
The Condensed Lam Rim

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We will spend some time in meditation, so sit in a comfortable, relaxed posture. Likewise, try to have a clear and bright mind. The combination of a relaxed posture plus a clear and bright mind will help us to have a good meditation session. This also applies to whatever activity we do. Before doing any activity, if the mind is in a clear and bright state, then that clarity of mind will help us to perform the activity in a meaningful way. Furthermore, within a clear and bright mind, the mind is able to relax and become calm, which has a positive effect on our physical health as well. This clearly shows that there is a close connection between the physical body and the mind.

We can also see that when the mind is agitated and troubled, this results in erratic physical behaviour, which leads to poor health. Again, this is because there is a close connection between the physical body and the mind. When the mind is agitated and disturbed, the energy of the four elements within the body is disrupted. The balance of the four elements are said to maintain good health in the body, so when these elements are in harmony then we have good health. But when the four elements in the body are unbalanced and disturbed, then that is what causes us ill health.

So if the mind is tense and not relaxed, then this causes our muscles to tense up. This is when we usually need to go and see a masseur and get a good rub on the back, and sometimes even quite severe rubbing is required to release the tension.

This is all relevant because no matter what field we may be working in, we all strive towards physical and mental wellbeing. Whatever we do, our ultimate purpose is to try to achieve physical and mental wellbeing. Of course we could say that our aim is to avoid enemies and try to accumulate as many friends as possible, but again, even when you look into doing that, it really all boils down to having the twofold wellbeing - physical and mental wellbeing.

Even if we engage in the difficult activity of trying to defeat an enemy and trying to appease our friends, again if we look into the ultimate motive of why we are doing that, then it is to gain some wellbeing and some happiness for ourselves.

Within this twofold wellbeing, we are already skilled and accomplished in achieving our physical wellbeing. When we look at the scientific and material progress in the world, it is mainly geared towards bringing about our physical wellbeing.

In other words we are not deprived of the external conditions for our physical wellbeing; in fact we have large and sufficient resources. However, we may still feel not completely content and happy; we may feel there is something missing, a sense of being empty within ourselves. This indicates that while we may have the conditions for our physical wellbeing, this in itself is not sufficient for our overall wellbeing, in particular our mental wellbeing. This is something which is missing for us. In order to bring about a real sense of happiness, joy and contentment, there is something missing.

Now in my observation - this is just my opinion and observation, but again you can think about it and verify for yourself if this is true or not - I feel that when there is plenty and even more than adequate physical resources for our physical wellbeing, there is still a sense of something missing and we are not fully content in our mind. I feel that if we reach this point, then we face great danger.

This great danger I refer to involves abusing our physical wellbeing when we seek out ways to try to feel content and happy. If our external conditions are all adequate, and we have plenty of resources, but still feel a sense of discontentment and dissatisfaction within our own mind, then we start to become restless and feel desperate to try to find something to make us feel happy. However, because external resources do not bring us a real sense of satisfaction and contentment, then we become desperate to find some satisfaction - and this is where the danger lies.

When people do not have the proper method or technique of bringing about inner happiness, then they are likely to rely on using substances such as drugs that bring about some sort of temporary pleasure, of feeling elated. This is when they start abusing themselves and their bodies by using substances like drugs or alcohol. These substances seem to bring a temporary sense of pleasure and sense of happiness in the mind. However, as we know, that does not solve the problem; people become even more agitated and more confused and frustrated down the line. They become dependent on these substances and it takes a toll on their health, in fact their health can be destroyed to the point where they can die. These things happen, and this is the reality of these situations.

Because some people are so desperate to find a way to feel satisfied and be content, and because they lack any understanding of how to do this, they fall victim to these substances. For people who have money, they use their external resources to buy alcohol or drugs. But even those who are poor, because they are unhappy they might still try to get the money in some way that causes a lot of problems, not only in their personal life but also in their family, workplace, and the surrounding community. Problems within the family could include creating a lot of arguments, abusing the children, the wife, the husband or the neighbours; the whole community becomes disrupted. I personally feel that people go out of their way, out of desperation, to use these substances because they don't have enough knowledge about the techniques

needed to bring about a true sense of satisfaction and happiness in the mind.

If we are feeling dissatisfied and discontented, then we can use that opportunity to really investigate and question what could be causing that. We could ask ourselves: 'despite having enough external resources, why do I feel that way?' This investigation can become very meaningful.

