
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual we can spend some time for meditation. As I regularly remind you, the main purpose of meditation is to familiarise the mind with positive attitudes such as kindness, a genuine concern for others and clarity. I regularly emphasise that it is essential to adopt positive qualities of mind, particularly kindness, in one's everyday life. As one becomes more familiar with having a kind mind, to the point that it becomes part of our everyday existence, then whatever activity we engage in, we will go about it with a joyous, happy state of mind. Even if one is just sitting and relaxing at home, it will be done with a joyous state of mind. In short, whatever activity you engage in will become more joyous and you will be genuinely happy. So it is important that we pay attention to this.

Whatever we do is done in relation to our state of mind – whether it be a happy, positive state of mind or a miserable one. Developing a positive attitude is manageable, within our reach, but if we continue to let our mind carry on as normal, it is likely to be preoccupied with senseless, negative chatter. If we instead pay some attention to our mind, we can see that we are capable of generating a positive state of mind. By thinking about the great benefit of having such a positive attitude, one can take the initiative to develop it within oneself. It is not possible to generate a truly happy state of mind by utilising external means.

Our physical wellbeing very much depends on external factors. We can see in the world that due to material progress, a lot of suffering has been alleviated. In the past, such suffering would have been natural; there was no choice but to experience those difficulties and hardships. To give an example, in my own situation, when I left my village in eastern Tibet, I was about 17 years old. I undertook the journey to the capital Lhasa in central Tibet to pursue further Buddhist studies. The journey in those days took at the very least about six months and was made mostly on foot. We would take mules to carry provisions but sometimes the mules had a hard time walking. There were also dangers on the road, with the prospect of being attacked by wild animals. Food was sometimes scarce, and the journey itself was arduous and difficult, with high mountain passes and so forth to cross. Nowadays, a journey that took six months can be undertaken in about a week by car, on proper roads. This shows how physical hardships and difficulties, which one had no choice but to experience in the past, have been alleviated because of progress.

So while external, material progress is obvious, has that lessened suffering in the world? Has it, on a personal

level, lessened our suffering? When we really think about it, we can see that even though there has been significant material progress, it has not alleviated suffering. We normally assume that if we do well materially, if we gain sufficient wealth, we will be happy, our problems will be solved and we will have a happy life. We are conditioned to think in that way, but is it really true?

Even in relation to conditions here in Australia, not too long ago, provisions for travelling from one place to another would have been carried on horseback. In many cases, people couldn't afford horses, so they would have carried their own luggage. Imagine yourself going on horseback for a few days – you wouldn't be able to cope! Your legs and thighs would be sore. And can you imagine carrying your luggage and having to walk for a few days? You wouldn't imagine doing this nowadays.

While the reality is that no one here in Australia has to travel for days on end on horseback or by carriage or carry their own luggage, in some parts of the world this is exactly how people live. When you go to the Himalayas, you see that everyday life involves carrying heavy loads and travelling from one region to the next by foot. To us this looks like a lot of hardship. In comparison to the living standards in these remote areas of the Himalayas, here in Australia we might assume that everyone would be happy because they didn't have such an arduous lifestyle. However, the reality is that people who travel to those remote areas in the Himalayas come back commenting that people there seem happier, more joyful, than people living here with a good standard of living.

That is because the day-to-day life of people in these remote areas depends on getting sufficient means for the day and being content with that. In other words, they have fewer expectations and fewer doubts. Having fewer expectations and doubts helps their minds to be in a more relaxed state compared to people living in developed countries where there is a lot of progress.

Progress is measured in terms of material gain, but the reality is that as more development takes place, it raises people's expectations. People living in a developed country have greater expectations of comfort and for things to be on time, for example. They have more expectations and doubts in their minds. That in itself brings them more angst; there are more things to worry about, a lack of satisfaction. In relation to like making money, getting a job, and so forth, the more you get paid, the less satisfied you are; you want even higher pay. This lack of satisfaction and contentment due to having more expectations and doubts or worries causes angst and unhappiness for people in more developed countries.

When we begin to understand and accept that having a happy state of mind depends not merely on external conditions but more importantly on our inner development, it is reasonable for us to take the initiative to familiarise our mind with positive states. As we mentioned earlier, this means having a clear, bright and a focused state of mind, from which we can develop the qualities of kindness, generosity, consideration for others and so forth. These qualities then become the inner resources that enable us to cultivate real happiness and a sense of wellbeing.

