
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual it would be good to spend some time for meditation. It seems that it would be an appropriate time to do some meditation.

As I normally relate to people, half-jokingly, when the festive time of Christmas is coming near, it is actually an opportune time for meditation because one might be more prone to agitation around this time.

There seems to be many reasons for agitation to occur during Christmas; some have the worries and anxiety of having to do shopping, trying to find the appropriate gifts and so forth. Then around Christmas time itself some people seem to suffer from over-eating, some suffer from jealousy and some suffer simply because of being completely carried away by the festive state of mind. Being completely distracted and overly excited; that causes anxiety in the mind as well. So these are the circumstances we face during the Christmas period.

Prior to all of this actually occurring, if we can prepare our state of mind so as not to be prone to too much mental distraction and excitement, then we will definitely benefit from that.

For the purpose of our meditation, let us first adopt a comfortable and relaxed physical posture. Then it would be appropriate to consider the purpose of meditation itself: simply put, it is a technique which allows the mind to settle down and leads to the experience of genuine calmness in one's mind.

Engaging in the practice of meditation is actually one of the most effective methods to train our mind. The need to train the mind is because our present situation is one whereby we are influenced by our mind and the mind is in turn influenced by the delusions. This is what causes trouble and turmoil in the mind.

An appropriate situation would be where one has control over one's own mind. However for most of us the contrary is the case. As we possess our mind we should rightly have control over it. However, in the present situation the mind seems to have control over us with the influence of various types of delusions. This is what causes turmoil and anxiety which is the cause of a troubled mind. That is how it comes about.

To begin with, if we can recognise the reality that we are under the influence of our mind and how it in turn is influenced by strong delusions, then that will reveal the cause of the troubles within oneself. The first step is to recognise this whereby transformation within oneself will begin to take place.

When we apply a genuine meditation technique and engage in the practice we begin to gain more and more control over our own mind. This is one way to relate to the benefits of meditation practice. As one gains control over one's mind, by bringing our focus and attention within oneself rather than allowing it to be distracted externally, one prevents opportunities for delusions to arise in the mind. In other words one ceases the influence of delusions within oneself. When the delusions are not present in one's mind and one is not influenced by the delusions, a sense of well-being and calmness is naturally experienced within oneself. This is the benefit of practicing meditation.

This positive effect of meditation practice is something that we can relate to when we experience it within oneself. It is within our reach, we can definitely relate to it. For example, if we compare two different states of mind, one which is influenced by anger and the other, a state of mind which is free from anger; we will notice for ourselves that when our mind is free from anger, when there is no opportunity for anger to arise, our mind is much calmer, much more settled. It is not troubled and agitated. Whereas whenever we give in to anger by allowing anger to take over, at that time we find our mind to be really agitated and troubled. Likewise with other delusions such as jealousy and strong attachment and so forth, when we are free from these negative states of mind or delusions, we definitely feel the positive effect within ourselves. So regarding the beneficial results of meditation, we do not have to wait years for them to arise sometime in the future. That's not the case at all. We can experience it right now, at this very time in our lives.

As explained in the teachings, the true mark or sign of a genuine meditation practice is the lessening of delusions. The minimisation of delusions in one's mind is a truly positive result of engaging in meditation and helps one to realise a positive transformation within oneself. For example, if someone who is short-tempered were to make a serious undertaking in meditation and practiced it in daily life, they would begin to notice for themselves that they begin to get less upset. If one becomes less upset, then that is a true mark of the positive results of meditation taking place within oneself. So this is how we measure our progress in the practice.

The teachings mention that "a subdued mind is a happy mind" and that "a controlled mind is a settled mind". In relation to these quotes, when we have control over our mind, we have a genuinely happy mind which is free from negative states. To be able to restrain the influence of delusions definitely produces a happier, joyous and more stable mind. Such are the means to further generate positive effects and progress in one's meditation practice.

