
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual, we can spend sometime in meditation. For the purpose of meditation we need to first adopt a comfortable physical posture. This is an important conducive condition for meditation. If the physical body is uncomfortable that can become a distraction for the mind. Likewise we need to set the proper motivation for our practice of meditation. Having a good motivation is essential to ensure that our practice is meaningful.

Even from a common, conventional point of view we may understand that whether an activity works out well or not depends very much on our intention behind the activity. If there is a good intention in what we do then the activity we engage in becomes positive. If there's a negative intention then the activity does not work out very well. To give you an example, if we converse with others with good intentions in our mind then the conversation we have becomes appealing to others and naturally they would like to be around us. That is based on the good intentions we have. When we converse with a good intention everyone around oneself would appear to be friends.

Even from a conventional point of view it is quite clear that if we talk with nice gestures and in a pleasing way then others will naturally appreciate that. If we talk with love and compassion in our hearts then that is particularly appreciated by others. It is essential that we have training on how to converse with others. In contrast, when we speak out of pride or conceit or any other negative state of mind, that will naturally distance other people. They don't want to be around us. That sort of contrast is very clear.

Our attitudes and intentions effect our communication with others. Thus whether others appreciate us or not depends on our intentions and our attitudes when we relate to them. That is clear, even from a normal point of view; this is not something not profound but very obvious. So, to this extent, it seems clear we need to adopt the attitude and intention that is most appealing and beneficial to others.

When we engage in activities with good intentions or motivations they will have good results. Whatever we do will definitely bring positive results. Whereas if we have a bad intention or motivation then the activity we engage in will have a negative effect. Since we wish to do something meaningful and useful, it is clear that the intention or motivation for what we do is primary and very important. That is the main point.

If this is true even in ordinary everyday life, which is obvious, then it must be even more so in a positive

activity such as engaging in meditation, because the purpose of engaging in meditation is to bring about a genuine peace and calm in one's mind. If we don't have a good intention to begin with it will not bring about any good result.

The significance of having a good intention or motivation prior to engaging in the practice of meditation is that it will secure our mind to be stable. It will settle our mind down, in contrast to a disturbed mind that is in turmoil. Initially it will settle the mind and as we engage further in meditation it brings about a genuine relief and calmness within one's mind. So if we don't pay attention to the intention, and our mind is already in turmoil and disturbed, then the attempt to engage in meditation won't work properly because the conditions for meditation are not yet set well. This is how we need to understand the significance of a good motivation.

When we engage in the practice of meditation we need an object to focus on. That object has to be an object that does not cause any delusions to arise in one's mind. Merely focusing on the object has a calming effect and settles one's mind rather than causing delusions to manifest further. Such an object needs to be chosen. It is specifically defined as an object that does not cause delusions to arise in one's mind.

When one has chosen such an object, focussing on the object and familiarising our mind with it, naturally settles the mind and reduces turmoil and disturbances, because the delusions subside. As mentioned in the instructions by the great masters of meditation, the clear result of meditation is one finding that the delusions in one's mind are decreasing. As pointed out by these masters, if we find through the practice of meditation that the delusions in our mind are weakening in strength and becoming less and less important, manifesting less, then that is a clear sign of our meditation practice working well. That consequence occurs when we have familiarised our mind with an object that does not cause delusions to arise in our mind.

If I were to ever question whether there is a positive effect in the practice of meditation I would look at the contrast between meditation practice that allows the delusions to subside and decrease, and the opposite of allowing our mind to be influenced and completely controlled by the delusions. If allowing our mind to be controlled by the delusions were to actually bring some happiness and joy to one's mind then, of course, there would be no fault to that. It would serve the purpose of bringing us well being and benefits. But that, of course, is not the case. If allowing our mind to be influenced and controlled by the delusions were to bring a genuine sense of calmness and peace to one's mind, then by now most of us would be very peaceful and calm, because that is what we are mostly doing. We have been allowing our mind to be influenced by the delusions. So our mind would naturally have to be very calm if that was the case.

Now that is not to say that we might not get some temporary satisfaction by following some of the delusions, such as attachment or even anger. We might gain some sort of immediate satisfaction out of anger when we feel we got even with someone. One feels one

has treated them rightly by retaliating and we may gain a sense of immediate relief. However if we were to look into the long term effect of anger we would notice that it does not bring about lasting genuine happiness and satisfaction. Likewise with attachment: we might get some immediate relief and enjoy some objects of pleasure, but when we look further into it and analyse further we would notice it doesn't bring about genuine happiness.

