
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual it would be good to spend some time for meditation. For that purpose, we will sit in an upright and relaxed posture. After one adopts a comfortable and relaxed sitting posture, one should ensure that the mind also becomes relaxed and comfortable. Through the combination of relaxing the physical body and mind, one will experience a sense of joy and happiness.

It is important for us to look into the relationship that we as a person have with our physical body and mind. Through our experience, we can verify that our physical and mental states definitely affect our outlook. When the conditions of our body and mind are favourable, this tends to give us a positive outlook; whereas if our physical and mental conditions are unpleasant or unfavourable, our outlook will be troubled. So it is good for us to understand that correlation between our body and mind.

Even on a conventional level, when we refer to our body and mind, we refer to them as "my body" and "my mind". This indicates that one regards the body and mind as being possessed by oneself, and not by others. Thus, we have to take responsibility for them ourselves; no one else can do much about them or have much influence over them. The more we understand this relationship between body, mind and one's sense of well-being, the more we will look after the health of our body and mind.

For example, when we experience sickness or an unpleasant physical situation, we say "I'm sick"; likewise if the mind is troubled and ill-at-ease, we say "I'm troubled" or "I feel uncomfortable". This illustrates the close relationship we have with the body and mind. If we were to further investigate – for example, the statement "I am unwell" – no one else can say "I'm unwell" when our physical body is affected. Likewise if one's mind is troubled, no one else can claim that their mind is unhappy or ill-at-ease. It is only ourselves who can claim that we feel unhappy or ill-at-ease. This shows that our own body and mind have a direct, very intimate relationship with this person, oneself.

Since we do need to take our own self-interest into consideration, it is worthwhile looking at what we can do to put ourselves at ease, at peace. Because of the close relationship between our body and mind, if we create the conditions for making our body and mind well, then we, as a person, will also feel well. We can conclude that whatever activity we do, we need to ask first whether it will bring about a sense of physical or mental wellbeing. If the activity makes us physically and mentally well, then we as an individual will benefit from that. Thus, all our activities should contribute to either our physical or mental wellbeing. This is what I emphasise regularly.

One could say that it seems easier for us to acquire the conditions for our physical wellbeing. Thus when we are uncomfortable physically, for whatever reason, such as with

hunger or thirst or feeling sick, we are usually able to access the conditions that will ease that uncomfortable situation. For example, when we are hungry, it is a matter of trying to get some food; if we are thirsty, getting some drink; if we are unwell physically, going to the doctor for medicine to restore physical health. So we are not really deprived of these basic conditions. Then, as we become more familiar with the needs of our body, we become more cautious about what will contribute to our physical wellbeing and what will be detrimental – for example, being more careful with our diet. We know from experience that we need to avoid eating certain kinds of food that harm our health. The diet we would subsequently adopt would come about through our own experience and familiarity with our body.

However, what we seem to be deprived of are the conditions for our mental wellbeing, and that is because we do not really pay much attention to them. We seem to spend much more time and energy on our physical wellbeing, while neglecting the conditions for our mental wellbeing. In fact, it should be the opposite: we should be paying much more attention to acquiring the conditions for our mental wellbeing, as it is much more important for our longer term happiness.

If the conditions for our physical wellbeing were the same as those required for our mental wellbeing, then we would be happy now: as those who have sufficient physical conditions put much time and energy towards acquiring those conditions for their physical wellbeing, they would in such a situation all be feeling happy. But the fact remains that the conducive conditions for our physical wellbeing are not sufficient in themselves for our mental wellbeing. There are other factors that need to be acquired for our mental wellbeing. Because we give little attention to them and are unfamiliar with them, this is why we experience mental turmoil and difficulty in our lives. So, just as we acquire favourable conditions for our physical wellbeing, we can also acquire the conditions for our mental wellbeing – that would be the best situation for ourselves.

The main point I am trying to emphasise here is that, as well as acquiring the conditions for our physical wellbeing, we need to also acquire the conditions for our mental wellbeing. For as long as we lack these mental conditions, no matter how conducive our physical conditions may be for us, we are still not really happy.

Relating to an experience I have had, on one occasion, I stayed at someone's home, a very nice, well-furnished, comfortable home that would have cost over three million dollars. When I asked the home-owner if he was happy, his immediate response was "No, I'm not really happy". Now in terms of physical conditions, he has a beautiful home. When I asked him, he also replied: "I have a good partner, friends, children and money". He was in fact quite a wealthy person, not deprived of any good physical conditions. But he was not really happy. This goes to show that there must have been some conditions lacking for his happiness. In contrast, there are some individuals who may not have much money or material wealth, but when you ask them if they are happy, they immediately respond "Yes, I'm happy". This goes to show that while they may be lacking physical material wealth, they have the intact conditions for mental wellbeing and happiness.

So just having good physical conditions in itself is not sufficient for our overall happiness. Rather we need to put some time and energy into acquiring the conditions for our mental wellbeing as well.

