
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual we can spend some time for meditation, so we adopt a comfortable relaxed posture. Likewise we try to maintain a clear and bright state of mind. When the physical body is relaxed, as well as the mind being in a clear and bright state, then we, as an individual, will also benefit.

Meditation is also a practice at a basic level to ensure that we are relaxed physically and mentally. As explained numerous times previously, meditation is simply a technique that allows us to familiarise cultivating good qualities within our own mind. This means that we develop good qualities as an antidote to the delusions or negative states in our mind. These delusions are what disturb our peace and our state of mind. We definitely get the benefit when we cultivate qualities that overcome or serve as antidotes to delusions.

So the more we familiarise ourselves with the technique of meditation, the easier it becomes for us to recognise all the good qualities that we have. We often underestimate ourselves and our own good qualities. Meditation practice allows us to see that we have good potential and qualities within ourselves. But we also have negative states of mind that are called delusions. A meditation technique allows us to distil our state of mind to begin to clearly see what delusions we have, and then we can start to overcome our negative states of mind and delusions. This technique can help us to have a happy state of mind.

We achieve a genuinely happy state of mind due to clearly identifying what disturbs our mind. What causes the turmoil, and all the unwanted, uncomfortable experiences that we have, such as fears, anxieties and so forth? The answer, in short, is the delusions within our own mind. When we can clearly identify the delusions within our mind, then we can also apply the antidote to overcome the delusions. When our practice is strong, then the delusions will begin to lessen within us; the intensity of the delusions will lessen within our mind. Naturally our mind becomes calmer and more tranquil. Meditation benefits us and also benefits others. People around us will experience positive effects as well.

When we clearly identify that the main causes of turbulence and disturbance within us are caused by the delusions, then we have identified the root of our problem. And in that process, we gain the methods and techniques to overcome those delusions. We develop a genuine self-reliance, without needing to rely on others to remind us of dangers or mistakes we might make. Rather, we can detect dangers and our own mistakes. We can definitely rely upon on our own wisdom and our own

understanding. This is how genuine self-reliance is developed. This maintains our integrity.

If we fail to recognise when a strong delusion arises and takes hold of us, then we fall victim to it, and experience the ill effects. We maintain our integrity or dignity when we have clearly identified the delusions that arise within us. When we are completely dominated or influenced by the strong negative mind that is when we may say and do things which are inappropriate. From our own experience, we can understand where others are coming from when they act or speak in seemingly inappropriate ways. Rather than taking it personally or becoming upset, we need to understand that they are affected by strong delusions and their negative state of mind. Thus, we start feeling sympathy and compassion for them rather than feeling upset.

This way of understanding others better helps us to maintain our dignity when others are seemingly misbehaving. If we don't take it personally, we are better equipped to maintain our dignity and not react towards others' inappropriate behaviour. This is important.

I have shared this advice with parents in the past, particularly as a way to understand the behaviour of children. It is very important that parents correct the behaviour of their children without telling the children that they are bad. Parents need to make the distinction between the child and the action. Bring to the notice of the children that while they are a good child, what they are doing (the action) is inappropriate behaviour, because it is harmful to themselves and to others. So when you present the situation in that way, the children are more likely to accept it. But if you tell the child that they are naughty or bad, then children will not understand. This will not help to correct their behaviour because children also have feelings, and their feelings can be hurt. They will not react positively when they feel that they are put at fault and they are being accused personally. So it is important, even at a very young age, to point out that while as a person they are fine, nevertheless some of their actions may be inappropriate at times. When that distinction is made and presented to them, they most likely will accept it.

In summary, the way to address the situation to a child is not by calling them naughty. The moment they hear that there are something wrong with them, that they are naughty or bad, then they immediately close up. Anything argued after that, no matter how logical, is useless because they have closed up. So telling them they are bad because of their behaviour is not an effective strategy to correct their negative behaviour. We are helping the child to recognise that their behaviour is not good, while they are fine as a person. We need to clearly present it in that way. There is definitely a difference between saying 'you are naughty' and 'the action that you are doing is unacceptable'; there is a difference.

