
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual we can spend sometime in meditation. For that purpose we can find a comfortable and relaxed posture with a clear and bright state of mind. A bright and clear state of mind will imbue the mind with peace and calm.

The appropriate physical posture for meditation is a relaxed posture while having a clear and bright state of mind. When one secures those two aspects, one creates the suitable means for one to practice meditation, which is the ultimate means to protect oneself: protecting one's mind from adversity. One may wonder why it seems relatively easier to relax the body while it is much harder to induce a clear and bright state of mind. One may wonder why it is so difficult. Why doesn't it naturally come about? These are genuinely worthwhile points to ponder. Such doubts and questions will prompt one to find an answer, and our knowledge and wisdom will increase.

So when one ponders in this way, one is actually contemplating the topic to promote a new sort of wisdom or intelligence, a new sort of logic within one's mind.

The reason why one ponders and has these questions is because it is difficult to naturally induce a clear and bright state of mind; the natural inclination seems to be towards a dull or distracted state of mind. In the course of questioning, one should enquire as to what could it be that is preventing one's mind from being clear and bright and naturally calm. What could be the factors within oneself that prevent one from having a clear and bright state of mind? Identifying, recognising and investigating the opposing factors will help to develop a clear and bright state of mind.

When one investigates what is preventing a clear and bright state of mind and what the opposing factors are, one will notice that it is the distractions that prevent the mind from being clear, bright and calm. Because of the distractions our mind is constantly busy, constantly running after different pursuits. The outcome is that while the body is on the cushion in a relaxed posture, the mind is not in the same place as the body. Rather the mind is distracted everywhere else. While the body is sitting on a cushion in a meditative posture, the mind could be busy going out shopping.

Now at this point, if one does notice a distracted mind focussed on external distractions then one may ask, "Should we not allow the mind to focus on external things at all?" Should we prevent the mind from focusing outward altogether? If the question is posed as to whether it is okay to allow the mind to go outward, then the general answer is "yes, it is okay". My answer is

"under certain circumstances, it is permissible for the mind to focus outward".

In relation to the earlier posed question of whether "it is allowed", it is in terms of whether there is any advantage in allowing the mind to focus outward. If there is no advantage whatsoever, then it is best to always keep one's focus inward. My earlier answer relates to focusing on positive external objects. If the mind is focussed on external things in a negative way or under a negative influence, then that will be a disadvantage for oneself. For example, when one focuses on someone else's suffering and misery and feels compassion towards them and a keen wish to help them, the mind is focussed outwards on someone else's misery and suffering, which that becomes a means to reinforce a positive mind of compassion within oneself.

With love and compassion, we will then develop the wish to benefit and help others. So these states of mind, whilst focussed on external objects, are positive states of mind. They are highly positive. Thus, by way of focussing outwards—on external things such as other's sufferings—it helps to promote a clear and bright state of mind, rather than hindering it. However in other instances, such as when our mind is completely distracted with meaningless things, such as trivial worldly affairs that have no real lasting benefit, that will hinder one's happiness and causes turmoil in one's mind. The more we focus on the distractions influenced by negativity, the more one feels mental turmoil. Therefore the manner in which how we focus outward is of significant consideration.

Now with regard to the practice of single-pointed-meditation, it is a disadvantage to one's practice to be focused outwardly, even if it is something positive—it is still a form of distraction for the meditation. In order to achieve results for single-pointed-meditation, one needs to adopt the technique of focussing on a chosen object to the exclusion of everything else. For the duration of time that one is focussed on the chosen object, it is advised that one does not allow one's mind to be distracted by any thoughts—be they positive or negative.

Focussing on the chosen object of meditation requires discipline and restraint. However as one practises and becomes familiar with single-pointed concentration when it is a virtuous object, one gains a natural ability to maintain a general equilibrium and calmness which increases clarity and brightness in the mind. Thus, when we come out of our meditation practice we will be more inclined towards focussing on positive things in our normal everyday life. The intense focus during our meditation practice helps to bring about a natural spontaneous familiarity in our ordinary every day life. This is the immediate benefit of meditation practice. It is a direct aid to improving one's daily life. Even if we are focussed outwards it guides and helps one to focus on the right positive thing rather than allowing the mind to be influenced by negative distractions. So in this way, we can see the practical benefit of meditation in our daily lives.

To further emphasise bringing this benefit into our daily life, we must make wholehearted effort in giving our full

attention to whatever virtuous object we are committed to focus on. Then through familiarity, practice enhances our everyday life by instilling stability in positive states of mind. It will ensure that whatever activities we do outside of our meditation session are virtuous and positive, such as walking, talking and so forth.

Whether we are sitting with someone, conversing with others, we will be in a positive frame of mind. Even at the end of the day when we go to bed, we will be able to sleep in a positive frame of mind. Going to sleep in a positive frame of mind will ensure we have a good sound sleep. There are times when we may be tired and we try to sleep but because of the disturbed state of mind one is in, when one goes to bed, that sort of neurotic and chaotic mind influences our sleep in such a way that it actually disturbs our sleep. It disturbs our sleep pattern so that even though we may have attempted to sleep to get a rest, when we wake up we don't really feel rested. Thus, our chaotic and distracted mind can also deprive us of sleep.

