
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual we can spend some time in meditation, sitting in an upright and relaxed posture. Sitting in an upright posture allows the channels within our body to straighten out, which then improves the flow of wind energy within our body. This helps our mind to be fresh and is good for our meditation practice.

Just as it is important to adopt a correct physical posture for meditation, likewise it is important to have our mind in the right state. We need to make a deliberate commitment to withdraw our attention from all external distractions and withdraw our mind from all discursive thoughts. Then we can bring the mind inward and focus on the object, which is our breath.

When placing the focus on the breath, we must try one hundred percent; and not have a partial attention to the breath with one part of the mind still distracted. Otherwise we will not get the positive effects of the practice. However, if we are able to focus one hundred percent on our breath, then we can experience real joy in our mind, and a settled feeling within ourselves. We can really begin to experience this mental joy when we apply the appropriate technique. The benefits of meditation can be experienced vividly if we do it correctly.

To really get a pleasurable or joyful feeling, we must withdraw our mind from external distractions and keep it entirely focussed on the breath. For the next few minutes we can try to apply this technique the best we can in order to have a good meditation.

(meditation)

Just as we can experience some benefits of meditation in our short session, likewise if we become more familiar with the practice of meditation in our daily life, then we can experience some of the more immediate benefits. One of the longer-term benefits of meditation is having a peaceful and virtuous state of mind at the time of death. At the time of death there can be one of three types of minds - virtuous, non-virtuous, or ethically neutral. We can experience a virtuous state of mind during a short meditation session (such as the one we just did) by withdrawing our mind from distractions. Then the mind is not being influenced by delusions and it naturally experiences a sense of joy and bliss. Similarly, having a virtuous state of mind at the time of death means there is no question that we will have a peaceful and good death. This is something worthwhile we can practise and work towards.

Another practical benefit of daily meditation is that it protects our joyous state of mind. As we become more familiar with the practice of meditation we can see that it

strongly supports and enhances our inner joy. Practising meditation is something really worthwhile for us to adhere to. Since we want a joyful and happy state of mind, then we must at every cost try to maintain whatever internal support we can achieve. External conditions do not support our joy - it is our internal mental condition that becomes the real support. We achieve these internal conditions through practising meditation.

Meditation cultivates the inner conditions of love and compassion, which are the main states of mind that bring us inner joy. The more we familiarise ourselves with these positive states of mind throughout our life, the less we are influenced by negative states of mind and external distractions and delusions. This familiarity, gained by meditating regularly, will naturally continue up to the time of death. Due to this familiarisation with positive states of mind, our mind will naturally adopt a state of love and compassion, and this will secure us a peaceful death.

Maintaining our inner joy depends on having a positive attitude. Unless we recognise that inner qualities such as positive attitudes are the real support for achieving a joyous mind, then we will become vulnerable to the destructive influences of external conditions. If we depend on external conditions, then we might become easily affected by them, feeling joy one moment but then feeling very sad at other times. If we find ourselves being vulnerable and being easily affected by external conditions, then this is a sign that we have not identified the inner conditions or the inner qualities that support a joyful mind. We are clearly not paying attention to that. For as long as we believe external conditions are the source of our joy and happiness, then we will be affected by them. When they are favourable or unfavourable they will affect us accordingly. We will be at the mercy of even the slightest change in external conditions. This happens when we have not adopted good inner qualities.

The key factors for a happy state of mind are having a clear and a kind mind. If we want these qualities, if we want to have a settled, clear and kind mind, then we need to definitely start developing these qualities within ourselves. A kind mind is important in bringing about a joyous and happy mind. We can see that when we lack kindness towards others, then that affects us to the point where we feel no joy; in fact we feel lonely. Even if we have a nice meal, we don't seem to enjoy it. We can't really even enjoy the company of others anymore because we lack a sense of kindness towards them. We find that our lives start to become empty and pointless when we don't have a kind attitude.

Thus, if one can practise some kindness that is how we can summarise the means in maintaining a happy and joyous mind.

A happy and joyous state of mind depends on our inner qualities rather than any external conditions. If our happiness did rely on external conditions, then we would have to assume that the richest people with the most pleasant external conditions would be the happiest people. But we have seen that no matter how much people may have externally, no matter how much wealth

they have, there can still be a lack of joy and a lack of contentment. This comes from a lack of contentment within. When there is no real sense of contentment, even with favourable conditions, then this clearly shows that having excellent external conditions is not a contributing factor in having a joyous mind. But inner qualities, such as a settled, clear and kind mind, become our inner tools so we can maintain a joyous and happy life. We can see that even if we have favourable external conditions, if there is a lack of joy and happiness in the mind, then we will still have an empty life because we would not be content or fulfilled. Here in the west there is not much lacking in terms of external resources. We can safely say that we have all the favourable external conditions that any developed nation can offer. Yet in this country we can still find there are many people who seem to lack a sense of real joy, or a settled state of mind, or any sort of joyful life. However, with moderate or limited external resources, if we can maintain a happy and joyous mind, then compared to the wealthy person, we have better conditions for a having a meaningful, joyful life.

