
The Condensed Lam Rim

ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་སྒྲིག་།

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As usual we can spend some time for meditation, adopting a comfortable and relaxed posture. Meditation means familiarising the mind, particularly with positive states of mind, such as kindness. Familiarising our mind with a positive kind attitude over and over again is what meditation entails.

Meditation relates particularly to the state of our mind. The great master Lama Tsong Khapa said that if the mind is sound and good, then the spiritual path will also be good. But if the mind is not sound and good, then whatever spiritual path we follow will also be corrupt. This is an essential point that Lama Tsong Khapa is presenting to us.

Our thoughts are related to the state of our mind or our attitudes. Of course young children below the age of fifteen find it hard to recognise that the mind affects all their actions. It is only after about the age of fifteen when we begin to pay more attention to our own state of mind. It then becomes noticeable.

When children are young, their state of mind is quite at ease. This is of course a generalisation, however children are not too concerned with their thoughts or the negative influences of negative attitudes because generally speaking their minds are still quite fresh and innocent. Because of that, children appear to have an easy going nature. As long as they have enough food and have a little time to play around, they are usually quite content. There are not many worries and anxieties that take place in their lives. However, as we reach our teenage years, our thoughts and attitudes start to take control over us. We start to realise how our mind can be influenced by thoughts, ideas, speculations, anxieties and worries. This definitely takes a toll on our well-being.

Across different cultures we find that children grow up more or less similarly, carefree and generally speaking with a happy and joyful attitude. That is because they don't have too many speculations, anxieties and worries in their lives yet. As we reach our teenage years, while on the one hand we are becoming more mature, however on the other hand we seem to bring about more unnecessary concerns and worries for ourselves. As most children reach the teen age, a transformation takes place. Somehow a child who may seem happy and easy going is now starting to become worried and facing difficulties in their life. It could also be the other way round, where children who seemed troubled and had a difficult childhood transform for the better when they reached their teenage years and life becomes a little better for them. They now take opportunities to better their lives. The main point is that significant transformation does

take place in the early teen years, either they become relatively happier or become more depressed due to their negative attitudes.

So why does this transformation take place? How does it occur? What is actually happening? Our attitudes and way of thinking are dependent on our state of mind rather than any external environmental changes. Of course external influences may contribute to a certain degree but the main factor is our own state of mind, which will determine what kind of attitude we have and whether we are facing anxiety and difficulty. The main point here is that rather than blaming external circumstances, it is good for us to take into account that our internal mental state contributes to our happiness or anxiety and confusion.

There are situations where many young people are facing disturbances and anxieties, even leading up to depression. It is worthwhile to consider what the causes are and then whether there is a method to help them overcome the turmoil that is going on in their mind. I feel that there are definitely ways and methods that young people can use to overcome their angst and their troubled mind. First of all, of course I feel that strong responsibility lies with the parents. For those friends and associates that I have personal connections with, I often remind those who are parents that when children grow up and reach their teen years, then this is the time that parents have to take responsibility and try to pay special attention to their needs. Between the age of fifteen and twenty years old the parents need to take particular care and responsibility for their teenager's needs and try to understand them, because this is the time when they have many more concerns and worries than when they were young children. This is the time when biological changes are happening, and more physical needs as well as mental stimulation taking place. They have more friends, including boyfriends or girlfriends, and studying at school becomes more complex and difficult. There are many, many factors that contribute to their anxiety, and even can lead to depression. It is important to pay particular attention to your children and to give them even more attention during their teenage years.

Consider the best ways to try to help them and pay attention to their needs. The main thing is to really understand them. Some students of mine had an eighteen year old who was not paying much attention to study and was just hanging around the house. They were seeking my advice of how to make their child motivated. In a situation like that one must first of all, try to understand why the child wants to stay at home, why don't they have the motivation to study or to work. It is good to understand what is causing that, rather than immediately being strict with them. Rather than just constantly nagging them for not doing things right, it may be worthwhile to pay attention to what their needs may be, and find out what is disturbing them.