At this point, one might ask, what are the appropriate conditions for our mental wellbeing and happiness? This question would quite naturally be asked by individuals who have achieved material success in their life, yet still feel a sense of emptiness within themselves – a feeling of not being wholly content and happy.

Some individuals have confided in me that while they had been successful in acquiring material wealth, they did not feel altogether happy and content. They had even considered maybe going out into the wilderness to try and find happiness there. This shows that one may naturally come to a point where one begins to realise that, if sufficient material wealth and good physical conditions do not bring a sense of real joy and happiness with the mind, what else could there be? What could one be lacking or missing? What other conditions could there be to bring about mental wellbeing, a sense of happiness and joy?

If we look at the conditions for mental wellbeing, we can see that there are certain factors that contribute to mental turmoil – to feeling unhappy, discontented or agitated. Identifying the factors that contribute to mental turmoil is the first step one can take towards getting rid of them.

There are two main factors that could contribute to our mental turmoil. One could be that we have a selfish attitude and show a lack of kindness towards others. Lack of kindness and lack of compassion could be the main factor for feeling inner turmoil, agitation and a sense of emptiness. Another factor could be a continually distracted mind, which means that our focus is always one hundred percent on external factors. These two factors – either a mind lacking in kindness or compassion, or a mind that is completely distracted – will contribute to a feeling of inner turmoil.

If one finds through one's own experience that either of these factors applies to oneself, then we need to apply the methods to develop a compassionate and kind attitude within oneself, or to settle down our mind and bring our focus more inwards, so that our mind does not become too distracted. When we apply these techniques, the causes and conditions for us to feel inner turmoil will definitely be lessened and eliminated.

Thus what we need to transform within ourselves are our own internal attitudes – overcoming the selfish attitude by replacing it with kinder, more considerate attitudes, or overcoming a distracted mind by trying to transform our mind so that it is not really distracted. So we have a big job ahead of ourselves! (*laughter*)

If one finds that one's mental turmoil is mainly caused by selfishness and a lack of kindness, one needs to look at how to transform that. One needs to tackle the factors that lead to a selfish, inconsiderate attitude. These include attitudes such as jealousy, competitiveness, pride and anger. These are some of the many factors that contribute to feeling self-centred and pompous. We may notice, for example, that jealousy arises when we see others doing better than ourselves. When we see others who are equal to us doing well, a sense of competitiveness may arise within us. When we see those who seem to have fewer advantages than us, we may develop a sense of pride.

Further, when others make even the slightest critical remark to us, we will immediately get upset and angry. Then if they direct the slightest praise towards us, it will cause us to feel very pompous and proud. When we experience either type of afflicted mind, that is what leads to mental turmoil. So if we allow ourselves to be influenced by such negative states

of mind as jealousy, competitiveness, pride, anger and so forth, then for as long as our mind remains influenced by those states, there will be no opportunity for us to experience a real sense of joy, happiness and calmness in our mind.

In relation to the second factor that brings mental turmoil, which is a distracted mind, we will notice that if we allow our mind to be influenced by distractions, there's no end to our conceptual thoughts. That is where all our worries come from, because we start thinking if "I do this, maybe this would happen" or "If I don't do that, something bad may happen", in this way when we allow our minds to speculate, there is no end to what may happen. Each conceptual thought is followed by another conceptual thought which causes worry, anxiety, fear and the like. So we can recognise that these uncomfortable states of mind – anxiety, fear, worry and so forth – all come from a distracted mind.

When I mentioned that there's no end to this type of thinking, if we look back over the years – not even days or weeks, but months and years – this conceptual thinking has kept churning over in our mind year after year. If we allow ourselves the opportunity to consider this fact, we will notice that our mind is constantly busy, each moment adding a thought to a previous thought, and on it goes.

So we have identified the two main factors that contribute to our mental turmoil, discomfort and unease in our mind. Now we come to question: What technique could release us from the negative, selfish, unkind mind and the distracted mind? This is where we introduce the technique of meditation as an appropriate means to relieve one from these negative influences.

The meditation technique involves withdrawing our mind from all external distractions, bringing it inward and focusing it on an internal object. In the very process of withdrawing our mind and bringing our full attention and focus on a chosen internal object, we are temporarily stopping the influence of negative states of mind, and we also get some relief from the distracted mind, because one does not allow the mind to be distracted by any external thoughts but rather focuses on the chosen object.

There are various meditation techniques that serve as particular antidotes to overcoming particular negative states of mind. Thus we do not claim that this particular technique of choosing an internal object and focusing on it is a remedy to completely overcome the negative states of mind altogether. Nevertheless, during our meditation, we will definitely experience some relief from any negative states of mind such as anger or jealousy and so forth, and the meditation also serves as an immediate remedy for the distracted mind. So we definitely get some immediate benefit.