Another example is someone going out with someone else who is known to misbehave when they go out. Tell them that it is not their fault, but that they have been influenced wrongly. There is a difference between telling them they are bad and that their action is bad. Telling them that they are okay, but their actions are not, gives

them the space to change their behaviour. When you make a distinction between the doer and the action, and present the action as being inappropriate rather than the person, then this logic is most likely to be acceptable to them.

The great Kadampa masters of the past said that they train their mind so that they never accuse or find fault in the person. They say it is not the person who is at fault, but the delusion that is at fault, the negative state of mind that is at fault. The person is fine, but it is negative states of mind that influence people to engage in harmful actions. When we understand this logic, it can have a very deep impact on how we approach others and how we present our advice to them. Rather than criticising them, we are helping them. This is an important point that we need to keep in mind.

When we familiarise ourselves with the understanding that it is not people who are at fault, but the delusions within them that are at fault; then this understanding will free us from negatives states of mind such as antagonism, and judgemental thoughts. When we are free from judgemental thoughts and antagonism, then we start to exhibit a demeanour that is acceptable to others, and actually benefits them.

The idea is that we don't find fault with them as an individual. We will not be disturbed by their actions, and this means others will also feel more positive, because we are not accusing them or criticising them as an individual. They will appreciate that, and from their own side will begin to notice that something must be influencing them to do or say negative things. When we don't create conflict, it helps the other person to settle down. So if your partner or friend exhibits some sort of agitation and anger, and in return we exhibit with our own frustration and anger, then we only make things worse; that is how conflict arises.

When others, through the influence of a negative state of mind, say or do things that are inappropriate, then it helps them to settle down if we don't react to that as well. From our own side, we need to take the initiative to apply patience, then positive effects will be experienced by others. And when we have the tools and the understanding, it is fitting for us to take the initiative. As the great master Shantideva mentioned in his great works, there is no real benefit in being upset with others. It is better to maintain a mind of joy. Being upset with others is not going to help the other person, and it is not going to help us. This is profound advice from Shantideva. If we take the initiative by applying patience, which comes from acceptance and understanding, then the situation will be calmer. When we put these points into practice, we can deal with difficult situations more effectively. We do not have to react with our normal habit of being annoyed, angry or upset. There are other ways; it is a matter of training our mind. The way to deal with difficult or annoying situations comes from training our mind. When we train ourselves to have these positive attitudes, then they will become a part of our natural qualities.

When a partner or friend exhibits gestures that are inappropriate, if we can remain naturally unaffected so

we aren't upset or annoyed and we can respond positively, then our positive attitude will benefit the other person as well as ourselves. A naturally positive attitude helps us to maintain our own integrity and dignity because we are not automatically upset or angry; and it helps others as well. This is possible—it is just a matter of training our mind and changing our attitude.

If this sounds reasonable, then it is appropriate to apply the techniques. Of course these positive habits may not come right away, but we can train ourselves in these techniques. And at the very least we will be heading in the right direction to bring about personal transformation and harmony in our relationships.

Shantideva gave more examples of how it is possible to train our mind and change our attitudes. He gave practical examples about the relationships we have with others. We can all recall experiences with someone who we could not bear to be with, who upsets or annoys us the moment that they are around. But even such a person can later become a good companion. The situation can turn around to be one where we become upset when they are not around. So that is possible, and it is something that can definitely happen. When I was a young boy I was quite rowdy, getting into fights with others. When I was about twelve years old, I had a fight with another young novice monk. We had both just joined the monastery. We had a fight where we came to blows and hit each other. For a year we were almost like arch-enemies, and we couldn't bear to be near each other. There was a mutual feeling of hostility. However, suddenly due to circumstances we became close companions and friends. From then on we were always together, sharing our food, and whatever else we had. We then spent a lot of time together. When we went to prayer gatherings, there was a tradition where you would save your spot for your friend. So if I was there first, I would save a spot for him, and if he was there he would save a spot for me. We wanted to be together all the time. So from my own personal experience, I can vouch for the fact that someone considered as an arch-enemy can turn around to be your best companion and friend.

