
The Condensed Lam Rim

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It is good to spend some time in meditation. Meditation is seen by many people as an important part of their life. Indeed, it is important for a happy life.

Let us look into how meditation is important in our life. If we consider the attitudes that we are familiar with in our daily lives, we can clearly see that certain attitudes are positive yet others are not really useful. We are familiar with the tendency of having either positive attitudes or negative attitudes.

Meditation is a technique that helps us to familiarise ourselves with the positive attitudes in our mind. It is important that we develop positive attitudes in our lives.

A toddler has no clear distinction between positive and negative attitudes, but as soon as the child is able to distinguish between good and bad, then parents need to encourage them to develop positive attitudes in their mind.

We need to cultivate positive attitudes within ourselves, because having positive states of mind contributes to a happy mind and our general well-being.

Unfortunately this does not come about naturally, so we need to actually put some effort into familiarising our mind with positive attitudes. We may find that negative attitudes are more predominant and seem to occur more naturally within us. This is because of our familiarity with negative states of mind. For example, someone who is used to getting angry easily - a short-tempered person - will become angry at the slightest adverse condition. Likewise, for someone who is prone to strong attachment, coming into contact with even the slightest condition for attachment will cause strong attachment to arise in that person. This also applies to negative states of mind such as jealousy. Someone who is prone to feeling jealous most of the time due to familiarity with that state of mind, will become jealous at the slightest condition for feeling jealous, for example, when they notice someone else doing well. The slightest hint of someone else doing better than themselves will cause jealousy to arise in their mind. These negative states of mind arise readily because of our familiarity with them.

Whenever we become influenced by negative thoughts or negative attitudes, any sense of peace in our mind is disturbed and we immediately feel unsettled.

It would be wonderful if we could reduce these negative states of mind, and then be able to enjoy a sense of peace within ourselves. Meditation gives us techniques to overcome negative states of mind by familiarising ourselves with positive states of mind. Finding the correct technique can help us overcome the inner enemies within

ourselves. As we familiarise ourselves with the proper techniques to develop positive states of mind, this will eventually reduce the intensity of our negative states of mind. When we become familiar with these techniques, then we reach a state where negative states of mind are reduced, which already starts to bring some temporary relief to our mind. Our familiarity with positive attitudes means that the intensity and duration of any negative thoughts and attitudes is reduced. This is how we begin to experience relief from negative states of mind. If we continue with the practice or technique correctly, then after awhile we will definitely begin to notice some positive effects. It is only matter of time before we start to notice the real benefits. As we look back, we will notice that we have benefited from our practice, and have naturally become more joyous and happy.

Negative states of mind are detrimental to experiencing joy and happiness. A negative state of mind is something that we need to try at any cost to overcome, while a positive state of mind is something we need to become more familiar with. You might agree with what has been presented so far, but the question that may arise now is whether this is all possible or not? Is it possible to overcome negative states of mind? We need to consider this more deeply. The answer is, yes, it is definitely possible to overcome negative states of mind by cultivating and acquainting ourselves with the positive states of mind.

This is because we have all the right conditions to do this. Physically, we have the constitution of a human being; and mentally we have the ability to think and analyse, which gives us a special unique mental potential. Any sufferings caused within the human existence can be overcome by human beings themselves. There are people who have reached a state of peace and joy. When we consider our own situation, we are no different from the people who have achieved those states. We have the same physical attributes - we have the same physical human body as well as the same mental abilities that others have. Furthermore, we even have the capacity to develop ourselves and to cultivate the positive states of mind to overcome the negative states of mind. With all the conditions that are beneficial for us, we can overcome those that are harmful and detrimental to our well-being. Thinking along these realities should encourage us to embark on the journey of transformation.

The point that I am emphasising is that when we become familiar with the appropriate meditation techniques, then we have the methods to achieve the desired positive state of physical and mental well-being. When we have access to the proper techniques, then all we need to do is actually apply them in our daily lives. Initially, it is advisable not to have high expectations of the practices and expect immediate results, but to maintain the view of working on the level you are at, the level of your capacity now. Slowly, as we become more familiar with our practices, we will reach a point where we can set out realistic goals for ourselves. As we proceed on those levels, we can reach a state where we realise our capacity and we know how much to do. This will only encourage us to go further rather than going back. We will reach a point where we can comfortably look towards increasing

our potential and reaching higher levels in our practice. This is possible only when we have initially laid the sound foundation within ourselves.