Initially at our beginner's level we might, of course, be all too familiar with expressing emotions or delusions such as anger and attachment as a way to gain some satisfaction. However when we look into the situation when someone becomes angry towards us and we retaliate with anger, there is a clear indication that responding with anger does not help to resolve a conflict or situation. It just escalates it and makes it even worse. Likewise, when attachment or a strong sense of desire is expressed towards us and we respond with similar desire and attachment, that will only escalate the situation and creates more agitation, discomfort and unease.

We are already familiar with responding with a similar emotion or delusion to that which directed it upon oneself. However responding and retaliating in the same way with the same emotions or delusions does not resolve the situation because we find that when we respond to anger with anger, or to attachment with attachment, it does not bring about genuine calmness and peace in one's mind. If we wonder why we lack a sense of true calmness, contentment and happiness within one self, it is because we have the habit of following the delusions. That is how we need to understand this situation for ourselves.

The main point that I am emphasising is that when we begin to recognise that we follow the influence of desire or anger because of mere familiarity or habituation, and that it does not bring about a good result for us then we need to resolve to train our mind to become habituated with positive states of mind, to familiarise our mind with non-anger and non-attachment, which are the opposites of anger and attachment. The more we familiarise ourselves with these positive states of mind, the more likely we will be inclined to be in those positive states of mind and not to be influenced by anger and attachment. The ability to be in the calm state of mind of non-anger and non-attachment comes from acquaintance and constant familiarity with these positive states of mind. It is something that we can definitely adopt. It is a matter of putting our mind to it and taking upon that practice for oneself. When we have that familiarity it would definitely become possible for us to experience that.

To summarise the point again, if we allow ourselves to continue our habituation with anger and desire, for example, we will never experience a real sense of calmness and genuine happiness because that is the nature of following anger and desire. So we need to resolve to adopt a practice of familiarising our mind with an object that does not cause anger and attachment, to name just two of the delusions that disturb us, to arise. Through that practice of familiarity we will gain that positive result for ourselves. That is the significance of the

practice of meditation and why we need to engage in it. So, for now, we can adopt the meditation practice.

It is far too easy for us to see faults in others and immediately come to a conclusion that someone else has a very bad temper and easily gets upset or angry and so forth. For example, when a student is seemingly misbehaving or not cooperating well, the teacher may immediately report to the parents that the student has very bad habits. However what is important is that, before accusing someone else of bad habits, one needs to check whether that is true of one's own attitude and behaviour and whether one is in a proper state of mind or not. The practice of meditation involves doing exactly that. It is a way of analysing and checking within oneself, rather than constantly blaming others.

Now, to practise meditation, let us assume a comfortable, upright, sitting posture. In order to make our practice a genuine and proper practice of meditation we need to adopt the proper technique and be very clear about this technique. The purpose of engaging in the practice of meditation is to not be influenced by all forms of distraction. However, for us beginners, it would be worthwhile to identify a specific object or state of mind that causes us the most obvious distress. Whatever it may be, a particular negative state of mind or attitude, we know through our own experience that as soon as it arises we immediately get disturbed or distressed. So it is that particular negative state of mind that we need to intentionally distance our self from. We need to make the resolution within oneself, particularly during this time of meditation, that I will not allow my mind to be influenced by that. I will place 100% attention and focus on the chosen object of meditation rather than giving my attention to this thought or attitude that causes me distress.

Thus, by distancing ourselves from a particular form of distraction that causes distress as well as all other forms of distractions, we bring our full attention and focus within us and then place it upon the object of our meditation, which for the purpose of this meditation is the breath. Then for the next few minutes we do not allow our mind to be distracted by any other forms or thoughts and remain completely focussed on the breath itself. (*Pause for meditation*)

That will be sufficient for now. You would have found that the technique in our short session now is not complicated or difficult. As far as the meditation technique goes, it is quite simple. It is a matter of choosing the object and keeping one's attention and focus on it. Now what you may find difficult, of course, is keeping and maintaining your focus on the object. That is something we might find difficult. However one needs to be mindful that the quality is much more important than the quantity. We do not need to expect ourselves to remain focussed for a long time. In fact as beginners it is not even advisable to have a long meditation that is seemingly focussed but mostly distracted. It is far more worthwhile to have a short meditation session with a really focussed mind. So that means that, from the very beginning, we need to make an attempt to maintain a clear and bright mind and maintain a clear focus on the

object such as our breath that we have chosen here. We should make a whole-hearted resolve to just maintain a focus on the breath itself for whatever duration we have set—three, four or five minutes. During that time we do not allow our self to become lax and just let our mind wander off. If it does wander off, we catch it before it wanders off too far and constantly try to maintain our focus. Then, for that short period of time, it will become a really proper meditation.