People who have enough material possessions but feel mentally troubled and experience a sense of joylessness clearly illustrate that the problem does not lie in a lack of resources or material things. There is something else lacking inside these people; they are lacking the internal conditions needed to experience joy and happiness. Some people continually put energy and time into getting more and more resources so they can be happy. But until they see that chasing resources and material things doesn't work, then happiness may not be a reality for them. Yes, we do hear about wealthy people who are doing well. But successful business people have told me that they don't feel joyful and happy, even when everything externally is going well, and even when their business is doing well. This is due to their lack of contentment, which makes their mind want to have more and more. But getting more does not contribute to their joy and happiness. In fact it seems to lead to even more worries. If someone's business goes well, maybe first of all they have one shop, which seems to bring them moderate worries. Then they have two shops, which brings them a little bit more worry and anxiety, then three or four shops or companies later seems to bring even more worries. The more you have the more it seems to add up to more worries and anxiety rather than contributing to a sense of peace and joy in the mind. This is something worthwhile for us to look into, and see what is causing that. This comes back to the main point that a lack of contentment, and giving in to our desires and attachments, leads us into an anxious state.

As the great master Nagarjuna said, the best wealth is being content. When we are not content we are never satisfied, no matter how much we have. Whereas when we have a sense of contentment within ourselves, then even with moderate resources, we can feel joyful and happy.

This also applies to relationships. Sometimes people get into a committed relationship and don't seem to be satisfied with that. They go and find another partner; but after a while they are not happy with them and find yet another partner. Without a sense of real contentment in

the mind, they will never be able to find that perfect partner. But after doing some initial research to find out if you are compatible with a partner, then stick with them and try to work on that relationship with kindness and compassion. I feel this is a much more worthwhile investment.

At Chenrezig Institute we did a course on Shantideva's text *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. There was one person who was about forty-five and she was sitting beside me during a meal. She seemed to imply that she suffered from loneliness and had no friends in her life. Then I happened to ask her, 'Hadh't you thought about getting married if you feel lonely?' And she said, 'Well, actually I have been married four times'. So even having been married for four times, she still had a sense of loneliness and a feeling of having no friends. Recently I met someone who said that they had never married but still feel very joyous and happy. They are quite content and happy. This indicates that happiness is a state of mind, and the attitude that we have either brings us fulfilment or not.

When I went to dentist recently, there was a middle-aged person who I thought would have been around fifty but he told me he was actually fifty-five and he thought I was fifty. When I explained that I was about seventy-four, he was surprised. He said he was very glad to see me joyful and happy, noticing that I lead a life by myself. He said that 'I'm also similar to you in that my companionship is a spiritual companionship that is within me'. Then he was admiring my sense of joy and happiness and he said that spiritual contentment seems to be really important in life. He seemed to be glad to see me and kept coming back to see me and talk to me three or four times.

If we practise the essence of joy and happiness within ourselves, then that seems to permeate to others as well, making them joyful and happy too. My conversation at the dentist indicates that. If we can maintain a sense of joy and happiness within ourselves, then a companion will come about naturally.

There are many examples of this. When I was at the St Kilda sea baths recently, a person came up to me to express his appreciation, saying 'Thank you, thank you, you seem to be a very happy and good person. Thank you very much'. The main point is that when we are in a state of inner joy and happiness, then it seems to affect others around us in a positive way. Even with my limited experience that seems to be the case. Having a joyous and happy mind will contribute to the happiness and joy of the other person you are with. In a relationship, when you practise having a joyous and happy mind and a kind attitude towards each other, then that will definitely contribute to having a good relationship. This also applies to a family relationship, such living with parents. When parents are happy and joyful together, then that seems to contribute to a happy feeling within the children. But when the parents seem to be upset or if they are quarrelling, then children tend to get upset too. I haven't seen my parents quarrelling and fighting that much, so I don't have that experience. Nevertheless, we do know that there are parents who quarrel and fight, and that seems to affect the children immediately. The

children become unhappy, like a large weight is making them feel down. People with a joyous and happy state of mind definitely contribute towards a harmonious feeling in the people surrounding them. This is the main point. Meditation is the tool or technique that helps us to achieve a joyous and happy mind, and make it strong within us.

There are many examples of strangers walking up to me and thanking me for having done nothing much more than just smile. This seems to affect others in a positive way and they come up to thank me.

When I go to Southland shopping mall, I often go to a café in front of Kmart. The owner of the café frequently came over to greet me and ask me how I am. One day he came and sat down next to me and I asked him how he was. He didn't seem quite up to saying, 'Yes, I'm well'. Instead, he said 'My business is going well, but what I really want is to be like you'.

About a month later when I went there again, he was not there anymore. Someone else had taken over his place. So, even though his business was going well, he wanted to be more like me. The point he was making was that yes, as far as business goes, he was doing well, but somehow he seemed to indicate that if he doesn't have a joyous and happy mind then what's the point. That's why he made the comment, 'Even though my business is going well, I still would like to be like you'. That is, he would prefer to be a happy person rather than have a successful business.

Our session is nearly up. Again I have not been able to refer to the text. But nevertheless, I feel that what I share is as a friend. I try to share with you whatever experience I have in my everyday life. I try to share that with you in a practical way, and how maybe we can see things from another side. It is not as if I sit on throne and just relate the text and give you a teaching from a traditional sense, but sometimes it is nice to share things on a practical level as well. So even though we may not have touched on the text itself, it is my hope that whatever I have shared with you has been meaningful and worthwhile in some way.

Summarising the main point of this evening - having a joyous and happy mind contributes to our own well being, as well as helping others around you by bringing them joy and happiness. The way to do that is through practising meditation. This definitely contributes towards having a joyous and happy mind.

Before we conclude for the evening, we can spend a few moments in contemplation or meditation. This time, withdraw our mind from all external distractions, and try to maintain focus on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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