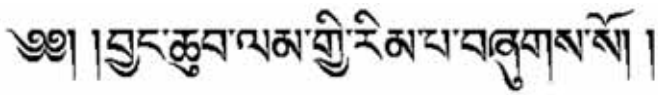

The Condensed Lam Rim



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As usual we can spend some time in meditation. For that purpose we adopt a relaxed and comfortable posture. Likewise we encourage our mind to be in a bright and clear state.

The main purpose of practising meditation is to develop the means to protect our mind. There are two main states of mind in meditation that can help us achieve this: mindfulness and introspection.

Mindfulness refers to being mindful of a virtuous object to ensure that the mind is in a virtuous state. It does not mean being mindful of just anything but rather to focus on and not forget a virtuous object. Mindfulness is not only essential in our meditation practice, but also in our daily lives.

Introspection refers to a state of mind that keeps a vigilant watch over the three doors of our activities: our thoughts, our speech and our actions. In introspection the mind consistently checks whether the three doors are virtuous so that the mind can refrain from non-virtues and adopt virtues instead. Specifically introspection identifies positives and negatives. Like mindfulness, introspection is essential in our everyday life as well as during our meditation practice.

Mindfulness and introspection help us to maintain a positive outlook in our lives. Being mindful of a virtuous object naturally put one's mind in a virtuous state, which in turn averts negativity—as long as the mind is in a virtuous state, there is no room for negativity to arise. In contrast, if we are being mindful of objects that cause delusions or afflicted emotions, such as attachment and anger, we become familiar with the objects that cause delusions. The state of mind then becomes negative because it is preoccupied with objects that enable afflicted emotions to arise. So to avoid a mind that is constantly influenced by negativities we need to intentionally adopt the technique of mindfulness because when we are mindful of a virtuous object, there is no opportunity for negativity to arise. Similarly introspection ensures that the mind is not influenced by negativities. It does this by using analytical wisdom. Analytical wisdom is a self-reflective intelligence that constantly checks what we are thinking, saying or doing so that we can correct these actions where necessary. Introspection is therefore a state of mind that is a constant and vigilant self-investigation of one's own activities.

Mindfulness and introspection are essential for us to lead a virtuous, positive and meaningful life. The great Master Atisha said, 'The best friend or companion for oneself is mindfulness and introspection'. This is very meaningful and useful advice because the point he is making is that our best friend and companion is not something external, but something within ourselves, namely mindfulness and introspection.

When we are able to recognise mindfulness and introspection as our internal best friend, then we need to

secure, stabilise and make it firm within ourselves. Once this is done, then regardless of external friends leaving us, we will not be deprived of companions. In contrast, if we were to neglect developing our internal best friend, then when we are deserted by external friends, we will be left without any companions. That would be a great loss—the loss of not having an internal companion as well the loss of not having an external companion.

In simple terms the great Master Atisha's advice to us is to be mindful of maintaining our internal companions so that we can have a happy and kind state of mind, which are the two most valuable assets within ourselves.

If we have applied introspection and have been mindful in securing a clear, happy and kind state of mind, then it becomes our unfailing aid whenever we face difficulties. If an external friend deserts us it would be a particularly difficult time, but if one has developed a clear, happy and kind state of mind, then regardless of the situation, it will not cause us as much suffering.

This is essential advice not only for anyone who is practising Dharma, but it is useful for those leading a normal worldly life too since we all wish for an enjoyable and happy life. If we don't pay attention to the essential tools of mindfulness and introspection, we will find it hard to find joy.

In summary, meditation is a technique of acquainting ourselves with a virtuous state of mind. The essence of a virtuous mind is a kind state of mind so we need to be mindful of our three doors, and ensure they are imbued with kindness and virtue rather than negativity, hostility and hate. By using vigilant introspection, we can check whether our three doors are being directed towards positive actions. That is how we apply these two essential states of mind.

Now we can spend some time in meditation. We can adjust our physical posture so that we feel comfortable and relaxed, and we can remind ourselves that in order to meditate we need to have a mind which is free from distracting thoughts. In meditation we intentionally withdraw our mind from all forms of distractions and conceptual thoughts, and bring our focus within oneself. Our focus in this meditation is on our breath.