If we allow ourselves to be half-heartedly focussed on the object and think, 'Oh well, my mind is distracted anyway' and allow our mind to wander off then that becomes a habituation in itself, and every time we meditate that same pattern will happen again. We may just allow that to happen when we could actually resolve to keep our attention focussed. So the point is that from the very beginning we need to familiarise ourselves with the proper technique in making the resolve, and really keep our mind, attention and focus for even a short time and make that a habit. When keeping a focus on an object becomes a positive habit then that positive familiarity will take over and slowly we can lengthen our attention on the object without wandering off. That is the main point.

I can give a more specific illustration on the point that I am making. If, from the very outset, we adopt the proper technique of how to gain concentration, we can initially make an attempt to focus for maybe one minute on a chosen object such as our breath, and continue that for a week. That is just one minute of meditation focussing on the breath. To focus for one minute at least would seem possible even for a beginner. Maintain that for a week and maybe for the next week you will be able to increase it to two minutes. Focus on the breath for two minutes and just maintain that for two weeks. Try not to go for long periods. Then by the third week you might be able to focus for three minutes and in that way we slowly and gradually increase our meditation. After a year or so we might be able to comfortably focus on a chosen object such as our breath for half an hour, or even an hour for some. The ability to focus for that duration comes in a gradual progression, and it is also a steady but sure progression. Whereas if as a beginner we attempt to focus on an object for five or ten minutes when we don't have the training we set ourselves up. Because we determine we should do that amount our mind might get into the habit of seemingly being in meditation but actually being half-focussed and still wandering off. That becomes a habit and we would never gain the result of being able to have a focussed and concentrated meditation.

We need to be really mindful that this gradual progress is the proper way to engage in the practice and not to be too ambitious, for example, thinking from the very start thinking that, 'I can meditate for a long time and thus I should expect myself to be able to focus on my breath or whatever object for half an hour or an hour'. If, in the beginning we have an ambition that is not based on strong foundation but a mere assumption that we can do that it will not bring about the desired result. There are, of course, very unique and special cases where individuals, might be able to focus and meditate for a long period of time soon after they hear about meditation.

According to our Buddhist tradition this is because they have a strong inclination or imprint from past lives to be able to do so. Those are rare, exceptional cases. Most people when they hear about meditation and make an attempt are beginners. So as beginners we cannot have that expectation of ourselves and make false assumptions and ambitions.

We have reached a significant and important point in the text but I never like to rush through it. Since we have already spent a bit of time for this evening I can use the rest of the time for any questions you have.

My approach in presenting and conducting this evening teaching is try to bring about a practical way for people to settle down their very busy, distracted, chaotic mind. That, I find, is the first thing that we need to try get a grip on. I find that if we don't have a settled mind then everything else we do does not bring about a good or proper result.

I am including myself in that. I am not assuming that I am very focussed and a high level meditator who is able to focus for a long time and not be distracted. I am including myself in making every attempt to settle the very chaotic, distracted and disturbed mind. It's my personal experience that once the mind is settled one can attempt to use it in a proper way for whatever else we want to do. That is why I spend a lot of time and energy in trying to present this to you. That is why I go over it, again and again, as an essential point.

Having a settled mind naturally brings about a more stable mind. In my meagre attempts in my life to work towards bringing about this settled and calm mind, I have found that this has been really beneficial and useful. It is essential to be able to cope with difficulties in life as they arise. As I have shared with many of you in the past, I have gone through a lot of difficult times and so forth in my life. What helped me in those difficult circumstances was none other than keeping my mind settled and calm. I have found from my own experience that no matter what is happening around one in difficult situations, if one is able to maintain a settled and calm mind it helps one to be able to deal with the situation effectively. Whatever that difficult situation may be I find that it is easier to be able to deal with it and that seemingly difficult situation doesn't affect one or disturb one's mind. Because one's mind is not disturbed one is able to deal with the situation better. This is something that we need to be mindful of.

