the mind from negative states of mind, such as attachment. With strong attachment, jealousy naturally comes about. When we experience jealousy—we all have some experience of how that makes us very uncomfortable and uneasy.

Of course, again as ordinary beings, it would be hard for us to assume we could reach a state of not feeling any attachment at all. At our level, it is hard to completely overcome and avoid attachment or avoid being under the influence of attachment entirely. But we can make an attempt towards not being under the influence of *intense* attachment, the type of attachment or desire which causes pangs in our heart. When strong attachment arises, it is associated with a pain in the mind or heart. When we feel pangs in our heart that is a clear sign of the faults of attachment.

Furthermore, even when we associate with the object of attachment, we may get some sort of satisfaction initially, but when we look into the situation, we are never really satisfied. The more we associate with the object—in whatever way it may be—that brings more and more

discontent in the mind. Rather than real satisfaction and contentment, it brings discontent in the mind. These are all clear signs of the faults of attachment.

So, when we relate to negative states of mind such as anger and attachment, then we can see that these are the very states of mind within ourselves that disturb our peace of mind. Because the negative states of mind are the ones that disturb our peace of mind, we must definitely do everything in our ability to overcome them. The way to do that is through the practice of meditation. The main point is that meditation protects our peace of mind.

It is beneficial to investigate and ask ourselves in a very simple way, 'When anger arises within my mind, if I allow myself to be influenced by anger, what benefit is there for me? Is there any benefit? Rather, what harm could there be for me and others?' In this way we need to validate whether anger is something useful, whether it has any redeeming qualities or not for us.

And on the opposing side, when we express kindness and genuine concern for others, what kind of benefit is there with that? Is there any benefit? We will come to recognise that there are great benefits for ourselves in just expressing and feeling a sense of concern and kindness for others.

That in itself brings great solace to us, an ease in our mind. This is how we begin to take some responsibility for our own well-being. Trying to correct others and trying to transform others is another matter. We can leave that aside for a while. Let us begin with ourselves. Our wellbeing will naturally contribute to the wellbeing of others as well. We need to take care of ourselves which is our personal responsibility.

Having mentioned the benefits and the ways to practice meditation, we will now actually engage in the practice of meditation. Let's re-adopt our physical posture to be in a relaxed state for meditation.

Having adopted a suitable posture, we need to bring about an appropriate state of mind for meditation. We first make a commitment and determination to withdraw all of our attention and focus from any distractions—whatever forms they may be such as external distractions or even our own superstitious mind, a mind with a lot of doubts and questions and worries. So, withdraw all distractive thoughts and memories, just bring our full attention and focus within; bring it 100 per cent inside.

Distractions can be any thought or memory or any object that we bring to mind that causes delusions to arise. Bring our entire focus inward and try not to concern ourselves with any of that. Having brought our attention inward, we identify an object to focus on. The object to focus on here in our meditation is our breath. So, we bring our full attention and focus just on the breath itself. In this way we try to maintain our focus and attention for the next few minutes. (*meditation*)

Just as we attempted now, it would be good for everyone to apply the meditation technique regularly.

The meditation technique itself is not something which is really complex and difficult to understand and comprehend. Basically, it is a matter of keeping our

attention and focus on the chosen object. However, we need to really apply the proper technique in order for it to be an actual practice of meditation. Initially, what is most important is to try to maintain focus for whatever time we meditate, even if it's just for a few moments. If we have a good attention span for those few minutes, really keeping our attention and focus on the object, then due to that proper focus and attention we can then slowly build on that.

When we first bring our attention on an object, we notice that it does remain there. We may appear to be focussed but actually the mind has already wandered off. If that becomes a habit, then we will never be able to really focus and develop a real concentration focusing on the object. Initially, of course we might find it difficult. But it is possible.

We need to just recognise whatever attention we have initially, and try to slowly build on that and increase it. The main thing is to increase the attention span, not the duration of sitting. Even if we sit to meditate for a long time, but our mind is distracted, then that doesn't serve the purpose at all; that isn't enough for an actual meditation practice. We need to be mindful from the very onset.

Question: In attempting to be mindful in meditation, it seems to cause more chatter in my mind. Alternatively, it seems much quieter when I don't go into any thinking process but just fall into the heart—just being quiet without any thought process?

Answer: There definitely are some traditions that present the technique of just letting go of all thoughts. But we need to consider what we are trying to improve or transform here. It is our mind. The mind is always in relation to an object that it perceives. Without an object to perceive or focus on, we are not really pinpointing to an actual state of mind.

There are definitely techniques from some traditions that are presented that focus on 'nothing', having no thoughts in our mind. According to this tradition of focusing on nothingness, they claim that we need to reach a state of mind where there are no conceptions at all, either good or bad. They claim that even if you have a good concept, it can disturb the mind and bring agitation in the mind. Of course, that is more so with a negative concept or state of mind. In this tradition, as an analogy to illustrate that whatever concept arises in the mind is harmful: whether it is a white dog or a black dog, if it bites you, in both instances you will feel the pain.

In our tradition however, we present a techniques to become familiar with the positive states of mind. We are presenting it as a way to transform the mind itself.

The specific tradition of meditation that was mentioned earlier—having no conception at all—prevailed in Tibet. The master of our tradition, known as Lama Tsong Khapa—in the centre of the three statutes up there on the altar—is said to have initially adopted this meditation because it was widespread. And it's said that he lost all sense of time and space for a long time, he just remained in a state of nothingness.

As an initial practice to maintain some sort of state of mind free from distractions, if that can actually help, this is technique might be useful.

However, what concerns us is what do we do, how do we interact and how do we maintain our state of mind out of the meditation session. Because we may spend some time in meditation where we don't focus on anything, we don't maintain any mindfulness. It might be all well during that period, but when we come out of that state and we have to go out in the world, how do you then deal with the outside situation? Without mindfulness, there are some who say that, "In meditation, I seem to have a bit of calmness, but when I come out I completely lose everything." That is what we need to be concerned about. We spend most of our time outside and interacting with the world.

However, I am just presenting the different techniques and different traditions. But finally I would say that whatever works for you is fine. If it works for you and you find it suitable, then that's OK. I have no objection to any tradition.

Likewise, as with meditation techniques, there are many different religious traditions as well. When the Dalai Lama was giving a teaching in Sydney some time ago he said, "I have respect for all religions because each religious tradition has a means to benefit, to help others who follow them." As His Holiness first of all mentioned, the way that the different religions serve as a means to benefit others is like different kind of foods. Some people like hot foods, some like spicy, some like sweet, some like sour. However, they all serve the purpose to fill the stomach. As His Holiness mentioned, all religions serve a purpose and are equally good. But for me, I would have to consider Buddhism best for myself. That actually is a very honest and very practical approach by His Holiness. If the leader of each religion could have that same attitude—that all religions are good, but their own religion is best for themselves—then that is really a healthy approach. It comes down to our personal preference and whatever works for us.

The approach that we could have when we come to the presentations here is that we can listen to what is said with an unbiased mind. But when it comes to meditation, follow whatever suits you. Sometimes I mention that, even though I suggest the object to focus to be the breath, you can focus on whatever is suitable for you. That is because some people are more familiar with a certain object and that may be more suitable for them. However, for the sake of the presentation here, I have to mention the traditional object that we use.

Before we conclude for the evening we can again spend a few minutes in meditation focusing on the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra.

After the recitation of the mantra, try to just keep your mind empty, without really focusing on anything. Just maintain your focus on the residue of the sound. This is line with the meditation that was mentioned earlier, about just falling into your heart and not thinking about anything.

*Transcribed from tape by Peter Boothby
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TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA