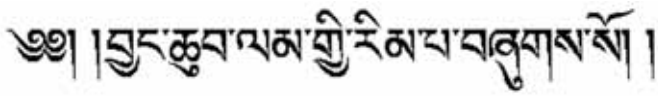

The Condensed Lam Rim



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As usual we will spend some time in meditation. To meditate we first need to adopt a comfortable, relaxed, physical posture. Secondly we need to ensure that we have a clear and bright state of mind.

As I regularly explain, the purpose of meditation can be summarised as a means for achieving physical and mental happiness. If we look into what it is that we are really striving towards in whatever we do, our ultimate goal is to gain some happiness. The happiness that we experience can only be on two levels, the physical level and the mental level. That, in fact, means that whatever we do needs to be directed towards that aim of gaining some physical and mental well-being, which is actually mental and physical happiness.

Within the two, physical and mental, our primary concern is for mental happiness because that is what really contributes to our ultimate well-being. The reason why mental well-being or happiness is of primary importance can be attested to the by fact that when someone experiences some discomfort on the physical level then happiness on the mental level that can override or help them endure suffering at the physical level. It is not the case that when one obtains a certain level of mental of happiness that there will be no physical suffering or pain, but one will be able to endure that more easily and accept it more willingly.

Whilst it is a fact that when one has achieved a certain level of mental happiness it can override physical pain and one is be able to endure that and it does not disturb one, the reverse is not true. If one has gained a certain amount of physical happiness that does not necessarily contribute to mental happiness. Having achieved a certain amount of physical well-being does not necessarily override mental unhappiness or pain. If physical well-being and happiness could override mental pain, we would safely assume that someone who has tremendous conditions for physical happiness and well-being, such as wealth, would not experience any kind of mental agony and pain. Yet we know for a fact that is not true.

When one comes to acknowledge this as a fact then the question is, 'If mental happiness is of primary importance to our well-being, then how do we gain that? How do we gain that mental happiness? What is it that obstructs mental happiness?' When one begins to acknowledge the fact that one's mental happiness is paramount to one's well-being it is essential to investigate and question for ourselves, 'How do we gain mental happiness?' And, in relation to that, we need to investigate what causes mental distress. 'What is it that disturbs mental

happiness?' The Buddhist teachings explain that one of the causes is discursive thoughts—very hyperactive states of mind that are completely overwhelmed by the distractions. Such a state of mind is what causes the distress and disturbance in our mind. To acknowledge that is already a beginning to transforming our state of mind into becoming more stable and focused.

The process of coming to this conclusion and really investigating one's mind is firstly a process of questioning oneself and acknowledging if it is true that one wishes for well-being and happiness? Then asking what can I attribute my happiness to? First of all one questions how one experiences happiness. Then it becomes quite clear that happiness or well-being is experienced on only two levels; the physical and mental. If we were to take it further and question which of these two is of more importance and more durable, it becomes clear our mental happiness is paramount to our well-being. Then we will willingly wish to investigate how to obtain that happiness. This investigation process itself is, in fact, like a form of meditation as that investigation can bring a sense of relaxation and great purpose. So, to that extent, the investigation and analysis is really quite beneficial as a practice.

When we have reached a point in our investigation of really seriously thinking about what is it that contributes to our mental happiness then, at that stage, if we come across the statement by the Buddha that 'a subdued mind is a happy mind' we can then seriously think, 'what does that mean? What does a subdued mind mean?' If a subdued mind is a happy mind then the contrary to that is also true. An unsubdued, chaotic mind is an unhappy mind. So, one looks into how to bring about a subdued mind for oneself. How do we work towards achieving a subdued mind? That then becomes a serious pursuit.

Now at this stage, when we have acknowledged to ourselves that an unsubdued or unruly mind is a disturbed, unhappy mind and that in order to gain a genuine sense of happiness one needs to have a subdued mind, that naturally leads to the question, 'How do we subdue our mind? Is it possible to subdue one's mind? How do we go about subduing our mind?'

This process of self-analysis is, as mentioned earlier, a great form of meditation practice in itself that brings a sense of calmness. When we have a very chaotic and busy mind any practise that allows one to settle down is an effective practice. This process of analysing one's state of mind, questioning oneself and when one reaches a sufficient answer, going on to the next question about how we develop further, in itself brings about a calm and settled mind. This process of self-analysis is also a means to strengthen or sharpen our intelligence. The investigation itself is a way to increase one's intelligence. One is using one's intelligence and when it is done in this structured way it becomes a means to sharpen one's intelligence.

Now, as to the question of how do we go about subduing our mind; in Buddhist scriptures, and particularly the great Indian master Bhavaviveka in his "*Essence of the Middle Way*", explains that meditation is the optimum way to gain a subdued mind. In his works this great

Indian master gave an analogy of how to apply meditation techniques and how meditation helps to subdue the mind. The analogy or illustration he gave is of a wild elephant that needs to be tamed. A wild elephant roams about and causes havoc. If it is untamed and roams about in the villages it will cause havoc, while a tamed elephant can be utilised to give service.

There is an illustration of the way an elephant tamer actually tames the elephant. In India an elephant tamer first gets the elephant to take a command by using a small hook to poke the elephant and then ties the elephant to a post. Once it has been tied to a post so that it can't roam about then the actual taming is with the hook and so forth. When the tamer has gained some sort of dominance over the elephant and the elephant does not obey the tamer he or she uses the hook to strike it on the ear and the elephant will again start to obey. Later he can give the elephant any task to perform.