When there are temporarily no difficulties or problems a settled mind still helps, of course, to maintain tranquillity and calmness within oneself. But one would find that it is more useful and beneficial when there are difficulties. We may just go through our life with everything seeming to go well and we might assume that we are quite calm and okay but as soon as things go wrong we can totally feel out of balance and agitated. If things go really wrong we might find that we can't cope with it at all. That is because of our attitude and state of mind.

If one were to consider why the mind might become disturbed one would normally think of experiencing difficult problems or hardships. But what I find through my observations is that, in Australia, most people's

minds are disturbed because conditions are too good for them. As far as conditions go, we can all safely assume that Australia is one of the best places to be in the world. In terms of the environment it is really nice and there are not many faults. In terms of other conditions, there is plentiful food, and conditions like housing, medicine, everything materially, are all good here. So, one would think that there shouldn't be any problems because all the conditions are really good. However, even with all these conditions there are still disturbances and turmoil in the mind. People's minds are not settled. It goes to show that the real cause of disturbances is within oneself and if we don't tackle that, then when things go slightly wrong we will never feel settled in our mind. Thus, what I feel that we need to address is how to maintain a real genuine sense of calmness within one's mind.

Question: Some people have claimed that when exercising, such as running, surfing and swimming it is a meditation for them; what are Geshe-la's thoughts about this?

Answer: It is like that analogy I used. A focussed mind does have benefits, in whatever way one gets that focussed mind. There are definitely temporary benefits, for example, for people who as you mentioned go surfing. Especially in winter and they go out surfing it maybe freezing conditions but while they are focussed on surfing they don't seem to feel the cold. That is because they are so focussed on what they are doing. However, of course, when they leave the water and come out it seems they are shivering. I used that analogy to point out that if you have a focussed mind it helps to relieve you of hardship and difficulties, even if it is for a short duration. That is a practical analogy that I would normally use.

There are others who have confided in me that looking out into the ocean and just watching the waves crashing against the beach is a form of meditation for them because they feel very relaxed and calm doing that. These individuals come and see me once in a while and confide that they have that experience. Of course I make no attempt to contradict that as a way for them to bring about some calmness. If it helps them to feel calm and peaceful then of course that time is useful for them. I cannot undermine the benefit of that.

Then of course swimming would be same. I agree that swimming can be quite pleasurable too. Of course there are those who would say that that is their meditation. It is because they are using the particular term that we use for other forms of meditation to focus one's mind. So they say, 'My mind is focussed so I should be in meditation'. They are using a reason for that. I would have to agree to a certain extent with your observation.

There is no point in contradicting those who are quite adamant that this is a form of meditation because contradiction does not serve a purpose for them. Temporarily that's what they are engaged in and feel comfortable with. There maybe others who say, 'Oh no, that is not meditation, that is a sort of activity. We won't call it meditation'. But I don't have that approach. Personally I feel that if someone is gaining some form of relaxation and focussed mind from what they are doing I encourage them. I feel, 'Okay, just go with that'. Then, at

a future point, they might discover for themselves that this may not be an ultimate technique to bring about a genuine sense of calm. They might discover something for themselves later on. At that point they might venture into other techniques but the main point I am stressing is if it works for them, let it be. Try not to contradict them if it is working for them.

Question: So wouldn't that be a form of escapism? Not wanting to face reality.

Answer: Ultimately that may be the case. The point is that if someone is adamant that surfing is their meditation and that resolve or decision is already made, then there is no point in contradicting them because it will not work. Contradicting will not help them to come to another technique such as meditation in our tradition. Our form of meditation may not apply to them for now. My point is that, temporarily, they seem to be getting some focus. During the time they are focussed they are getting some benefit. So let them experience for themselves whether when they come out of that focus their mind is still disturbed and confused. If they find themselves still in a disturbed state of mind, then they might come to understand for themselves that perhaps their technique is not really working to relieve the real cause of their problems. To address your question, even if it may be escapism for a while let it be because until they find out and realise that for themselves it's better not to contradict them. They might come to understand the point in time, themselves. That's my approach.

Contradicting them isn't in the spirit of presenting the advice and teaching. In Buddhism it is said that whatever you present, even the truth, should not be presented bluntly to someone who is not ready to accept it. If you present it then it is not going to be accepted and you will not benefit the person but harm them instead. Therefore, if someone is not inclined to accept a certain reality or truth at the moment, present them with what works for them and leave it at that. When the time is appropriate one can present a higher form of truth or reality.