As beginners it is quite natural for our minds to not focus on the chosen objects so we need to be diligent and constantly remind ourselves to bring our attention back to the breath. Initially we might find it hard to meditate with complete focus, even if it is for a minute or two, however, we need to persevere and not be influenced by other thoughts or emotions. If we allow ourselves to be distracted, then we will never be able to master single-pointed concentration so we need to bring our focus back on the chosen object. If after a few attempts, you find the mind keeps wandering and you become stressed, it may not be good to force your focus, so take a small break. A small break is like letting your mind have a rest. Afterwards you can attempt to bring your focus upon the object again. If we constantly, diligently and patiently bring our focus back upon the object, our mind becomes trained because to bring our focus back upon the object whenever it has been distracted is in itself part of the training. When you find the mind is focused on the object, just try to maintain it, and be satisfied and happy with whatever familiarity you can achieve. We'll now focus on the breath and try to maintain that focus for the next few minutes. (*Pause for breathing meditation.*)

Just as we have attempted now, it would be worthwhile to invest a few minutes from our daily life in meditation. We

need to remind ourselves that it is the quality of time spent that is most important in meditation rather than the quantity. If we attempt to meditate for ten, fifteen or twenty minutes, but are completely distracted, then we will never really develop a focused meditation practice. Instead our mind will constantly wander and distractions will not be addressed. We want to avoid a back-and-forth meditation habit of seemingly being focused and then getting distracted because this will develop a habit of not paying attention and not having a focused mind. So from the beginning, we must be mindful of our focus and slowly develop a good habit. A few minutes of single-pointed concentration can then gradually increase to become a proper meditation for a longer duration. That is the way to do it.

Today I will attempt to cover some of the text. Some of you may wonder why Geshe-la brings the textbook but never uses it! (*Laughter.*) At some point people may be curious about what is in the book. When I was living in Dalhousie, which is in the northern part of India, I noticed an elderly person, who always carried a cushion. Wherever he went, he always had this cushion under his arm or was sitting on it. It turned out that he had kept some gold that he possessed in the cushion. As it was not safe to leave it in his humble dwelling, he figured that it would be best to carry it with him wherever he goes. So he was a very clever person! Similarly if I bring a textbook all the time and don't use it, people might wonder what's in it!

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

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2. The actual training in the stages

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1. Training the mind to strive for the welfare of others

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1. Establishing the basis for that mind to arise

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.1. Establishing a balanced attitude towards sentient beings

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.1.2. The way to cultivate equanimity

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.1.2.5. Arresting attachment and aversion even though the mind [that discerns] enemies and friends has not been arrested

We have come to the fifth subdivision of an earlier category, which is 'The way to cultivate equanimity'. The way to cultivate equanimity is subdivided into five subdivisions. The fourth subdivision, which we covered earlier, is 'How to cultivate a mind that can combat attachment and aversion'. The fifth subdivision is 'Arresting attachment and aversion even though the mind [that discerns] enemies and friends has not been arrested'.

This means that to develop equanimity we need to overcome attachment and aversion to others. Attachment to friends, or developing a strong affinity to friends out of attachment, and having aversion towards those we would consider enemies, needs to be arrested so that we can develop equanimity in our mind.

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.2. Establishing the appealing aspect of all

Now we come to the second subdivision, 'Establishing the appealing aspect of all', which relates to the earlier category 'Establishing the basis for that mind to arise'. What we are attempting to establish is a state of mind where all beings appeal to us. In order to see all beings in the same light, we need to develop a state of equanimity, which is dependent on overcoming a strong attachment to some and an aversion to others. Without arresting or overcoming the strong attachment and aversion towards others, there will be no way for us to see all beings as appealing. So the mind of equanimity has to be achieved first in order for us to develop a state of mind that establishes the appealing aspect of all beings. How to establish the appealing aspect of all is subdivided into three.

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.2.1. Meditating on [knowing sentient beings to be our] mothers

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.2. 1.2. Recalling their kindness

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.2. 1.3. Repaying their kindness

We can establish the appealing aspect of all beings through the technique presented under the heading 'Meditating on [knowing sentient beings to be our] mothers'. The kindness of one's mother is said to be incomparable to any other kindness that we can receive from any other individual. When we clearly recognise and feel the kindness of our mother, she naturally becomes very appealing to us. Our establishment of the appealing aspect of all beings needs to be equivalent to a mother's strong affection towards her only child. The love that a mother has for her only child is immense because the mother would do anything for that child. When we love others to the same extent that a mother has love for her only child, then we have established the appealing aspect towards all beings.

If one is able to recognise all beings as one's mother, who has been extremely kind, then by 'Recalling their kindness' it is possible to see the kindness of all beings, and one can develop the attitude of 'Repaying their kindness'. There is a systematic and logical development of these attitudes.

The logical structure presented here has to be based on reason. Meditating on the recognition that all beings are our mother has to be based on an acceptance of them having been our mothers in past and future lives. Without that acceptance it is not possible to assume that all beings have been one's mother in the past. So what we need to establish in our reasoning is that there has been a past existence and that there will be a future existence. This is really the point, which might not immediately be apparent, even though there has been a lot of investigation and research conducted about the possibility of there being a past existence—even by psychologists and scientists. Buddhist reasoning is based on the continuum of the mind so whether there is a continuum of the mind from the past, or whether there will be a continuum of the mind in to the future, needs to be investigated and founded on reason.