If we do take up this self-analysis and investigation in an honest way and truly look into ourselves and find the causes of our mental problems, then it will slowly dawn upon us that the real cause for all the disturbances in our mind, the dissatisfaction, lack of joy and happiness within us, comes from our unsubdued mind. This is a mind that is an untamed, which is filled with negative attitudes. This mind is constantly obsessed with oneself. Engaging in negative states of mind leads to an unsubdued or untamed mind, which is the real cause for all our problems.

We will also come to realise that a completely distracted mind is also the cause for our problems. A distracted mind is a mind that constantly focuses outwards onto material things; it constantly seeks pleasure in material things. It does not have any inward focus or attention.

Through this analysis, we realise and accept that it is an untamed and distracted mind which causes all the disturbances within us. At this point we have taken a significant step in our own spiritual progress or transformation. This is because we naturally question whether there is any technique that can tame and subdue the mind.

At this stage, because we are doing an honest self analysis and investigation with a sense of personal responsibility, then we will come to a point of accepting that meditation might be one of the techniques that can help us. Many people talk about meditation; you hear a lot about meditation, and its benefits. When we think about it, engaging in meditation could be a means to subdue and tame our own mind.

When we sincerely wish to try meditation, then with the proper technique there can be great progress and benefit. An appropriate meditation technique has the most benefit when a person who has previously entertained themselves with the distractions and the sensual pleasures of life, realises that this does not bring about satisfaction. Someone who has spent a lot of time and energy trying to find true happiness and joy from external things, and does not find it, has reached a certain stage where they have some distaste for external pleasures and joys. Through analysis, they've come to a point where they feel that they really won't be getting any real lasting happiness from the pursuit or external pleasures.

When we sincerely want to try the appropriate meditation technique and try to really apply it in our life, then we will begin to experience some of the positive effects of meditation. We will notice the mind settling and calming down. The Buddha says that a subdued mind is a happy mind and an unsubdued mind is a troubled mind. When the mind is not subdued, and is affected by

distractions and is full of negative attitudes, then it is a troubled mind. The opposite is true for a calm and inwardly focussed mind. This type of mind doesn't give in to distractions, and naturally becomes more settled as the mind becomes more subdued. By not giving in and not being influenced by negative attitudes, the mind becomes truly joyful and happy.

In applying the appropriate meditation technique, we need to be clear from the very start that the technique involves a commitment to be fully mindful and aware of our focus on the chosen object. With a sense of personal responsibility and commitment, we then focus on the object one hundred per cent. This complete focus on the object naturally distances our mind from all internal and external distractions; the mind naturally becomes more tranquil, more calm and we begin to experience a true sense of wellbeing. Of course, if this practice is not maintained then it does not bring much of a lasting result. The way to maintain a practice is to apply meditation in our daily life, even if it is just for a few minutes. If we can really commit ourselves on a daily basis to devote few minutes of our busy life to just focus and do some meditation, then I feel that it will be definitely a great help in life, and will bring about a positive result in the long run. It is good to be clear about actual technique itself and the commitment involved.

Meditating is the simple act of committing ourselves to keep our attention focussed inwards. This is the tool to bring about some benefits and really positive transformations within ourselves. Whether we use those tools or not, whether we use that information or not is of course up to us individually, but at least we have those tools.

When you meditate, sit in an upright, comfortable position, and remind yourself of your mental commitment. Then devote yourself to completely focusing your mind on the chosen object, which in this case is our own breath. Focus on the natural inflow and outflow of the breath, keep your full attention and focus just on the breath itself. Even though thoughts and ideas may pop into our mind, we don't allow our mind to just follow those thoughts and other distractions. Instead, we constantly bring focus and attention back on the breath and try to maintain it for as long as we can.

[meditation for about 5 minutes]

If you can actually try similar meditation to the one we just did in your daily life, even for a short time on a regular basis, then this will help you to calm down and settle your mind.

Familiarity with the meditation practice helps us when we get disturbed or agitated. This familiarity means that we are able to switch on a warning signal and say, 'oh, this is a dangerous state to be in. If I am not careful, this can lead to disaster. The way to appease my highly distracted and agitated mind is to apply some of the meditation techniques that I am familiar with'. We can rely on an inner resource – meditation - to help calm our mind.