With a sound foundation, we can set up constructive, realistic goals and levels of practice. Otherwise, without a sound foundation, assuming that one can achieve high levels quickly is unrealistic; it is not possible. The realistic approach is to allow a gradual process, because the process of familiarising our mind with the positive takes some time.

Some people want quick results, they want to achieve things quickly. So, they may wonder why I keep emphasising that this is a gradual process. They would like to achieve quick results, however that is just not possible. The whole technique involves a gradual process.

The main point with the process is that, first of all, it is really important to have an expansive, joyous, relaxed mind combined with a clear focus in whatever activity we do, particularly with our meditation. When we have that joyous mind, then the activity does not become strenuous, it isn't a burden. When the activity is done with a joyous state of mind, then it will definitely give positive results because it is done with a joyous state of mind. It is not done with a strain or a stressed state of mind.

It is important that we keep a joyous mind in whatever activity we engage in, particularly in relation to meditation practices. A joyous mind comes with accepting whatever capacity we have now, and working and continuing with that capacity. If we don't lose our joyous state of mind when we start the practice, then we will definitely get positive results. We will not give up or get a sense of hopelessness, feeling completely overwhelmed. Feelings of being overwhelmed and burdened come when we have not been realistic in our approach, and also because we have a stressful mind. If we have a joyous mind at all times, then we will definitely reach our goal - not with haste, but by going slowly. In fact it will be as the saying goes "we will reach our goal quicker by going slowly".

I like to emphasise this point to the younger generation in particular, that as your achievements in life still lie ahead of you, all activities can be achieved with a joyous state of mind. You have to constantly remind yourself of that. If we do our activities, for example study or work, in a joyous state of mind, then as we accomplish our aims, we will experience an enhanced sense of achievement and joy in our mind.

If we do things in a depressed or in a stressed state of mind, then even when we do achieve a certain goal, we will experience a sense of nervousness in the mind rather than feeling peace and joy. This will lead to feeling more anxious. Even with our achievements, we may not really feel content and fulfilled. There might be an empty-pointless feeling in our mind even when we have achieved our desired goal.

Having a joyous mind helps us not only achieve whatever goals we set for ourselves in a constructive way, but as we achieve those goals, a joyous mind enhances our feeling of joy and well-being. In this way,

we become more and more joyous, and experience an overall sense of well-being.

Maintaining a joyous state of mind helps us to achieve our goals in a constructive way that will only help to further enhance our well-being. Now to come back to the earlier point, we can maintain a joyous state of mind by practising meditation. This is why the practice of meditation is emphasised so often. As I mentioned earlier, the reason why I emphasise these points also to the younger generation is because it seems that there are quite a lot of young people who reach a point early in their lives of feeling a little bit lost in their direction. When we reach this awkward state of mind, then whatever we do doesn't seem to be enough. It somehow doesn't seem to bring much meaning to our lives. We seem to start losing purpose in our life.

This is a dangerous place to be, when we lose purpose and direction in our life. This is a very sad state to be in at a very young age. So in order to prevent ourselves from falling into that pit of hopelessness, losing a sense of direction, and feeling desperate in our life, practising meditation will enhance a joyous state of mind. We must try to protect whatever joyous mind we develop. The ultimate protection for a joyous state of mind is to continuously practise meditation. If we continue gradually, then this definitely brings about a positive result.

I cannot overemphasise the importance of maintaining a joyous state of mind. This is to be done internally by ourselves. We need to take that initiative and take personal responsibility for maintaining a joyous state of mind. It is crucial to protect our joyous state of mind. If we lose that, it would be difficult to restore again. When we reach a state of mind where we feel desperate and hopeless, it is difficult to restore a joyous state of mind again.