This is why we need to pay attention to meditation. What we call meditation is none other than the technique of familiarising our mind with these positive attitudes. While making the attempt to familiarise our mind with a positive attitude, we need to also clearly identify the cause of our mental distress. In contrast to a positive attitude, which contributes to a happy, joyous state of mind, a negative attitude causes us mental distress.

Within the Buddhist context, negative attitudes are called 'delusions'. There are various forms of delusions and one may identify particular delusions within oneself through the practice of meditation. Having a clearer, brighter mind will help us identify the particular afflictions within ourselves that cause us distress. It is important for us to face those negativities and remind ourselves that: 'This is the negative state of mind which is causing me distress. If I allow myself to be influenced by these negative thoughts, it will not be of any benefit for me. It will cause me more and more mental distress and hurt others as well. Therefore I must not give in to these mental afflictions. I must, by every means, try to avert them. I must not fall under the influence of these negative emotions.' That is how we need to deal with our negative attitudes or emotions.

Thus we need to resolve to accept that a happy state of mind comes from familiarising ourselves with positive attitudes. This familiarity comes from setting aside time to intentionally generate positive attitudes, and then try to maintain those positive attitudes within ones' mind. That is the process of meditation: to familiarise ourselves with positive states of mind. That is how we secure a more durable state of happiness. When we have firmly secured a happy state of mind then whatever activity we engage in, and whomever we associate with, will be a joyous, happy time. That is how we can contribute to others' ease and wellbeing as well.

In contrast, if we allow our mind to be constantly overwhelmed and influenced by negative attitudes, anxieties, fears and so forth, that is what we become accustomed to. Thus whatever we do, wherever we go, we will always feel unsettled; we will never feel rested and we will lack a sense of joy in our lives. In the end, we make ourselves miserable. Even those around us will feel uncomfortable when we are in their presence. Therefore we definitely need to take the initiative to develop positive states of mind within oneself and that comes through the practice of meditation.

This is how we can relate to the practice of meditation in a practical way. Even if one does not believe in religion or a future life, this life will become much more meaningful, more joyful. Even if we can't cope with the idea of a long-term goal, let us try to make ourselves happier and more joyful right now. This can be done through the practice of meditation.

Having explained the significance and importance of meditation, we can now apply the meditation technique for a few minutes. Again we sit in a comfortable, relaxed physical posture. The most important thing we need to do is to develop the determination to engage in the proper practice of meditation. This is done by first, intentionally distancing ourselves from all forms of

distractions, thoughts and so forth, and bringing our full awareness within. This means we not allow ourselves to be distracted by other thoughts. We then place our mind on the object of our meditation, which will be our own breath. What we are attempting to do in our practice of meditation over the next few minutes is to develop a single-pointed focus or concentration on the breath. Being single-pointedly focused on the breath means not to think about anything else, during the meditation session. If our full attention is on the breath itself and we try to not allow other thoughts to diverted us from that focus, that is how we maintain our concentration. So for the next few minutes, this is what we will do. *[Pause for meditation]*

As we have attempted now in our short meditation session, it would be meaningful and highly beneficial if we were to practise meditation in our daily life. We will only experience the benefits of meditation if we actually put some time into it. Then we can begin to see the positive effects of meditation taking place: we begin to generate a naturally clearer, brighter state of mind, which comes with a calmer, more settled and more joyous state of mind. Having a calm and joyous state of mind is essential in everything we do. As mentioned previously, even with material progress, if we don't have that state of mind, we are not really happy.

Of course, we cannot say we are in the state where we can go without food, drink and shelter: of course we need the basics needs for life. We must have food and shelter and we need to adopt the means to acquire those things. However, the benefits of practising meditation and maintaining a happy, joyous, clear and bright state of mind is that once we have sufficient means to survive – enough food and drink and shelter – along with that we will also have a sense of contentment. With that sense of contentment, we will feel joyous and happy, and will have a really relaxed state of mind. That is one of the benefits of meditation practice.

If anyone would like to share a question, do you have any questions?