As for the delusions that affect us in daily life, they occur differently relative to different individuals. Sometimes it may be a problem with anger that begins our primary disturbance and at other times it might be strong desire, attachment, jealousy, pride, perhaps a sense of competitiveness (related to pride). At different times we are affected by variations in the type and intensity of delusion that overpowers us. Because we can be particularly prone to one type of delusion the first step is

to actually recognise, what is it? What type of delusion is affecting us? Having identified it, we then need to deal with it, to try to apply the antidote for overcoming it. We need to do this without any expectation that one will overcome it right away, but rather gradually. If we deal with it through the appropriate means of practice, slowly that particular delusion can be minimised and as we begin to feel less intensity of that delusion within one's mind, then to that degree we have experienced the positive result of our practice.

The way to apply the practice in one's life effectively is to be alert and ready to combat the illusions whenever they arise. As the great Kadampa meditation masters of the past have mentioned in their works of advice, "When the delusions are strong, then I will also be strong and firm to combat them. Rather than being submissive and allowing myself to be under the control of the delusions, I also will become strong applying the antidotes to overcome the delusions. If the delusions begin to subside and relax, then I can relax a bit." So, when the delusions are strong, that's not an appropriate time to relax and allow oneself to be overpowered by the delusions. Rather one needs to become strong by applying the antidote.

As one great Kadampa master mentions in his works, *The 37 Practices of a Bodhisattva*, "one needs to wear the armour of the practice of patience and use the weapons of applying the antidotes to combat the delusions". So he's giving the analogy of going out to fight in a war by wearing armour and being prepared with the right kind of weapons. This is how we need to deal with the delusions in our mind. Being our enemy we need to combat them with the appropriate antidotes. Otherwise, as the Kadampa masters have mentioned, the delusions are quite cunning, tricky, and strong but if we recognise them for what they are and prepare to deal with them, they lose their power.

Also it is not the case, unfortunately, that the delusions will feel pity for us and spare us. The delusions have no mercy. It's not the case that if one gives in to the delusions that they will let go and spare us the agony. For example, if we let anger control us, it is not as if anger will take pity and let us go saying, "OK, I'll spare you from having the angst in your mind." Rather, the more we allow anger to dominate us the more it disturbs us. We must not give the opportunity for anger to control or influence us at any time. Rather we must apply antidotes to combat and overcome anger so that it does not control us and give us negative consequences.

Many times in the past I've related the different appropriate antidotes for overcoming particular delusions so you can refer back to those particular past teachings. What you need to do is recall the antidote and implement it.

Now that I've summarised the main purpose of meditation we can engage in the meditation practice. To recall the main purpose of meditation again, if we were to summarise it into one main point, it would be to gain a genuinely calm and relaxed state of mind, which is a peaceful state of mind. That is really the ultimate purpose of meditation. If we were to question ourselves as to whether we want to have a calm and peaceful mind, we

would all accept and agree that, "yes, we do want a peaceful and calm mind." That is something for which we all wish, no one intentionally wants troubles, angst and worries in their mind. Therefore since we all wish to have a peaceful and calm mind, we need to consider the fact that the peaceful and calm mind does not, unfortunately, just come about naturally without any causes and conditions. They depend on causes and conditions and these are found in the application of meditation practice.

The delusions arise in the form of distractions which we allow ourselves to become fixated on and that cause our mind to end up in turmoil. The meditation technique involves intentionally withdrawing our mind from all forms of distractions and bringing it inward, bringing our mind and focus centred within oneself. This is the actual cause to experience calmness and a quiet state of mind.

For the purpose of a formal practice, we need to adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture. If there is tension in any part of our body, that becomes the object of our focus and another distraction. Rather than being able to focus on the chosen meditation object, our mind will be drawn to where ever we feel the tension or pain in our body. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama advises on the practice of meditation, even though traditionally there are instructions for sitting down cross-legged to do meditation if that causes anyone to have pain in the knees or legs, then that will just become a cause for distraction. Therefore, it is better to sit on a chair where it is more comfortable and relaxed, where one would not have to struggle with pain and so forth. Therefore, as His Holiness advises, the main point really is, one has to have a relaxed and comfortable posture for meditation. Bare that in mind and try to adopt a relaxed posture without any tension.

Despite traditional postures for meditation, when it comes to individual practice we have different bodily constitutions to which different postures might be more suited for meditation. There are certain great masters who are said to have meditated while lying down. Because of their bodily constitution and how the channels work it was more suitable to lie down and meditate. And then for some practitioners, even standing up was an appropriate posture. Again, if you adopt that posture of lying down, for us it might not work. [*Geshe-la laughs*] The point is that we need a relaxed, comfortable but upright posture.

