
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual we can spend sometime in meditation. In order to engage in meditation we need to first adopt a relaxed posture. As we adopt an appropriate upright posture, it is also important to set our mind in the correct direction. The correct mental state is a positive motivation or a positive attitude.

Having adopted the appropriate posture and set a positive motivation or intention for the meditation practice, one may then question whether that, in itself, is sufficient. What more do we need to do? Of course that it is not to say that sitting in an appropriate posture and having a good intention in one's mind is not a positive thing in itself. However that doesn't seem to be sufficient as a complete practice. If we consider our practice, or whatever we do, it falls into two main stages. There are the actual thoughts and then the actions that are carried out with those intentions.

Any action is preceded by a mental intention. Setting the mental intention to do something, whatever it is that we need to accomplish, is obviously not sufficient in itself. We need to carry out actions in order to accomplish what we have set out to do. Thus whatever we wish to achieve, whether in the spiritual field of Dharma practice or even in ordinary engagements, falls into those two categories; intentions and the actions that follow.

Whether an action is positive or not depends on the preceding intention. If the intention is positive then the following actions will be positive actions. If the intention is negative to begin with then the following actions are more likely to be negative as well. The consequences or the results of the actions will also follow suit.

To use simple language to explain our situation, if we were to ask ourselves what is that we wish to really achieve, it can be simply put as, 'we wish to achieve happiness or a joyous state of mind'. That is what we wish for. As we strive for happiness we try to avoid unpleasantness or suffering that opposes happiness. Whatever activities we undertake are intended to achieve some level of happiness and fulfilment and to remove some level of discomfort.

Whether it is conscious or not, our intention is to gain happiness. If it were the case that whatever activities we engage in actually bring about genuine happiness then, of course, it is fine to engage in whatever we fancy. But we find, more often than not, that we don't achieve the intended goals for ourselves.

When we look into the predicament of our lives we find that we strive to gain some happiness and work towards achieving that, but never seem to gain real happiness. We

engage in many different kinds of activities and we put a lot of effort into gaining happiness. Even though we may achieve some level of happiness we are never really content and strive for more. Even what we have achieved doesn't seem to really satisfy us. This seems to lead to more anxiety and a lot of physical and mental problems follow from that.

When we look into the world from this point of view we can safely assume that this is the case for everyone, irrespective of their knowledge, whether someone has a high status and is renowned or not, whether one is wealthy or poor and so on. We all equally strive to gain happiness and some contentment. This is the same situation for everyone. We strive to achieve the goal of happiness by putting in a lot of effort but it seems that when we don't obtain what we seek that brings a lot of distress to the mind. We feel hopeless and so forth.

This is only evident if we really pay attention to our own situation in life with a relaxed state of mind. When we are overly excited and engaged in frivolous activities this might not be very obvious to us. However, if we were to take the time to just settle ourselves down and try to think about our situation it becomes quite evident that the reality is that we have spent a lot of time and energy, and put a lot of effort in one's life so far, but have not reached the state where we are completely satisfied, content and happy. That situation would be very clear to us.

Just reflecting upon this reality becomes a turning point for many to become an earnest spiritual seeker, or an earnest Dharma practitioner, as we say in Buddhism. It is when one really considers one's predicament that one becomes keen in following a spiritual path. When one comes to this situation and sees one's predicament in this way, it slowly becomes quite obvious that unless one changes one's attitude and attempts a different way of pursuing happiness one will not solve one's problem.

Earnestly wanting to change one's pursuits becomes evident when one realises that no matter how often one has had good times it has not brought about a real sense of contentment and happiness in one's mind. Rather than bringing about some sense of contentment and happiness there is an unsettled feeling within oneself. If the earlier pursuits have not helped in anyway to settle one's innermost being and make one settled and peaceful then that becomes enough reason to want to change one's pursuits. That lack of happiness within oneself, in one's most innermost being, becomes one's impetus for wanting to change.

Knowing our earlier attempts to achieve happiness have not worked is something that comes from one's own experience. As one experiences the lack of inner joy and happiness within and understands that all the attempts one has made earlier have not worked in bringing about happiness within oneself then, at the point, one begins to realise the attempts one has previously made have mostly been attempts to gain happiness through external means and factors. Thus it becomes evident that the change one needs to adopt is that the happiness one wishes to achieve cannot be satisfied through external means and factors, but instead from an internal pursuit of changing

one's attitudes and state of mind. One realises that the resources or means to gain inner happiness and peace lie within oneself rather than in external factors.