Question: With respect to the Buddha's teaching on killing, it's difficult when living around harmful creatures like red-back spiders and snakes and so on. For my mother's generation, the idea of red-back spiders being near children was dangerous. That's why they invented insect sprays. Given their motivation to protect their family, how is this harmful for them – otherwise lives might be lost?

Answer: Of course, what you relate is true. There are creatures such as spiders that are potentially dangerous to human life. On the one hand, there are certain individuals who practice ethics to the extent of not wanting to kill other beings. Then there are those who don't really observe the ethic of not harming or killing others. With the prospect of a creature harming themselves or their family members, they would find no hesitation in destroying it because they reason it wants to destroy them or their family members. Using that reasoning, it is seen as acceptable to destroy the other. Whereas those who choose to follow the ethical principle of not killing, of non-violence, would try to find other

means, such as trying to capture the spider and relocating it to where it would not have the potential to harm one.

One reality we have to consider is that, even if a spider for example is noticeable in the house, it is not the case that the spider has actually harmed someone. It is possible the spider might attack and, because it is venomous, could poison one of the children and they could die. It is with that prospect that someone might take the initiative and destroy it. However, one thing we need to consider if we consider ourselves as Buddhists, is that while we may have certain ideals and follow certain ethical principles that we willingly choose to live by, we need not necessarily try to influence others to also live according to our principles. For someone who is not ready to accept them as reasonable, if you try to reason with them, the reasons would not work for them. Rather they would see it as being a little bit crazy; rather than taking it in a positive way, it might be taken negatively. So it would not benefit the situation by trying to explain your beliefs, when they are not ready to accept it. That's why we need to be careful and mindful when we relate to others.

From a religious context, we would have to agree that the Buddha's teachings are meant for those who accept themselves as Buddhist. It is suitable for them to hear those explanations because they wouldn't disagree, just as the Christian doctrine is meant for those who believe in the Christian faith. However, if someone has the potential to be interested in Buddhism, for example, because they are not Buddhist to begin with, our approach would have to be very mild and gentle. We need to base our explanations on what is acceptable for them and then slowly go further; that is the approach. Even within the Christian context, we can see they have skilful means. They initially go out to poor places and countries where they provide material help – education, medical assistance, hospitals and so forth. When they begin to notice the people are really appreciating their help, they then present the Christian doctrine and those receiving the help may accept it. So there are methods and techniques that are very similar to those explained in the Buddhist teachings, such as the four means to gather followers: to be generous to others, then based on that to use kind, appealing words to them and so forth; that is the process.

The Buddha was very skilful in presenting advice on how to deal with this kind of situation, where your house is infested with bugs, harmful creatures and so forth. For example, in temples and monasteries, the Buddha advised to try and make sure you don't create the conditions for birds to nest; you first prevent birds from nesting. If the birds have already made a nest and laid eggs, at that stage then you need to protect them so they will not be harmed: make sure the eggs or chicks don't fall out of the nest. We often see cases where chicks have fallen out of the nest and are left helpless. So the Buddha advised that first you try to prevent the situation from happening – that is the best because you don't have to deal with the consequences. But once the situation has taken place, for example, the bird having made a nest, then you must protect it.

Using that sort of logic and advice from the Buddha nowadays, if we are moving into a new place, we would clean it out well first and maybe use something that would repel the pests. For example, in relation to a comment made some time ago, someone mentioned they had a spider in their car and asked what to do about it; so I told him: 'I don't think the spider would have been in the car when you first bought it. I think the spider came later!' *[laughter]* So in the case of a spider being in the car, when we first got the car it wouldn't have had a spider in it. So if you notice a spider in the car, it must mean that it got in while we were being unmindful when opening door, or it may have been caught on our clothes or something, and we may have brought it in ourselves. If we took better measures, we could prevent it from coming into the car. That would be a fault of not keeping one's car clean to begin with! *[laughter]*

I think the main point is that it is good to be mindful when dealing with others who may not be Buddhist. Even if it is a principle we respect in Buddhism, be mindful not to try to impose it on them.

There might be certain aspects of the teachings, such as not killing, when you mention that taking the life of others is not a virtuous deed and it is better if we don't kill, people might accept it as a good thing. Who would disagree with that in general? But when it comes to one's personal situation, if one's own life is threatened or one faces the prospect of harm, that earlier acceptance of not taking another's life becomes challenging, and one feels 'my life is threatened here, so it is better to kill and take the other's life'.