There is evidence of reincarnation from those who can recall memories of their past lives, particularly amongst youngsters. There was a case in India where a young girl remembered how she was killed in a past life. She was on the way back from school and was killed by a bus. The young girl remembered all the particulars and she even remembered her past-life parents and was able to recall their names. Her present-life parents investigated and discovered a couple, who bore the same names their daughter had

insisted on, and who had lost a young daughter in a bus accident. When this couple met the young girl, they immediately recognised her as being their daughter from the past, even though they did not necessarily believe in past and future lives. So the story ends with the girl having four parents, two from the past life and two from the present life, and all having the same affection towards her. There are many stories like that.

Something that we can clearly accept is that we presently have consciousness or awareness, and that awareness or consciousness is a continuum of our consciousness from this morning, which goes back to a continuum of our consciousness from yesterday, and so on. If we trace the continuum of our consciousness from yesterday to the day before, from the day before to the week before, from the week before to the year before, we can go back all the way to when we were in our mother's womb, even to the first moment when conception took place. It is logically easy for us to accept that our consciousness or awareness can go back to this point.

The time of conception, according to the Buddhist explanation, is when a consciousness enters the mother's womb. It seems that there are clear indications from the mother and from others' observations that at this time there is something living in there—it is not just a physical sperm and a physical egg anymore. When a consciousness enters, a real sense of life takes place, which shows the remarkable potential, or power, of the mind over matter. When the mind enters the mother's womb, there is an organic development from then on. If we can come back to an awareness or consciousness of our mother's womb, then where does the consciousness come from?

It wouldn't be logical to assume that consciousness comes from our parents just because the physical matter of egg and sperm is a combination from them both. The father's mind or the mother's mind has not gone into the womb, but rather a distinct individual consciousness has entered the mother's womb and, as can be detected later, is a completely separate individual. Put another way, if parents were the cause of consciousness, then their child will naturally have the same qualities as them. However, there are parents with a sound and clear intelligence whose child is intellectually disabled. There are many features in the physical body that resemble the parents, but we can never say that a child is exactly like either of the parents or exactly the same in every way, aspect, thought and emotion. In fact they are completely different. So while accepting that the physical matter is contributed from the mother and father, the distinct consciousness has come from somewhere else.

From the Buddhist point of view, the explanation is that the consciousness has to come from somewhere because it can't be suddenly and newly be formed out of nothing—it has to have preceding causes. The only preceding cause for consciousness is another previous moment of consciousness. Just as we traced back our present consciousness to earlier moments of consciousness, likewise the consciousness at the time of conception has its cause in earlier consciousness. So before the consciousness enters the mother's womb, there has to have been a previous moment of consciousness, which is the Buddhist explanation of a past life.

When we come to accept this past existence, we can trace backwards into previous lifetimes before that. In this way it is said that when we try to trace back consciousness, there is no beginning. It is beginningless. Consciousness comes from

continuous, infinite and successional previous lives. Even thinking about the physical matter or physical body is intriguing because we know that our physical body is contributed from both parents, and their physical condition was contributed by their own parents, and so on. Tracing back the continuum of our physical body seems to be hard enough, let alone tracing back our consciousness. Those who believe in a creator God may say that the first moment of consciousness was created by God. However according to our Buddhist tradition, since we don't believe in a creator, the cause of consciousness has to be preceding moments of consciousness, which is cyclical. Therefore, there's no beginning to consciousness.

Let us return to the first point, which is that there have been mothers in our past lives. The text explains:

Because cyclic existence is beginningless, your births are also without beginning. Therefore you have died and been reborn time and time again. There's absolutely no kind of body that you have not assumed in cyclic existence. There's absolutely no place you haven't been reborn in and there's absolutely no person who has not been your relative such as your mother. This is stated in the Buddha's sutra.

So what is being explained here, since cyclic existence is beginningless, is that one's birth is also beginningless, and we have been born and have died again and again many times. Since we have been reborn in many kinds of different situations, in many different types of bodies and have had many different existences, we can say that all beings, at some time or another, have been our mother.

Just as we have a father and mother in this life and in our past lives, so it will be in the future. For as long as we are in a condition of being reborn again in cyclic existence, we will be continuously reborn in different situations with different sets of parents, relatives and so forth. This is how cyclic existence continues to revolve.

I recall a mother telling me her very young daughter was asking, 'What happens after we die?' The mother, being influenced by Buddhist teachings said, 'We are reborn again', and the young girl responded, 'Oh, how wonderful'.

Before we conclude for the evening we can again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time our object of focus will be the recitation of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As you hear the mantra, try to maintain a focus on the sound, and when the recitation subsides, try to maintain that focus for a short while.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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