One of the factors that may cause distress and unhappiness could be our relationships with others. When we don't have a good relationship with others it can cause distress and unhappiness. Other factors that can cause distress and unhappiness within oneself could be negative mental attitudes, or what we call delusions, such as jealousy. When strong jealousy arises it can disturb the peace and happiness within oneself. There are times when strong attachments or desire can disturb our state of mind. Likewise anger and pride can disturb our state of mind. These are states of mind that can disrupt and disturb the sense of equilibrium, or peace, within oneself.

As each of the negative states of mind arises we need to tackle that particular negative state of mind to overcome it. For example, when someone is affected by jealousy it causes distress in the mind. Because the immediate cause for distress and feeling unsettled is the mental attitude of jealousy, what needs to be done in is to try to overcome and oppose the jealousy within oneself. Adopting certain attitudes, to overcome the jealousy within oneself will immediately help this distress or agitation in the mind to subside.

It is appropriate to address jealousy at this time as a particular negative state of mind to deal with, for we may be experiencing jealousy soon when we have our Christmas gathering with our families. Christmas lunches apparently seem to be a time where jealousy can arise quite strongly. As it is very difficult to overcome negative states of mind in the actual moment when they arise, the way to tackle this is to prepare beforehand. Prepare ourselves for the time when we have our gathering with the family and jealousy is very likely to arise. If we can prepare ourselves not to be carried away with jealousy it will help us to face it at the time. The effective means to overcome the negative states of mind such as jealousy is to engage in the practice of meditation. The particular meditation practice that opposes jealousy is generating a sense of joy in one's mind.

Jealousy is a state of mind that arises from not feeling happy about others' success in terms of their beauty, clothes, wealth, their status and so forth. Not being happy about others' achievements is what causes distress in one's mind. This is a form of jealousy. To overcome that state of mind or attitude we can prepare ourselves to rejoice in the achievements others. If others are beautiful, rejoice in the fact that they are beautiful. If others are wearing nice clothes and well dressed, rejoice in the fact that they dressed well. If others are more intelligent or are better off in their work situation, then feel happy about it. Rejoice in the fact and feel happy for them.

Think to oneself, 'It is great that they are doing well. It is great that they are beautiful.' and so forth. When one adopts the state of mind of feeling happy for them and rejoicing in their goodness that in turn brings the joy and happy state of mind within oneself. That opposes the feeling of unhappiness. In rejoicing one can of course be inspired to achieve that status as well. To feel inspired to

achieve that state if fine, but to feel unhappy causes one's distress. So to rejoice in that way is how one can tackle that state of mind.

As opposed to rejoicing, feeling jealous and unhappy about others doing well in whatever their field is doesn't help us in anyway. If feeling jealous actually helped us in any way, we could say that it is worthwhile to feel jealous. But it is clear that feeling jealous of others is not worthwhile in any way. As mentioned previously, it causes distress and unhappiness.

If one can oppose the negative state of mind of jealousy, and replace it with feeling happy and joyful about others good fortune then, because of that attitude, one would naturally feel close to them and feel comfortable to be with them. Thus sharing a meal together would be a joyful occasion. Because of one's joyfulness the other would naturally respond in a positive way too. Others will feel comfortable around one and, in that way, it can really be a very joyful time.

Our predicament is that as ordinary people it is really difficult to associate with others if one is not careful with one's own attitudes. It is as the great master Shantideva has mentioned in his great work *The Bodhisattvas' Way of Life*, 'Ordinary people are so hard to please; the slightest criticism makes them feel angry and the slightest praise makes them feel puffed up with pride'. He was pointing out that as ordinary folk we are prone to feeling either pride when coming into contact with those who seem inferior to oneself, or developing jealousy when one comes into contact with those who seem superior to oneself or feeling a sense of competitiveness with those who seem equal to one.

This is always the situation. When we compare ourselves with others we feel jealousy towards those who seem to be better off than ourselves, pride in regard to those who seem inferior to oneself or a sense of competitiveness with those who are considered equal to oneself. All of these states of mind are a cause for distress and unhappiness. As mentioned previously, jealousy can make us feel distress. We can consider how pride affects one's situation.

Pride occurs where one feels superior and looks down upon others. When there is an attitude of putting others down then naturally it creates a distance between oneself and the other that one is putting down. Because of that distance one cannot really associate with those who seem to be inferior to oneself. Then, naturally, those whom one considers as inferior will sense our pride and be distant in relating to us too.

Pride is something that even in worldly terms is considered not to be very healthy. Often we talk about someone as very proud and snobbish. That is not considered a virtue. It is hard to relate to people who seem to be very proud. In that way, we can see we definitely need to overcome that state of mind.