I can give an analogy or illustration of the point that I am making in a historical context. The main point is that when the teachings or the truth or reality are presented, they must be presented in a skilful way. If one lacks the skill, rather than being useful and beneficial for the other the teachings could actually harm them. The historical illustration is about a great master of the past who had a very good understanding of the Buddha's teachings, particularly on the topics of emptiness and selflessness. He started presenting this knowledge and understanding to an audience and there happened to be a king present. This was in ancient India. This great scholar presented a teaching on emptiness and that all 'things are empty of inherent existence'. Because the king's intellect was not ready to receive that level of teaching the king misinterpreted the teaching as a presenting nihilism—that nothing exists. The king thought, 'This is very dangerous. This person is giving teachings which deny the very existence of our world. He is claiming that things that actually exist in this world don't exist'.

The king thought this was like blasphemy. The teaching that had been presented would be similar to the essence

of teachings in Buddhism called the *Heart sutra*. The *Heart sutra* says that, 'there is no form, no eyes, no smell, no taste, no consciousness' and so forth. If that were to be taken literally then of course one would think that this is crazy. How can a great being like the Buddha deny something that exists? It is a false claim or crazy. So the king ordered that the scholar be beheaded because he felt he was spreading a very dangerous doctrine. However later on the king met another teacher who had more skilful means of presenting the truth and reality according to Buddhism. He taught in a very systematic way by gradually by first explaining things based on conventional reality leading slowly to the understanding of ultimate reality according to the Buddhist teaching.

When the king came to understand what 'emptiness' means in it's proper context he understood what the earlier scholar had been teaching and he developed a strong regret for ordering the scholar to be killed. With this strong regret in his mind the king later engaged in strong purification practices. Because of his strong regret and remorse he had visions of the scholar forgiving him. This story illustrates that even if it is the truth and reality, if it is not presented in a proper context or proper time, then lacking such skilful means could be detrimental not only for the other but for one self as well.

I advise the more experienced students who conduct the Monday evening meditation to be very mindful in presenting the talk in accordance to the level of the listeners and not to present those uncomfortable parts of the Buddhist teachings. 'Uncomfortable' refers to those teachings that, if you don't really fully understand their context, may sound a little bit challenging or uncomfortable. It would not be useful to present that material to beginners. I stress and emphasise this point by reminding them, 'remember when you first met the Buddha's teachings. You would have heard certain things that felt uncomfortable and challenging for you. So remembering and recalling those times which have been quite uncomfortable for you, why would you want to put someone else into that as well? If you have felt uncomfortable initially hearing certain things you wouldn't want to make someone else feel uncomfortable as well with those challenging sort of topics'. Therefore, remembering your own experiences in the past, one must be mindful and present the teachings in an appropriate way according to the level of the listeners. That's the point that I make to them.

Another point that I share with parents who care for young children, is that when you bring up a child it is important to try to tune in to the child's inclinations and give them a certain amount of freedom, a freedom of expression of thought, and within that make some discipline for them. Do not completely take away their freedom. If as a parent when they are quite young you were to entirely take away their freedom of thought, expression and will, you may be able to ask them to do whatever you want them to do with no questions asked.

But as they grow up, they will start to become rebellious and not want to cooperate because they feel completely repressed. Whereas if you allow them a certain amount of freedom initially, and within that freedom make a certain

reasonable discipline for their life, that would be much more acceptable for them, and they would grow up with a better understanding of what is proper and what is not. That is another point to make.

This approach is in line with how important we all consider and regard freedom. Personally we would all want to believe we have freedom. We want our freedom; we have the right to our freedom. Just as we would feel that personally, it applies to everyone else. Even a young child needs a certain amount of freedom.

We need to understand freedom in its proper context too. Freedom to do whatever you like without any discipline is not beneficial. That kind of freedom can be disastrous. Whereas if there is freedom with a certain amount of order and discipline, then that freedom can be enjoyed and expressed in a proper way.

Before we conclude for the evening we can again spend a few moments in meditation. This time the object of our focus will be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. As we hear the sound of the mantra we try to place our full attention and focus on the sound and try to maintain that for the next few minutes. As the sound of the recitation subsides we just try to maintain our focus on the residue of that sound. That itself, becomes a proper meditation practice.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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