When someone who has never tried it before initially tries this meditation technique, they will be quite amazed and surprised at how calm and peaceful the mind becomes. That is an initial experience that anyone who adopts this technique seriously can benefit from. But then they may wonder why that calm and peaceful experience doesn't last long. This is because they are not really consistent with their practice. If we do some practice for a while and let it lapse and don't continue, we will not gain the same effect again. A lasting, deeper effect comes only with prolonged, consistent application of this technique. We have to put in some effort. I regularly emphasise that one must try to adopt a regular practice and be consistent with it.

Thus we can clearly identify the immediate benefits we gain from meditation practice, particularly the fact that it serves as a cause for gaining happiness within one's mind. Meditation serves as a method for promoting positive attitudes in the mind and opposing the negative states of mind; the technique enables us to adopt the positive states of mind and free the mind from distractions.

The positive effects of meditation are particularly obvious to the older generation, who have already had quite a lot of life experience, and who have acquired sufficient material security for themselves. When one adopts the technique of meditation after having already gone through certain life experiences and having not really found much satisfaction, one seems to really appreciate the real sense of joy, the feeling of "coming home", when one is really settled within oneself.

For the younger generation, it may not be so easy for them to come to this point, because there may be still lots of excitement in the air for them. But for the older generation they really can feel a sense of solace, something within oneself that one can always rely upon as a source of joy and happiness. The most prominent and dreaded suffering that older people would have is the fear of loneliness. But the suffering of loneliness can definitely be eliminated, because through regular meditation, there is always that source of joy and a real sense of companionship within oneself; it is always at one's disposal. Thus that dreaded suffering of loneliness can definitely be eliminated in old age.

Having explained some of the benefits of meditation, it would now be appropriate to actually apply the technique now. As mentioned previously, we adjust our physical posture, sitting comfortably upright. The reason why I emphasise a comfortable position is that the traditional instructions in the teachings indicate the meditation posture one should adopt is the seven-point Buddha Vairochana meditation posture. But after the teachings explain that, they add that one can assume any comfortable position as long as one is sitting upright, with a straight back. Thus we can adopt the most appropriate, comfortable posture for ourselves individually.

Similarly, we must attune our mind to be free of distractions. Thus we make the commitment that "For the duration of my meditation now, I will not allow my mind to be influenced by external distractions, but bring my focus inward, and keep it completely, one hundred percent focused inward". The main point of the meditation is to have a mind free of distractions. The characteristic nature of the mind is that if it doesn't have something to focus on, otherwise it cannot remain still. Thus for the purpose of anchoring our mind, we need to settle it on something either positive or neutral. Here the object we choose is our breath. As we withdraw our mind inward, we keep our attention and focus on the breath, which will anchor the mind from being swept along by other thoughts and distractions. Thus we will keep our focus on the breath for the next few minutes. *(Pause for meditation)*

That is sufficient for now. We seem to have already used up most of the time of this session. However if anyone has a good question, raise your hand.

Question: Is reading or doing artwork, does that complement our meditation?

Response: It seems that particularly when you are doing artwork, you have to be quite focused on what one is drawing. This seems to really contribute to our ability to be able to focus. So it can help our meditation practice. Even if

drawing may not be considered as meditation as such, I personally advise individuals who are not yet familiar with the practice of meditation that doing some drawing would be good, because it will at least help the mind to be a little less distracted and a little bit more focused. That in itself would bring some relief from the turmoil that goes on in the mind.

I also mentioned on another occasion that, for example, if you are watching a good cartoon it can be quite fascinating when one just focuses on the details of the cartoon and how they are made so cleverly! That helps the mind to become a little calmer; a cartoon that does not have much violence can help the mind to become quite calm. One is able to get relief from strong emotions such as anger or jealousy while watching a nice cartoon. That can definitely help the mind to be relieved from its usual turmoil, as I mentioned previously.

Small children seem to really be able to give their full focus and be oblivious to everything else when they watch cartoons. You can see some children in front of the television fixated on the drawings and so forth. In comparison, our mind is normally distracted and scattered in all directions. Maybe when it focused on one thing, such as the drawing in the cartoons on the television, it is in a relatively better state than the mind distracted at large.

Indeed there are some who say that one can get quite involved focusing on a television program! Whether that causes emotions such as anger or jealousy to arise, I'm not too sure, but nevertheless they seem to be quite focused on that program. There was someone, I've forgotten who she was, who used to say, "Don't disturb me while I'm watching the television", because as soon as she heard someone's voice she got distracted. She commented "Don't distract me while I'm watching the show on the television, because I lose the sense of engagement in what I'm watching". So particularly in relation to some sort of historical program or a program with a complex story behind it, focusing on that story and following that in detail seems to keep the mind quite focused, and one seems to gain some understanding just by focusing on that.

Before we conclude for the evening, we will spend another few minutes in meditation. This time, as we bring our focus inward and free the mind from the distractions, we keep our attention focused on the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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