We can go back to the earlier point of how we seem to lack a sense of real joy and happiness within one's inner being, within oneself. Now if we can relate this to these negative states of mind being prevalent within oneself then that would be the reason why we lack a sense of real

joy and happiness. If these negative states of mind are constantly manifest within our states of mind then it is, as His Holiness the Dalai Lama mentions, 'when the mind is filled or covered with these different opposing negative states of mind, having a real peaceful and happy state of mind is impossible'. What he is pointing out is that in order to gain some real joy and happiness one needs to settle these negative states of mind.

In this way it becomes very clear that, unless and until we actually make an attempt to reduce these negative states of mind within oneself, a real sense of joy and happiness is quite impossible. This is the point where it becomes clear that meditation practice is essential because meditation practice is basically methods or techniques of applying antidotes that oppose negative states of mind. That is what the various meditation techniques involve. Thus one can resolve upon the need to engage in the practice of meditation.

As we attempt to adopt the meditation technique we need try to acknowledge to ourselves what is the most predominant, strongest, emotion at that particular time and try to deal with that. We need to try to oppose that and apply antidotes for overcoming that particular negative state of mind. When we overcome that then we can deal with other, subtler, negative states of mind as well. This is how we need to pursue a meditation practice.

The meditation practice that we adopt for our practice here is focusing on our breath. This particular technique, of choosing the breath as an object to focus on and just keeping our full attention and focus on the breath, is said to be very effective in reducing agitation in the mind. It reduces or subdues the very discursive, very excited state of mind filled with conceptual thoughts. Though this technique may not completely overcome the discursive state of mind to the point it is completely at peace it nevertheless reduces a very agitated and excited state of mind. Reducing that, bringing the mind to a calmer state, actually helps the mind to be more focussed in general. It is said to be a most effective meditation to begin with.

This technique seems to be a very effective practice, especially for beginners, because when our mind is already very agitated and excited it is very difficult to try to adopt the meditation technique as an antidote to overcome a particular delusion. So, initially, this technique calms our mind so it can focus and we can use it for other meditational practice. Thus this technique of focusing on the breath is very effective.

To actually experience the positive effect of this technique we need to take to heart and implement the technique in its entirety. We need to be committed. What we need to commit to first of all is to remind ourselves we need to engage in this meditation practice to bring about the positive effect for oneself. First of all we withdraw our mind from all other preoccupations, all thoughts, ideas, plans and so forth. We completely withdraw from all external and internal distractions and bring our mind inward. Having brought our focus inward we bring our attention to our breathing and maintain full attention and focus upon the breath itself. As we do this very sincerely we will experience the positive effects of the mind being

settled and calm which brings a sense of joy to the mind as well. So for the next few minutes we bring our full attention and focus to our breath and maintain that. (*Pause for meditation*).

As we have attempted now, it would be good for everyone to try to implement some meditation practice in their life. If one can maintain and continue a meditation practice there will definitely be a benefit for oneself. The practical benefit is that by attempting to meditate in this way it may help to settle lots of disturbance in the mind. When the disturbed mind is settled then, to a certain degree, it naturally becomes clearer and more focussed. When the mind is clear and focussed and this is combined with a sense of joy in one's mind then the intelligence or the wisdom in the mind also naturally increases.

If one has a settled and calm mind with a sense of joy one will be kind and help others in a natural, spontaneous way. Also when one has a settled and calm mind one's behaviour would naturally be appropriate at all three levels, mentally, verbally and physically. Manners will be appropriate and in accordance with others wishes and this will make others naturally appreciate you. One would be considered a person with good manners. A person who is considered an honest person is naturally a person who can be of service to others.

When we extend our service to help and benefit others, the natural result would be that others would start to appreciate and like one. Now if we were to help and benefit others but they shy away and completely disregard our help and don't like us at all we may say that this is a waste, 'There is not much point. One completely loses out.' But that is not the case. Statistically, when you offer genuine help and consideration to others then others will naturally like you and appreciate you. There is a mutual benefit for one self, too. We will have more companions and friendships. One's connection with others would be more stable and firm and the outcome of all of that is that one naturally becomes happier.

As one's mind becomes naturally happier, that will have a positive effect on one's health as well. One's health will be improved. So, we will have a happy mind and good health. What more could we wish for!? As far as this life is considered, we couldn't achieve anything better. If we have a sound mind and body that is what we need to achieve. We will have better sleep, and will enjoy our meals better. Also, when one converses with others, one will have pleasant speech that others appreciate.