In essence, the practice of focussing one's mind on a virtuous object enhances its clarity, bright and clear state, which in turn helps promote a stable mind which ensures that whatever we do is influenced by positive thoughts. It enhances our everyday life in a positive way. Recognising the great benefit meditation practice has, we can see how it is really essential that we make sure we keep up in the practice.

As I regularly emphasise again and again, the most essential and valuable possession that we could ever have in our life for our well-being, is a clear and bright state of mind complemented with a joyous and happy state of mind. So a clear and bright state of mind imbued with joy and happiness is really the most essential element for our well-being. If you are devoid of a clear, calm and bright state of mind, a joyous and happy mind, then whatever we do in life will not bring real lasting fulfilment. One would notice that there are many who have lots of material possessions, wealth and so forth but don't really live a fulfilled and happy life. That is because there is something missing in their life. If they really investigate and look into what is missing, it is the absence of a clear, bright and happy joyous state of mind.

We need to really contemplate and consider how essential this is; maintaining a clear, bright state of mind imbued with a happy, joyous state of mind. When we have that secured within oneself then, as mentioned previously, that becomes the most 'prized' regardless of our external situation. Now even if we have gained a certain amount of clarity and brightness and a joyous and happy mind within oneself, then regardless of the external situation i.e. even in difficult situations, one would be able to withstand that. One would still be able to experience a sense of joy within oneself and fulfilment regardless of the external situation. The experience of difficulties is related to our state of mind or attitude. It is not dependent on our immediate external conditions, but rather how we interpret our situation, how we view it and respond in our life. Whether we are experiencing joy or misery is dependent on our state of mind.

If we have worked towards developing a clear, bright state of mind imbued with happiness and joy that will keep us in a positive frame. I am not claiming that I have great experience of this myself but over the years I have done investigation myself and am totally convinced that these factors are what contribute to our well-being. Therefore I emphasise again and again the importance of the practice of meditation. It is because I have seen the value and I am convinced of the benefits that I feel comfortable to encourage you to do the same.

One needs to be realistic about cultivating the positive results from meditation and have some foresight or a long term goal for oneself. Our practice of meditation needs to be followed day by day, week after week, month after month and year after year. With consistent long term practice we will begin to reap real positive, stable and firm results within oneself. One should bear in mind that the positive results of meditation may not come after just a few attempts but rather from consistent practice. If sessions are kept to a short amount of time it is easier to keep up consistency in the long term.

What is also important to note is that for the duration that we practice meditation, we need to do it with full commitment and full heartedness, rather than half-hearted. Only by giving it our full attention will we be able to reap the positive results of meditation. If we do it half-heartedly with a distracted mind, we will never really reap the full results possible. So therefore even if it is a short session, we must give our full attention and commitment to the practice. That is how we will actually reap the positive results.

Therefore in our session now for meditation let us readjust our physical posture to an upright relaxed position. In our mind make a commitment to ourselves that for the next few minutes, I will not allow my mind to be distracted externally with any thoughts, any memories, any kind of distractions which may pop up in the mind—I will not follow them. Rather I will bring my full attention and focus inwards and having brought one's full attention and focus inwards we withdraw one's attention within oneself. At that stage, one places one's attention upon the object to focus on which in this case now is our breath. Breathe in and out naturally, bring full attention and focus to the natural breath, just place your attention on it. In this way we will spend the next few minutes in meditation. (*Pause for meditation*)

That would be sufficient for now. As we attempted in our short session of practice just now, acquaintance with the object of our practice will be good for us and we can continue later by doing it regularly at home.. We can now cover some of the points from the text.

The subject we are covering now, explains the necessity or importance of compassion.

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

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.3. The importance of compassion at the end

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.3.1. Actual

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.3.1.1. Differences between buddhas and bodhisattvas

The text explains three important points about compassion which are:

1. The importance of compassion in the beginning;
2. The importance of compassion in the middle;
3. The importance of compassion at the end.

The first two points were already covered with the subdivisions. *In the beginning* is when one begins one's practice. *In the middle* is during one's practice. The third is *the importance of compassion at the end*. *The end* would be the result of one's practice on the path towards achieving enlightenment, to become a Buddha. So even when one obtains the ultimate state, Buddhahood, even then compassion is important. That is what is being emphasised here.

The importance of compassion in the end is again explained with two subdivisions – the actual explanations and specifically instructions to treat bodhichitta or the awakened mind as the core instruction. So the first is again subdivided into two categories. The first point under this heading reads:

Based on the power of great compassion, buddhas, even when they reach their goal, do not abide in peace like Hinayana practitioners, but continue to work for the welfare of beings as long as space remains. For, without compassion buddhas would be like hearers.

Thus what is being explained in this passage is that due to the acquaintance of compassion in the beginning of one's practice, and in the middle of one's practice, one actually reaches the goal. When the bodhisattva reaches the goal and becomes a buddha, due to the acquaintance with compassion, there will be an instantaneous and spontaneous compassion for working for the welfare of living beings rather than remaining in a state of bliss like the Hinayana practitioners.