Question: But you can argue that the life of a spider has not much value compared to a well-educated human being. It's the same situation as sending soldiers to fight terrorists and prevent them from doing harm. Are we going to allow terrorism to flourish in the world or try to stop it?

Answer: Of course that is true. Even that is also discussed in Buddhism – comparing the value of life and so forth. In relation to the text we have been studying on Tuesday evenings in Study Group, *The Precious Garland*, as you recall, Nagarjuna gave the following advice to the king: You are in a position where you have to pass down laws to deal with people who do criminal acts. For potentially dangerous criminals, you may have to imprison them. In the event that you have to imprison criminals, make sure they are taken care of in prison, that they are comfortable, get enough food and clothing, showers, and so forth.

Then when they have served their sentence in prison and are to be released, prior to and after their release, make some time to observe and investigate whether they still have the potential to harm others or not. If they are found to have reformed and are not going to harm others, release them into society. But if you find they have the potential to further harm and engage in acts such as murder and so forth, don't execute them but rather banish them so that they would not harm others in your kingdom.

Question: I would just like to point out that when the Christians were originally given the Ten Commandments, the fifth was 'Thou shalt not kill'. It

referred not just to human beings. Also, in Buddhism, if you have reincarnation, might you not come back as a spider, and is this not a good reason for refraining from killing other beings?

Answer: That is, of course, very true and so I acknowledge your comments as being reasonable. It seems that the Ten Commandments are compatible with what, in Buddhism, is explained as the ten virtues: avoiding the ten non-virtues. It seems there are different ways of presenting them. For example, in Buddhism, of the ten virtues, not killing is the first; otherwise they seem quite similar, even in the terms used, to the Ten Commandments

Question: In the Tuesday night text, there was something about giving to beggars. Is it appropriate to give them what they ask for to make them happy? If a person will spend the money on alcohol or drugs, should you still do that?

Answer: It is, of course, a difficult situation, because if your intention to give is to relieve them from suffering then, for an alcoholic, suffering is not being able to get a drink. For a drug addict, suffering is not being able to get the next fix. So are we helping them to relieve their suffering? [*Geshe-la laughs*] They are adamant that 'if I don't get the next drink, that is my suffering'.

Relating to this is a personal experience I had when I was once in Delhi. Another local monk was walking along with me. We came out of the Gyuto Monastery Guesthouse and along the road were a few beggars. One seemed like he was sick. He was covering himself up, saying he was sick and looking very miserable. The other was a young man whose particular reason for begging was that he needed the money for the bus fare to go to another part of India called Rajpur. He was not asking for a great amount – 65 rupees for the bus fare. He seemed to know the exact amount of the bus fare. So I said, sure, I will help you and give you the bus fare. I gave him a bit extra, about 100 rupees, and as we resumed our walk, the other monk said, 'Geshe-la, Geshe-la, you have just been taken in. He is not going to use that money for a bus fare at all. He is going to buy some booze.' [*laughter*]

On another occasion, I was sitting in a restaurant and about to have a meal when one of the beggars came up and said, 'I need some money, please give me some money to have a bowl of noodles' and I said to him, 'Oh, you are the one who asked for money to go on the bus ride.' [*laughter*] 'You tricked me the last time, you didn't use it for the bus fare at all!' He said, no, that was not me it was the other beggar. [*laughter*] So then I said, well, if you really want a bowl of noodles, you can sit down, I will order a bowl of noodles for you. So he did get a bowl of noodles with some embarrassment. [*laughter*]

I think the main thing is to be little bit mindful. But also it seems that those who often bring up these doubts and questions about whether one should give or not are the ones who hesitate to give in the first place. Those who really want to give or help don't seem to be bothered by these doubts and questions; they have no hesitation in helping. But those who have little bit of hesitation in helping seem to be full of these doubts and questions about whether to give or not. Those who want to help, even if it is for a drink, would actually say, okay, I will

buy you a drink, and just maybe buy one glass of alcohol for him or her.

Before we conclude for the evening, let us again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time our object of meditation is the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we hear the sound of the mantra being recited, try to keep our full attention and focus on the sound. Then as the sound subsides, just maintain our focus on that for a few minutes.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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