Leading back to the main point, in order to gain the benefit from meditation, it is a matter of familiarising ourselves again and again with the technique. Meditation helps to gradually reduce and overcome the delusions within our own mind. When we apply the right method, we can definitely transform our mind. As mentioned in the teachings, a good sign of the meditation taking effect, is when we notice our negative states of mind naturally lessen. When the delusions are less intense and less frequent, this is a sure sign of our Dharma practices taking root.

If we are wondering whether there have been any effects when we meditate or practise the Dharma, then we just need to look at our own state of mind. If we see that there are some improvements where delusions have lessened or do not have a strong hold in our mind, then that is good sign that we are progressing well.

Having explained about the benefit of meditation and how it helps to transform our mind, we can now again go back to adopting the appropriate posture for our

meditation session. While we adopt an upright but comfortable posture, just take a moment to set a good intention or motivation for our practice. At the very least, we can remind ourselves that the purpose of engaging in meditation is, 'to overcome the negativities within myself, my negative states of mind, and not allow myself to be influenced by delusions, not even for a minute. I will not allow the delusions to influence or overpower me. This is why I need to meditate'.

We need to make a commitment to ourselves that for the next few minutes we will not allow our mind or thoughts to just wonder about, and be influenced by distractions or delusions. Instead, we make every attempt to bring our entire focus and attention inward, rather than being distracted by external things. Having brought our focus within, we then place our entire focus, one hundred percent, on our breath. We use our physical breath as a medium. But try to come to a very natural breathing rhythm where we are not forcing our breath in and out. Instead, relax and breathe naturally and calmly. Based on the natural rhythm of our inhalation and exhalation, we place a complete focus and attention upon the breath itself, being just aware of the breath coming in and going out. (*meditation*)

Questions

Question: How do we know when we have created merit? And how do we dedicate it?

Answer: How do we know if we have created merit? That is dependent on our actions. If we have done a virtuous deed, then we collect merit.

So how do we determine if it is a virtuous deed? That depends on our intention. If we have a good intention or motivation, then it is a beneficial deed. The combination of a good motivation and a worthwhile deed is how we collect merit.

An action resulting from a good motivation, based on a positive attitude, is called a virtuous action. Generally when we stop doing an action, then the karma of that action has also ceased. However, that action leaves an imprint in our mind.

It is like the negative when a picture is taken from the old traditional roll of film. The negative is created first, and it has the potential to bring out a photograph. When the negative is processed and developed, you get the actual photo. The potential for that picture to be brought out is always there on that negative. Similarly, with the positive or negative actions that we do, as soon as the action ceases, it leaves an imprint in our mind. Later, when the conditions are ripe, that imprint is activated and we experience the result, which could be positive or negative. The imprint that we have in our mind from our virtuous actions is called merit.

Another simple way of understanding this is that basically merit is mental potential that brings results. Any potential that brings about negative consequences is called a non-virtuous imprint. Merit is basically the positive imprints left upon our mind as a consequence of engaging in positive or virtuous deeds.

A good deed with a good motivation will create a positive imprint in our mind, which we can call merit. We

can dedicate the merit of that positive deed rather than holding onto it thinking 'this is my merit'. Instead, we can dedicate the merit of our good deeds to make a strong wish or aspiration that 'may these positive imprints that I have created become a cause for others to experience happiness'.

There are different ways to dedicate our merit, but the most optimum according to our Buddhist tradition is to dedicate our merit towards eliminating all sufferings of all beings and leading them to ultimate states of happiness. That is why we dedicate our merit to ultimate states of enlightenment. In a very simple way, we can generate this sincere wish: 'with the merits I have accumulated may it become a means only to bring benefit and happiness to other sentient beings; may it become a means for others not to experience any suffering.'