My advice basically consisted of finding out what is troubling the child. There is definitely something that causes the child to be that way, to shy from everything and to try to cocoon themselves, so what is it that is disturbing them? Find out and then try to fix it. If

children already have problems with study or work, and if on top of that the parents start nagging them, then this becomes a second problem for them to deal with. Rather than adding to their problems it is better to really understand where they are coming from and then try to help solve their problems.

When I observe young people and consider the contributing factors to homelessness, I feel that it is around that teen age that some may actually decide to leave home and are then likely to have difficulty in finding a place to live. The reason why they would make that drastic move even though they are probably not ready is because they don't feel settled or comfortable at home. If they get the impression that their parents don't really understand them while they are going through their own anxieties and difficulties and problems, then that gives them an extra worry. They can't take it anymore and that is why they leave. And some may even resort to more unfortunate measures like abuse of substances. All this might lead them to leave home and become homeless. Even from watching television, I notice that parents say they have a good home for their children and don't understand why they want to leave home. This is because they don't feel settled and they don't feel they are understood at home. My advice is to pay extra attention to teenagers and try to not pressure them too much. Try to understand them and try to make them feel comfortable; maybe sometimes even take them on a vacation if you can afford it, or take them out somewhere where they feel relaxed. When they feel relaxed and when they feel you are paying attention to their needs and trying to understand them, then that makes them feel more comfortable and more at ease. Parents have later confided in me that this advice has worked. They said that their children had grown up to become mature, responsible people, found a good job and got married, and now even have children of their own. That is the positive outcome of following this advice.

The main point is that the so called problems in life, a disturbed life or lack of direction in life, with lots of anxieties, worries and problems begins as a teenager, between the ages of fifteen to eighteen. From there, these problems carry on through life, where they feel unsettled and troubled. If attention is not paid at this most crucial time, the situation will slide and get worse, which may make it uncomfortable for all concerned for a long time. This relates to most of us. If we look into our lives and see where things started going wrong for us, we can relate that back to certain times in our lives where we have made bad judgments or choices.

As for me, it was in my teen years that I began to put some effort into understanding the techniques of meditation and make some attempt to meditate. All though I cannot claim that I have become a skilled meditator, whatever I have gained so far and can share with you now, is the result of my continuous meagre attempts at meditating. Despite my limited experiences of meditation, I feel it is worthwhile to consider a technique that can help to settle down the mind at whatever age, as a teenager or later on in life. The technique of meditation is worthwhile considering and putting into practice. It is useful and beneficial in our life.

The main point is to try to adopt a technique that will help to settle down our mind so that it is not influenced or prone to agitation. Whenever we make bad choices or mistakes in our life, our mind is in a heightened, excited state or agitated state. In my experience, from the early part in my life, before my attempts of really taking meditation seriously, when I was maybe twelve or thirteen of age, this is when I experienced my mind getting quite agitated. I got into some fights as a young boy. When I look back, it is nothing more than the mind being influenced by anger, and then anger leading me into a false sense of bravery and then leading me into fights. Whenever I look back I can see now that it was just a state of mind of being completely agitated and unsettled, so that is why I have made attempts to try to overcome that myself.

There was another time I remember when I accidentally fired an arrow that shot a bird and killed it. It was only the one time that I killed a bird, but that regret is still with me now. Even though it was a mishap, in some way it became an impetus for me to take the meditation practice seriously. If we have something to regret, then that becomes a reason for us to try to transform ourselves and try to make our life better. I can't claim to have much understanding of purification, but whenever I think about an incident like that it does give me a strong impetus to purify negative deeds. The practice of purification is powerful and an impetus for meditation practice.

One of the main points I have been trying to emphasise is that having a settled, calm and kind mind, is important. This is because the opposite of that, an unsettled mind, a mind that is agitated leads to a mind full of anxiety and unhappiness. Our mind is not happy if it is in turmoil.

As we can see with our own state of mind, there is the potential for it to be happy and at peace, we do experience that. We also experience the contrary, which is the unsettled agitated mind. We need to overcome this troubled mind and protect our calm state of mind. Meditation can successfully achieve both - protecting the mind as well as maintaining whatever happiness we have.