External losses such as loss of money or job are relatively easier to restore than losing a joyous state of mind. With proper investigation and resources we can restore external losses relatively easier than being able to restore the inner qualities within ourselves. So we need to protect whatever joyous states of mind we have through the practice of meditation, because when we lose our inner qualities, it is very difficult to restore them again. It takes lots of effort. Some people can reach a negative mental state where it seems that they can't come out of it, they have a sense of hopelessness and have a joyless state of mind. However, through appropriate meditation techniques, we can definitely enhance and maintain a joyous state of mind. And that is what I consider as being very precious. A joyous state of mind is the most precious companion we can have within us. And this will help us.

When we lose our joyous state of mind, it is it difficult for us to restore it, but even others can't help you. Even parents who love you dearly and really care for you, they cannot help you to restore the joyous state of mind. This is really something that we need to pay utmost attention to. We need to take personal responsibility in keeping our joyous state of mind intact.

Children reach a time in their lives when they start feeling pressure, and it may start to overwhelm their

mind. Parents of course feel responsible for their children and wish the best for them. But when the child has reached a point where they start to reject things, and don't seem to really cooperate very much, that is actually a sign that they are experiencing some inner turmoil. This is a crucial juncture in the child's life.

At this time, a parent needs to be able to detect those signs, and then act accordingly in an effective way. Giving them even more pressure in terms of studies or work is not an appropriate way. Comparing them with other students, and saying things like "others are doing well, so how come you are not doing well", and "you have reached an age where you should take more responsibility for yourself", can only enhance their anxiety or feelings of frustration.

When parents notice those signs, they need to have a more relaxed approach; not to pressure the child too much. Of course we could claim that the parent has every right to pressure their children to study harder or to work harder or to do better at things, but when the child reaches a certain point where those strategies are not effective and they become detrimental to the child's well-being, then the responsible parent must change their strategy and be able to act differently. They need to have a different approach for the child to feel more at ease. Parents can have a conversation with their children, and try to say things to put their children's mind more at ease, and to present things in a more relaxed light - something that will comfort the children so they feel more welcome and more embraced by the parents. Children can then slowly open up, relate to the parents and try to overcome whatever difficulties they have. Otherwise, it can get to a dangerous point if the child gets more and more pressure. This will eventually lead to some disastrous situations.

The reason why I share these thoughts with parents that I know, and with you all in our teaching session, is because I feel a strong affinity with everyone who is here. I feel that we are like a big family. And so, as someone in the position of giving and sharing advice, I feel like sharing some practical advice, in the hope that it can be useful in your lives.

I remind parents, that some of you may have had similar experiences with your own parents when you were younger. They may have said things when you were growing up that you didn't find appropriate, and make you feel more angst and more uncomfortable. If you have experienced that yourself, then you should draw from your own earlier experiences in life to be able to deal more effectively with your own children.

In summary, the main point is that meditation is something which is useful and important in our lives. Appropriate meditation techniques will enhance the positive attitudes in our mind. Meditation is important in our lives because it enhances the clarity and joy in our mind.

We can now engage in some meditation. We begin by sitting in a relaxed posture. Then we set our mental state by reminding ourselves that for the next few minutes we will put all of our energy and attention to withdrawing our mind from all internal and external distractions, all disturbing thoughts. We will completely try to withdraw,

not allowing our mind to be influenced by external thoughts and bringing our mind and focus inward. As we focus on the object, which is our own breath, we place our full attention, one-hundred-percent on our breath. For the next few minutes try not to let the mind be influenced and distracted by any other things, but just maintain your focus on the breath itself. (*Pause for meditation*).

Question: Geshe-la, in the practice of *Confession of Moral Downfalls to the Thirty-five Buddhas*, there is a sentence that mentions 'possession of stupas'. Why do we need to confess to possession of stupas? Is it because in our past lives, we might have inappropriately possessed these?

Response: First of all, the stupas mentioned refer particularly to donations, which would have been given specifically to construct holy objects like stupas. To misappropriate or to keep the donations for yourself if it was meant to be given to the construction of a stupa or to a Dharma activity is considered as a negative karma. So if we have not done that in this life, why should we confess that? As you rightly said, we might have committed that in one of our past lives.

As the confession prayer itself indicates, since beginningless lifetimes, in whatever lifetimes in the past that I have done such negative deeds, I confess all of that. So that is what this confession indicates. Whenever we engage in practise for purifying negative karma, such as reciting confession practices, it is advisable not only to purify negative karmas of this lifetime, but every possible negative karma that we would have created in past lifetimes. We have countless past lifetimes, so it is assumed that we have created all types of negative karma. For example, in past lifetimes we could have been a general or a leader in a war, where we could have taken others' lives. Or there might have been have times when we were so desperate that we would have stolen from others.