Dedication secures the positive imprints in our mind so they do not go to waste. When we rejoice in our own good merit, it is a way to increase our merit. It is also good to understand this point about dedicating our merit as a way to secure our merit. This can be explained with an analogy of adding a drop of water to the ocean. Because that drop of water merges with all the water in the ocean, it is impossible to find and recover that one drop. Thus, unless and until the ocean completely dries up, that drop of water will not be exhausted. It is the same when we dedicate our positive deeds. Even if it may be a small positive deed that we have done, the imprints of that merit will remain until we achieve the ultimate goal of enlightenment; the imprints will not be exhausted.

The optimum result is to become a buddha. Dedications are made towards that end, of benefitting sentient beings and not wishing them any harm. This is what a buddha is constantly engaged in; the only activity of a buddha is to benefit sentient beings. Furthermore the Buddha had said to his followers: 'if you benefit other beings, it is the same as helping me, and if you harm beings, you are also harming me'. So in effect the Buddha was saying, 'if you wish to follow my advice and be my followers then don't harm others but in fact help other sentient beings'.

Some people may wonder why keep count of prayers and mantras. We keep count so that in the future we can feel a certain level of accomplishment, and we can rejoice in doing the practice. If we don't keep track, then we may think 'Oh yeah I have done a certain number, but I'm not sure how many I have done'. If we were committed to a hundred thousand mantras of a certain deity or a certain practice, then when we have completed it, we can rejoice. We increase that positive merit every time we rejoice in our own good deeds. Rejoicing in our good deeds is a significant practice; we rejoice that we have done something useful to others.

Rejoicing is not something so obscure or religious. We all have memories of having done something good for someone, and whenever we remember that we feel a sense of joy that we have helped someone other than ourselves. Similarly, when we know have done something harmful, whenever we think about that it makes us feel uncomfortable. Instead of joy, we feel a sense of unease. It feels as if we are carrying a weight in our mind.

The difference between aspiration and dedication is that in dedication we have already done the deed in order for it to be dedicated, whereas an aspiration is a mere wish. We can have aspiration at any time, but there is nothing to dedicate because we have actually not done anything. In order to dedicate, we need to have done a positive deed, and then generate an aspiration.

One example of a good dedication are the verses of the dedication at the end of *The Guru Puja*:

*Whatever white virtues I have thus created,
I dedicate as causes enabling me to uphold the holy
Dharma of scriptures and insights,
And to fulfil without exception the prayers and deeds,
Of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three times.*

*By the force of this merit, in all my lives,
May I never be parted from Mahayana's four spheres,
And may I reach the end of my journey along the paths of,
Renunciation, bodhicitta, the pure view and the two
stages.*

There are also these two verses from *The King of Prayers*:

*Just as the brave Manjushiri and Samantabhadra,
Realised things as they are,
I, too, dedicate all these merits in the best way,
That I may follow their perfect example.*

*I dedicate all these roots of virtue,
With the dedication praised as the best,
By the Victorious ones thus gone of the three times,
So I might perform good work.*

That is a concise way of dedicating our virtuous deeds. When we think, 'Just as the great masters of the past had dedicated, I also dedicate my merits in the same manner', it becomes a very powerful way to dedicate our merit. It is said that these two verses of dedication from *The King of Prayers* are very powerful, because they consist of the twelve hundred thousand different aspirations of a bodhisattva!

Before we end the session for the evening, let us again take an opportunity to engage in a brief meditation. The meditation's object to focus on is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As the mantra is being recited and we hear the sound, it is good to have complete focus on the sound of the mantra itself, a hundred percent focus on that. Temporarily, do not think of anything else, just focus on the sound, and then maintain that focus for a while. This is a contemplative meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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