We need to consider applying the technique of meditation because we have all experienced a mind that is completely distracted and agitated. We don't feel all that together, we don't feel at ease. In consideration for our own well-being, it is worthwhile to consider applying a meditation technique on a daily basis. During the meditation we need to first of all make a commitment to not allow our mind to be distracted. We can temporarily withdraw from all forms of ideas, thoughts and speculations; we just leave all that aside and bring our mind inward, free from distractions.

Having brought our focus inward, we place it upon our breath, which in this case is used as the object of focus. As we settle down our mind, withdrawing it from distractions, bringing it inward, we focus on the breath. We notice for ourselves that our mind will naturally become settled. At this point we can relate to the essential point of meditation and understand its value. Thus, for the next few minutes we will keep our entire focus and

attention on the breath itself, and just keep centred on that. (*Pause for meditation*)

It is good to initially make a meditation session for about five minutes. One of the practical benefits of limiting meditation to five minutes is so that we don't need to use the excuse of 'having no time'. Often people confide to me that they find meditation useful but they say 'Geshe-la, I don't have time for it'. So five minutes is something you could probably find time for. For those who say they don't have time to meditate, I challenge them - how come you find time to go and see a movie? If you see the benefits and importance of meditation, then how can you explain giving up the time to see a show but not giving up the time to meditate? If you actually can see the benefit of meditation then you have to willingly give up the time for seeing a mundane, trivial movie and spend some time in meditation.

Some movies and shows can be educational, for example some movies depict the life of people who have overcome many hardships and yet are successful later on in their life. These kinds of movies can be educational for us, where we learn about the difficulties others have gone through, and this can be beneficial as well. Apparently some people can be focussed while watching the movie. When I questioned someone particularly about why they have complete attention and focus on the movie and nothing seems to disturb them, they told me that if they don't put their full attention on it they lose the taste of the show. Some people prefer that you don't talk to them in the middle of a movie. But even children in front of the television can watch a cartoon show and pay full attention to it.

As I emphasise regularly, the real purpose of meditation is to adopt a state of mind where we can remain calm and achieve less agitation and less turmoil in the mind. If we can secure a state of mind that is settled and calm, then there is a natural calmness that surrounds us. For example, pets comfortably come up to you and curl around you when you are feeling settled and calm. But if you are agitated, animals notice and they shy away and try to hide in the corner. One western monk, Thubten Gyatso/Adrian Feldman, told me that once he was absorbed in meditation and was sitting for quite a while when a mouse came and sat in his palms!

A meditation technique generates a more calm and settled mind, but the main point is that within a settled and calm mind we can develop a genuinely kind mind. This is the real benefit for us and others around us. Meditating calmly and with a kind attitude can draw in even a mouse. Animals are attracted to someone who is calm and peaceful. Indeed, if we can adopt a calm and peaceful state of mind, then it will definitely help develop harmonious relationships with people around us, such as our relatives and immediate family members. However there may be incidents where some get a big fright during meditation. One day, when I was living in Nepal at the Kopan monastery, I went off to the top of the hill and a westerner was sitting there seemingly in deep meditation. At a certain point an eagle flew and landed on his head, which startled him so much that he was really afraid.

When I saw that, I couldn't help a laugh, even though it was not funny for him.

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

4.2.2.1.2.3.2. The actual paths

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2. How to develop an awakening mind

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1. The stages of training the awakening mind

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1. Training the mind in the pith instructions on the six causes and effect, which comes from the lineage traced to the great master Atisha.

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2. Extensive explanation

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.1. Developing certainty in the stages

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.1.1. Showing compassion to be the root of the Mahayana path

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.1. The importance of compassion in the beginning

In relation to the outline that we are covering now, we have come the point of the method and means of training the awakening mind of bodhichitta. As mentioned in the text, there are two particular methods. The way of training the mind that comes from the lineage of Atisha, and the method that comes down from Shantideva. In explaining the technique that is presented by the lineage that comes from Atisha, the text has a brief and extensive explanation.