There was once a person who used to come to meditation sessions here who had a bad back. In order for him to be comfortable, he had to lie back, having his back on the seating.

The main purpose of posture is that it does not hinder our mental focus on the object. The one who is doing the meditation is the mind and it is the mind that focuses on the object, so whatever is conducive for the mind to focus on the object is the main point. Of course, in the higher forms of tantric meditation, the posture of sitting cross-legged is said to be a particular feature, the full lotus which is a full cross-legged posture for instance.

In adopting the appropriate technique for meditation, with a comfortable physical posture we aim to adopt a clear and bright state of mind and the intention in our

mind is that we develop a commitment that for the next few minutes “I will not allow my mind to be influenced by the distractions.” So with that commitment in mind we intentionally withdraw our mind from all distractions, whether they be memory, thoughts or whatever other conditions in which they may come. We completely withdraw from all of that and initially just bring our entire attention and focus within. Bring your whole focus within and centre it within oneself. Then as we begin to notice the mind starting to get distracted, at that point we particularly relate to the object of our focus of meditation which is the breath. We focus on the breath as a way to anchor the mind and prevent it getting distracted again. That means while we breathe in and out naturally, we just keep our entire focus and intention on the breath itself. In that way we will spend the next few minutes in complete focus. (Pause for meditation)

That will be sufficient for now. Now we can cover a few points from the text.

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

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.1.1 Taking upon the responsibility of the Mahayana path is dependent on developing compassion.

Following from our last session, the topic that we are covering now is the text explaining compassion as the root of the Mahayana path. Compassion is important in the beginning, in the middle and at the end. Under the heading, for the importance of compassion at the beginning, there are three subdivisions. The first reason for the importance of compassion at the beginning is that the responsibility of liberating beings depends upon it.

So we explained compassion and what it entails to quite an extent as well as the importance for generating compassion. As the text reads, in relation to the first heading:

Once your mind is moved by great compassion, you will definitely make the commitment to free all living beings from cyclic existence. If your compassion is weak, you will not. Therefore, compassion is important at the beginning because feeling responsible to free all beings requires great compassion. And because if you do not take on this responsibility, you are not ranked as the Mahayana practitioner, or the Great Vehicle's practitioner.

In relation to the text that says “you will definitely make the commitment to free all living beings from cyclic

existence, once one’s mind is moved by great compassion”, what is being emphasised here is the special intention or great resolve: resolving to take responsibility to free all beings from all suffering. In order to develop superior intention one needs to have first developed a genuine sense of love and compassion towards all living beings. As mentioned previously, love is a state of mind where one focuses on other beings deprived of happiness and wishing them to be happy. This is what we call love. Whereas compassion is the state of mind where one sees other beings suffering, and not being able to bare their suffering, wishes them to be free from suffering. When love and compassion are developed towards all living beings in cyclic existence, and that becomes stronger and stronger in one’s mind, it reaches a point where one makes a resolve to take the responsibility upon oneself to free all beings from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate happiness.

This is the commitment with which one enters the Mahayana or “great vehicle’s path” that leads one to enlightenment. As mentioned previously, in Tibetan the connotation of the Mahayana or “great vehicle” is a sense of being able to take on a certain kind of load. The great load that one is able to withstand is the load of freeing all beings from all suffering and leading them to the ultimate state of happiness. Someone holding that intention is called a person of the great vehicle, someone who has entered the Mahayana path.

This explanation of love and compassion, particularly compassion defining the Mahayana practitioner, is not to be regarded as something that we cannot relate to, which excludes us because of some lack in capacity or something that we’re not ready to practice. When we think about our own capacity for love and compassion, we all definitely have the basis of love and compassion within ourselves. When we wish someone else to be happy and joyous, that is a sense of love. When we don’t want to harm someone and we don’t want others to suffer, when we refrain from harming others that is a sense of compassion in us.