The practitioners of the Lower Vehicle, in contrast, lack familiarity with compassion because their main goal is to achieve a state of peace and liberation for oneself. When they actually achieve the state of nirvana or peace, they are engrossed in that peaceful state, and they may remain in that state for very long periods of time.

Now of course, one must not misinterpret the teachings and think that this implies that they don't have any concern at all for other beings, that they do not help other beings in any way. How it has to be understood is that in comparison to the buddhas, their way of helping sentient beings is very limited. The arhats, those who have reached the state of self-liberation, are limited to helping other beings because of their lack of great compassion. So

therefore, the great results of compassion are emphasised here as important because once one reaches the ultimate goal of peace oneself, helping others does not end, one does not become engrossed in a peaceful state but rather is perpetually helping and working for the sake of other sentient beings.

To use a contemporary analogy, if someone who is initially poor and has friends and acquaintances, and later becomes wealthy, then if their kinship and friendship with others was very shallow and not really based on genuine concern, then he will start to neglect and shy away from their friends and acquaintances as he becomes wealthy. Whereas someone who has a genuine concern for others, because their friendship was based on genuine concern and compassion, when they become wealthy they use their wealth in order to help others rather than ignore and neglect them. They are now befitting the position of wealth and status so that they can help their friends and acquaintances.

The difference in one having the wealth and neglecting others and the other having wealth but helping others, is based on whether they have genuine concern for the others or not. So that contemporary analogy can be used to understand how the term 'Buddha' implies someone endowed with infinite love and compassion for all living beings. It is not even imaginable to even consider the Buddha to be selfish in anyway. If we were to imagine the Buddha completely free from suffering and in a perpetual state of bliss and happiness, it could never be the case that he could neglect and not help other beings.

The state of enlightenment is the result of having practiced compassion over and over again throughout previous lifetimes. Therefore the result of practicing compassion is reaching a state where they have spontaneous and effortless means to help and benefit sentient beings. So acquaintance with compassion at all times secures one's practice to be a benefit to others, to always consider others as your primary concern. So it is in this way that we can value compassion as described here as the ultimate benefit for other beings.

The second point as explained in the text under this heading, the actual importance of compassion at the end, is illustrated with an example. The example which is presented here in the text is the example which the Indian Master Chandrakirti presented. The text reads:

The glorious Chandrakirti taught that just as seeds, water and ripening are important in the beginning, middle, and end of a harvest, similarly compassion is important in the beginning, middle and end of the harvest of buddhahood.

Further Chandrakirti's commentary on the *Middle Way* states:

Compassion alone is regarded as the seed of a conqueror's excellent harvest,
As water for its development,
And as the maturation in the state of long enjoyment.
Therefore in the beginning I praise compassion.

Using the analogy of the *harvest*, for the harvest to be a good and fruitful, there needs to be the *seed* that is most essential in the beginning. If you don't have the seed you

can't even have a harvest. Therefore the seed is the most important thing in the beginning. Once the seed has been planted and for it to germinate and grow, water is important in the middle. Then at the very end for the actual ripening of the harvest, the seed is important to get a good harvest. In using that analogy for Buddhahood, it is said that the one and only thing which is essential in the beginning, in the middle as well as in the end is compassion itself. So compassion is the one thing most essential in the beginning and one of the most essential things towards the middle and at the very end where Buddhahood is actually obtained.

As presented in the text here and also clarified in other parts of the text the criteria for actually entering the Mahayana or Great Vehicle, is compassion. Without having developed compassion one would not be able to enter the Mahayana path: compassion is like a doorway for entering the Mahayana path. Once one has entered the Great Vehicle which leads to enlightenment, during the various practices of the path compassion is a constant aid for engaging in those practices. Therefore during the whole time of the practice, along the various stages of the path, it is compassion that is the most essential. And at the very end when one obtains the goal of buddhahood, compassion again is the most essential means to benefit and help other sentient beings. Reflecting on these points, on a personal level also shows the real importance of developing compassion oneself. As one is inclined to follow the example of the bodhisattvas and the enlightened beings, the buddhas, one aspires to become like them. In so doing it is most essential that we develop compassion ourselves.

We have the basis of compassion within ourselves right now. Even though we may not have developed great compassion at this stage, we do have the basis of compassion within ourselves now. So it is a matter of slowly working to increase that compassion within oneself. To nurture that and slowly to increase whatever compassion we already have. To periodically think about compassion, the great benefit of compassion and to actually work towards developing compassion within oneself, would then be the practical benefit for oneself.

Before we conclude the session for the evening we again can spend a few minutes in meditation and this time while sitting in an appropriate physical posture we can set our mind, this time on the sound of the mantra to be recited which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we hear this sound for those of us who recite it and for those of us who hear the sound, that sound itself will be the chosen object and as the sound subsides when the recitation stops, try to just maintain one's focus on the residue of the sound. Just maintain one's full attention on that just for a short while. Then when one comes out of that focussed attention, during that time, it will have also been a meditation session.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version*

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