The lineage of Atisha relates particularly to the *seven cause and effect sequence* of developing the awakening mind or bodhichitta. The ultimate state of awakening mind is enlightenment. This is dependant on the initial awakening mind that was developed, called bodhichitta, and that is dependant on whole hearted resolve. This is dependant on great compassion, which is dependent on great love, and that heart warming love is dependent on the wish to repay our mother's kindness, which is dependant on remembering her kindness; and that is dependant on the initial cause of recognising all beings as having been our mother. This is the brief presentation of the seven cause and effect sequence of developing bodhichitta. The extensive explanation is subdivided into two more categories, which are: *Developing certainty in the stages* and *the actual training in the stages*.

Developing certainty in the stages is again subdivided into two: *Showing compassion is the root of the Mahayana path* and *the way the other causes and effects are the cause and effect of compassion*.

The presentation of the sequence demonstrates the great skill in how the subject matter is presented by Lama Tsong Khapa. He presented the text according to the outline as shown here. He presented compassion as the root of the Mahayana or the Great Vehicle path. He is pointing out that for all practices and essential paths developed on the great path are based upon developing great compassion. This is why this is referred to as the root of the path, because it serves as the very foundation or basis for developing all the other qualities along the path to enlightenment.

Compassion as the root of the Mahayana path is presented into further subdivisions. It is the root of the

path because compassion is important in the *beginning, the middle, and the end.*

In summary, it is important to develop compassion within ourselves. If we pay heed to the advice here and try to implement the techniques for developing compassion, there is no question about how great the benefits are for us.

As presented here, compassion is the root of the path. I think it is safe for us to assume that all major religions also consider love and compassion as the very foundation of their religion. There may be different ways of explaining what love and compassion is, but all would agree that they are the foundation of their religion. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama often relates, he definitely finds that love and compassion in the Christian religion is strongly emphasised; it is a strong basis in Christianity. His Holiness the Dalai Lama related a personal incident on one of his visits to Europe. It must have been in Spain where he encountered a Christian hermit who was known to have been meditating for six years in isolation. This hermit monk came out of his retreat to see the Dalai Lama during His visit there. The Dalai Lama felt very honoured and asked him directly, 'what were you meditating on for six years?' Apparently the Dalai Lama was informed that he was living on very basic meagre food, such as dry bread. He was living in contentment with meagre food and meditating in isolation. When the Dalai Lama asked him what he was meditating on, with great sincerity and modesty, he mentioned that he was meditating on love. The Dalai Lama said that he was actually moved with that response. The Dalai Lama relates that story on many occasions. He is giving a message to everyone, to all religious followers, that it is essential for us to consider developing love within ourselves. Furthermore, as he relates the qualities and virtues of other religions he is also presenting us with the message that we need to practice genuine respect for other religions; to develop a pure view and have respect for other religions rather than having a critical mind. This is important.

The most recent account I remember of the Dalai Lama giving this story was in front of over twenty thousand monks and several thousand Tibetans - over maybe two hundred thousand people gathered together mostly from Tibetan and Asian backgrounds. The Dalai Lama wasn't saying this just to westerners out of goodwill, but rather was giving a message to his large number of Asian followers, as way for them to develop real genuine respect for other religions. What he also went on to mention is about how for earnest Christian followers who have strong faith in God, faith seemed to be an incredibly powerful state of mind. A strong dedicated and single pointed faith in God was really helpful and beneficial for their mind to be calm and peaceful. He mentioned this again to the Tibetans, not to the westerners. The Dalai Lama is really promoting genuine understanding and respect among all religions. He personally shows great respect to other religions himself. He is giving this profound advice that no matter what religion your background might be, whether it is Christian or Jewish or any other faith, it is for your own and others' well-being

to have mutual genuine respect towards all religions. The Dalai Lama promotes that view on a regular basis.

Before we conclude for the evening we spend again a few minutes for meditation. As we sit in a relaxed and upright posture, our object of focus is the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra. As we hear the sound of the mantra, we try to withdraw our mind from all distractions, and place our single pointed attention on the sound of the mantra. When the recitation stops, we can maintain a focus on the residue of the sound.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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