So we all have love and compassion and the basis is definitely within us to cultivate and develop these qualities beyond one’s immediate friends and extend it further. Also it is important to reflect upon how we are dependent on love and compassion. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama mentions, in relation to ourselves at the very beginning we were dependent on love and compassion. We would not have survived if our mother did not love and care for us. We would not have been able to survive as a toddler soon after we were born. What sustained us is the love of our mother and other carers. That is how we were sustained and grew up. At the end of life, when we are weak and sick, or if we are in a desperate state, we depend on the love of others to care for us, the compassion of others to look after us when we are not capable. So in the middle, when we think that we are capable of managing things for ourselves and we think that we are in control of our own life, is it reasonable to think that we shouldn’t extend love and compassion to others?

In fact, even during the middle we are dependent on the compassion of others, but we may have an assumption that we have control over our life. To neglect expressing love and compassion to others would not be proper, when we are dependent on love and compassion ourselves, particularly in the beginning and at the end. So therefore it is appropriate to develop love and compassion in the middle and really work at it.

I regularly emphasise, again and again in my talks and teachings, the real importance of love and compassion in one's life. Even to the extent that sound, harmonious relationships depend on love and compassion whether it's regards to others, immediate relatives, companions, or one's partner. When we have a genuine concern for others and a mutual concern for each other, the true expression of love and compassion is made. As I regularly mention, when we are distressed and having a difficult time, someone who helps us is the one that we feel immediate, natural gratitude towards. Someone who helps us at a time of distress is someone we will naturally trust. This is because during difficult times, someone who helps us demonstrates a mark of true love and compassion towards oneself and proves a true companion.

If one's relationship is based merely on infatuated attachment or attraction to each other, then it is difficult to sustain the relationship. It is difficult for real harmony to develop within that relationship. As attachment fades away, then whatever apparent love or compassion was there also fades away. What truly lasts the distance is true, genuine concern, love and compassion towards each other. I don't know if you would be able to overcome your attachment to each other in your relationship. That is something that might be hard to overcome. But in the event that your attachment does fade away from each other, if you have worked at developing a genuine concern for each other, then that will sustain relations. Even if attachment fades away and leads to living separate lives love and compassion for each other will remain and in some cases become stronger. This only goes to show that in any relationship love and compassion must be of principle concern.

To come back to the main point, as the teaching describes here that for the Mahayana practitioner, the one who enters the Great Vehicle, the very root of the path is compassion. The main purpose of the Great Vehicle practice is to work towards the goal of liberating all beings from all suffering. In order to accomplish that goal, one has to generate compassion towards all living beings and the beginning of such compassion is found in the feelings one has to those around oneself now. The expansion of great compassion starts with wishing others to be happy and free from suffering in relation to those close to you, companions and so forth, then you should expand it further to other beings and then even further until one's scope includes wishing all living creatures to be happy and free from suffering. At that point, one has developed great compassion. That great compassion then becomes the very basis for engaging in practices of the path leading towards enlightenment, where one actually obtains full capacities for liberating all beings from

suffering and leading them to happiness. This is an overview of the practice in its entirety.

Even in a worldly context, we can appreciate the value of love and compassion. When we consider someone as being a trustworthy, considerate and good person, what is the basis for identifying these qualities? It is related to their genuine sense of care for others, loving-kindness, and working towards the well-being of others. When someone has genuine concern for others, works for making others happy and helps others to be free from any kind of misery and discomfort, such a person would be cherished as a naturally good person. The term "a good person" or a "good lad", comes from the values of their character dependent on their good intentions and genuine concern for others.

Therefore, even in a worldly context, leaving aside the religious context, someone who exhibits genuine concern based on love and compassion for others, is a cherished person, and is a valued person. It is quite remarkable that regardless wherever you may be, whatever culture, in this world a person who has genuine concern for others and cares for others is regarded a valued person.

So before we conclude the session for the evening, we can again spend a few minutes in meditation. As mentioned previously, let us adopt a comfortable and relaxed physical posture and within that comfortable physical posture set up an attentive and focused mind. This time the object that we focus on will be the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we hear the sound of the mantra, try to absorb your full attention and focus with the sound itself. Then as the recitation subsides keep your focus together with the residue of that sound for a few minutes. In that way we train our mind to keep a really good span of attention and focus.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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