We should not ever underestimate the value of even a five minute meditation. It is very easy for us

underestimate it by thinking, 'well, what's the big deal about that, after all it's just a short time, how much can it really help to change my life or benefit me?' Now think about it in a more specific way, analyse this further. If we are given a choice to be completely disturbed and agitated for an hour, or spend five minutes with a calm mind within an hour, wouldn't we opt for the five minutes of being calm? Five minutes of sanity, clarity and a calm state of mind. Isn't that worthwhile from an hour, rather than having a full hour of complete disturbance? From a practical point of view, five minutes meditation gives us a tremendous relief from an otherwise busy and chaotic mind, from a neurotic mind. The positive effect we gain from that five minutes has a deeper significance in our life. If we train our mind even for five minutes, spending just five minutes in meditation, then that familiarity can slowly increase the duration of feeling calm and sane. This can eventually be increased to ten or fifteen minutes, and eventually you can spend the whole hour being peaceful and joyful and happy, which is a great achievement. But to reach that goal we need to begin somewhere, even if it is a five minute meditation. We can see the great significance of even a short meditation, how in the scheme of things it has a deep significance and is meaningful. So we should not underestimate the practice of meditation.

When we use an appropriate meditation technique, then even five minutes meditation is establishing a firm basis to begin to really unravel our mind from a chaotic, neurotic state. Our state of mind has certain patterns that we keep maintaining. We may experience some kind of psychological difficulties and problems, feeling hurt or whatever it may be. When we look into it, we find that the same story is going around again and again in our mind day after day, week after week, and year after year. We find there are certain things that seem to trigger something within us, and it is as if we are obsessed with it, we keep going around with it, we don't want to let go of whatever it may be that triggers us to feel hurt. This trigger may be something from the past, but we keep it present and alive in our mind by constantly going over it again and again. This is what is referred to as being neurotic. The meditation technique gives us a breather, it distances us from the cause that disturbs us. We recognise it for what it is, that is, nothing more than just something conjured by the mind. Meditation also distances us from that vicious circle of continuously going over and over a story in our minds.

The more we meditate, the more we become more familiar with it, and it brings a real sense of joy and happiness in our mind. Meditation will benefit us, regardless of whether there is a future life or not, whether we are religious or not, or whether we believe in an after life or not. Leaving aside the benefits meditation can bring for our future life, even now, in our present life, there isn't anyone who wouldn't want to have a happy moment, or a happy state of mind, and meditation can bring about a genuine state of happy mind in this life.

It is essential for all of us to have a clear state of mind. A clear mind accompanied with a joyous and happy mind is something that we all have a right to experience. There is a technique, there is a method, and we can achieve that

state. So it is worthwhile that we put some effort in trying to achieve that.

The formal subject matter that we are studying is *The Graduated Path to Enlightenment*. At the end of last year, we were up to identifying the possibility of achieving a state called 'liberation', which is being completely free from this vicious cycle of that we call 'cyclic existence'. The teachings explained what kind of person can achieve liberation, then explained a human rebirth with the eight freedoms and ten endowments. Someone who has these conditions is the type of person who can achieve liberation. Then the teachings introduced what path is to be followed so we can actually achieve liberation. This is where we are at in the topic.

The way the teaching is set out is a way to increase and use our intelligence, so we analyse and think about it. When liberation is first explained, that already makes us think about what liberation is and how is it possible. And then naturally we ask who can achieve liberation? The next topic is presenting the vessel, that is, the type of person who has the conditions to achieve liberation. Then having answered that, we will then ask 'what is the technique?' and 'how do we actually achieve liberation?' The next topic is the actual path, where the teaching introduces the path.

The meditation procedure that I follow regularly in the Wednesday teachings is something that many people seem to appreciate; somehow it relates to their life. Many people have made positive comments about introducing meditation into their lives. They say it is like a medicine; even getting it once a week seems to really help them to cope with the rest of the week. Because so many people make personal comments about how beneficial meditation is for them, I feel it is worthwhile to spend some time in introducing a meditation technique and explaining it further.

Even if we can spend an hour in one day where we feel genuinely physically and mentally relaxed, then it is worthwhile. In the course of our busy life and busy day, if we have even one hour where we can feel genuinely relaxed, then it is worthwhile spending the time and energy to meditate.

To conclude for the evening, just spend a few minutes in meditation again. This time, as we bring our focus inwards, place our attention upon the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. Just keep your attention on the sound.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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