Even though we may not have done all of these negative karmas such as stealing and killing in this life, it is assumed that we would have created them in past lifetimes, regardless of whether we can remember them or not. Since we have had countless past lifetimes it is definitely possible, so we purify all of them together now.

This is also true for dedicating virtues. When we dedicate virtues, the dedication is not just limited to the virtues we collect in this life. We have collected lots of virtues from previous lifetimes, so we dedicate the virtues of the past that we have accumulated, the virtues we are accumulating in the present, and virtues that we will accumulate in the future. So for those three times, if we dedicate those virtues for the well-being of others, it becomes much more powerful and effective. This is how the practices are presented to get the utmost benefit from our own practise. That was a good question, thank you.

Question: I was trying to explain to my kids this afternoon the difference is between a joyful and a happy state of mind. Does a joyful state of mind have a longer duration than a happy state? A joyful mind seems to be more than a happy state of mind; is that true?

Response: Joyous states of mind have many different degrees or levels of joy. For example, if parents are nice and good to their children, then the children might feel joy. This is one type of joy that they may experience. Differences may also lie in expression. When someone is happy they don't necessarily express it physically, whereas a joyous state of mind may bring a smile to our face. For example, when parents are being nice and they feel joy, they and the children might smile.

Question: This afternoon we were up in the mountains and we come into this big flowing beautiful spring water. I felt very joyful and I was trying to tell the children how nice it is, and then the younger boy says, "it's happy, mum, it's just like a happy state of mind".

Response: Whether there is a difference or not, both happiness and joy are positive states of mind; that is the main point. Joyous mind and happy mind - we could equate each other with being the same. However, there are different ways to bring joy and happiness in the mind. For example, some people plant nice flowers in their courtyard and one of their intentions seems to be bringing joy to others who may see the flowers. There are some who claim that they work hard on their plants and flowers so that when people pass by they get some joy out of it. While they experience some joy and happy feeling for themselves, the activity also brings some joy and happiness for others. This is a positive intention, an intention to benefit others. Planting flowers to bring some joy to others is a good intention; we can call it a virtue.

The word 'enjoyment' is related to external factors. You need to see something nice in order to enjoy yourself, or you have to experience something or hear something nice to enjoy yourself. However, a real sense of joy and happiness is not something that is dependent on the outside; it is cultivated within our mind. We may be using the same terms as conventional language, but from the spiritual or Dharma worldly context, there might be differences in how these words are understood.

In the worldly context, I don't know if when you say you are happy or enjoying something, whether that relates to an inner sense of real contentment. An example of external conditions that bring a little bit of joy and happy feeling to others, is keeping our surrounding area clean; cleanliness brings joy to others. Some people keep their place tidy and clean because they like others to enjoy the place. And we ourselves are also more relaxed when things are clean and tidy. Some elderly people pay attention to keeping themselves tidy and clean because they are concerned about others reacting in a negative way, as a dirty and unkempt appearance is not pleasant for others. An attitude of wanting to be appreciated by others, or to bring about joy in some else's mind in whatever small way, is a good thing to do.

However, we should not go to the extreme of cleanliness where our house is kept so tidy and clean that we cannot accept someone else even stepping in our room. When we go to a place that is so tidy and immaculately clean, then we may worry that we might mess it up in a small way and disturb the other person. When I was attending the Dalai Lama's teaching on the Kalachakra initiation in South India once, I was staying in a nice, clean hotel. I

was tipping the cleaning ladies well, so they made an extra effort to keep my room clean. They made sure that everything was really super clean and tidy. But when some monks, cousins of mine, came to visit me from Drepung monastery, they came looking for me and checked the room. As they opened the door, the first thing they seemed to notice was how clean and everything was. They were a little bit hesitant to come inside, thinking that the room was too clean to be mine!

If people have been a little bit joyful during the teaching, then it has served its purpose and has been meaningful.

Before we conclude for the evening, we can spend a few minutes in meditation. We can focus on the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. Let us keep our attention on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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