It is important that we take care of ourselves in a holistic way, which involves developing the right and positive attitudes in one's life. That, as mentioned previously, is where the practice of meditation helps to bring this about. What we really need to consider is how what one wishes to achieve for one self, is a happy mind and a good healthy body. A happy mind is dependent on developing positive attitudes within oneself. This is where the practice of meditation becomes essential. In our current situation we don't lack the conditions for good physical health. The good food that we have combined with good external conditions can help strengthen the inner conditions for our happiness. When those two are

combined together and we have a happy mind we can relate to others in more effective and positive way that will then naturally have a positive effect upon others. In this way the situation is one of mutual benefit.

To summarise the essential point of meditation. The technique of meditation involves acquainting ourselves with positive states of mind by recognising the factors that oppose negative states of mind, and making every attempt not to be influenced or swayed by the negative states of mind, and familiarising ourselves more and more with the positive states of mind. This, in turn, brings about calmness and joyfulness within one's mind. That is achieved through the practice of meditation.

The purpose of meditation is to acquaint us with virtue or a positive state of mind. That is what meditation is. As we train ourselves in the practice of meditation that naturally has a good effect on our health. So by protecting our mind we also protect our body, our health. Thus there is a two-fold benefit of meditation. We can say the meditation practice serves its purpose in entirety for our overall well-being. That is why we need to consider the practice.

Being the last Wednesday evening session for the year, I would like to mention that from my side I began the year leading these classes with a positive motivation and a good attitude. Likewise you have attended very diligently and come to the classes very well. I would like to thank everyone for that. As I have mentioned on previous occasions, even though my physical body is up high on the throne, in terms of attitude I feel I am down where you are. It is as if you are actually up and I am below and trying to assist you in that way. That is my attitude. My motivation for providing the teachings and advising you is to be some benefit for you. I have no other intention or motive than that. I constantly think about how best I can share my advice and how the teachings can be of service and help you in your lives. If we were to use the analogy of a meal, I try to pick out the most delicious and most nutritious meal I can to serve to others that can be satisfying for them. That is the attitude that I have.

I wish to thank you again for your kindness. Thank you very much. Of course I need to reflect upon the conditions that we have which are due to Tara Institute providing these facilities. I would like to thank the Institute as well. This is definitely a great facility that we have, just in the fact that we can gather here.

There is definitely a mutual benefit to these classes. I consider these classes are beneficial for myself and as I notice others benefiting there is no doubt that this is something worthwhile. What we are doing here is something of benefit and worthwhile. We gather to share the Buddha's teaching. The ability that we have to do this is due to the facilities we have at the centre which, in turn, are due to the kindness of the members, who contribute regularly, as well as others who have given donations for the upkeep and running of the center. It is really worth considering that we can have these teachings conducted on a free basis. There is no charge for people to come and afterwards we can also enjoy tea and cookies. All of this is due to the kindness of the supporters; the members and as well as other contributors.

It would be good that the members and other supporters who may not be here are also notified that their contributions have not gone to waste. It goes to a worthy cause. It is good for us to be thankful and also for the donors to rejoice in their worthy contributions. It is not easy for the situation we have here to come about in the west. Usually there is a charge for each individual for any other gathering or service. For us to have these facilities to enjoy is really noteworthy. Just to take one small example. Usually we have to pay three or four dollars to have a cup of tea outside (*laughter*). Today was maybe my first experience of being charged only two dollars for a cup of tea at one restaurant, (*laughter*). The chocolate milkshake is usually four dollars. In this restaurant it was only two dollars (*laughter*).

I also regularly mention that besides the good intention that I carry in imparting the advice and teachings that I share with you there is nothing else I can divide amongst you. It is not as if I can divide something tangible among you to take with you. But it seems that there are definitely those who benefit from the good intention with which I impart the teachings and give advice. It seems, as I regularly emphasise, that when there is a good intention from both sides, the speaker as well as the listener, that combination of the good intention from both sides brings about a good result. That gives me encouragement to continue and joyfully partake in giving and sharing whatever I can.

Thus, with these sort of intentions, I would again like to say on a parting note, 'Thank you' and to wish you well during this time and for us to meet again in the next year and to be able to have this opportunity to gather again. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to everyone. I already mentioned earlier how to prepare yourself for your family gatherings and Christmas to maintain a happy mind, joyful mind, so just keep that advice in mind as well.

Before we conclude for the evening we can spend a few more moments in meditation, this time focusing on Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. Just focus on the sound while it is being recited.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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