This analogy is used to illustrate how, when our mind is unsubdued, it is like a wild elephant. However just like a wild elephant, it can be tamed. This particular analogy is used to illustrate how one's untamed mind is like the wild elephant and the person who possesses the mind (oneself) is the tamer. Just as a tamer would use a hook and a rope to tame a wild elephant, the mental tools that one uses to tame one's mind are called mindfulness and introspection. Like the hook and the rope, mindfulness and introspection are used to tame the mind. Once it is under control then the mind will be able to focus on the chosen object of one's meditation.

When the mind reaches a stage where it is completely focused, paying full attention to a particular object, it is said that one can use one's mind for any virtuous practice. That is the stage where one will have a profound, genuinely controlled mind. The earlier quotation, that a subdued mind is a happy mind, can be applied here too. A controlled mind is a happy mind. The opposite of a controlled mind is an unhappy, chaotic mind. Therefore the technique to bring about genuine control and calmness in one's mind is meditation.

When we apply the meditation technique as a means of controlling or subduing one's mind then, as the great master Bhavaviveka mentions in his work *The Essence of the Middle Way*, it is definitely possible to get a grip on the chaotic, uncontrolled or unruly mind, where it can become a subdued and genuinely calm mind.

When we talk about an uncontrolled mind that is hard to control or subdue, we can relate that to certain individuals who really question whether the mind can ever be really controlled, and whether their problems can be overcome. Some people are so fixated on their own problems, to the extent of being obsessed with them, that they don't allow anyone else to help them because they are so obsessive about their problems and don't even want to share them. When questioned about how they could be helped their response might immediately be, 'How would you know about my problems, my difficulties. You don't know, you have no idea what I am going through. You have no possible way of even beginning to understand and helping me. So just leave me alone.' So they get into a state of being completely

withdrawn within themselves, give up hope and don't see any possibility of others being able to help them. What is happening, in fact, is that they are completely protective of their problems and so obsessed with them that they have a very closed mind. That closed mind is really a mind that is just being completely overwhelmed by their own problems, which starts to eat away at them. Whereas if one can open one's mind and let go those problems the mind becomes an expansive, rather than being a very narrow, withdrawn mind. Contrary to what we may think, a controlled mind is actually a very expansive, relaxed mind. This is understood in the process of practising meditation.

The benefits of gaining an expansive mind are that one will naturally be able to use one's wisdom and intelligence and adopt many different techniques that will help one. Whenever there are problems one will be able to immediately tap into different resources because of one's expansive and open mind. If it is a withdrawn mind, one will be just circling around with one's own problems and not even give oneself the opportunity to look outside to find solutions. Therefore a mind that is expansive and open can lead one to the great benefit of finding many solutions for one's problems.

The main point being emphasised so far is that we all naturally wish for well-being and happiness for ourselves and others. When we look into how we experience happiness and at what level that we experience happiness we find there are only two levels, physical and mental. Likewise, what brings us distress can only be on a physical or a mental level. Thus it is for our own well-being that we take a keen interest in the methods and ways of bringing about genuine happiness; not only on the physical level but primarily on the mental level. In that quest when one comes into contact with the meditation technique, one learns that meditation is a means to withdraw oneself from the disturbances that causes distress in our mind. So what are those disturbances? It is the process whereby we become completely overwhelmed with discursive thoughts. We need to withdraw from discursive thoughts and bring our mind's focus within ourselves.

When we sincerely apply the process of withdrawing our minds from all discursive thoughts or distractions and bringing our focus and attention within we will gain control over our own mind. As mentioned previously, when we gain the control over our mind we are then truly the masters of our own well-being. We need not fall victim to being completely overwhelmed with problems, difficulties and mental agonies because we have control over our own mind. Therefore, this process of gaining control over one's own mind becomes the most beneficial aid or help for one. This is how we need to see the relevance of meditation practice.

So, we are now going to apply the meditation technique. We again adjust our physical posture, feeling relaxed, but primarily having a straight posture. Firstly, the technique involves a genuine commitment that for the next few minutes that one will not allow one's mind to be distracted with all sorts of discursive thoughts and so forth. Rather one brings one's full attention and focus

upon the chosen object that, for the purpose of our meditation now, is our own breath. When we withdraw our mind from all forms of thought and other forms of distractions and bring that focus within oneself we then use that attention that we bring within us to focus on the breath itself.

To maintain a focus on the breath we need to apply the two tools that were mentioned earlier. These are mindfulness and introspection. In the analogy that was given earlier a rope is used to bind or to tie the elephant to a post. Likewise here, mindfulness is used to bind our focus to the meditation object. In other words, we are firmly establishing our attention and focus on the object. It is not as if we think about the object and then let it go and then we think about it again and then let it go. That would not be the proper measure of focusing. Rather we need to apply our mindfulness so that we maintain a constant awareness of the object we are focusing on, which is our breath. We need to really fully aware from the very beginning of what it means to be mindful of the object. It is to have a constant awareness of the object.

It is mentioned that someone who has a good ability to remember would not have much difficulty focusing on the object because mindfulness is related to constant remembering the object. However when we find that, even though we apply the full measure of being focused and mindful of the object, our focus lapses then that which detects one wavering away from the object is introspection. Just as the hook is used in the analogy to poke the elephant to remind it when it is not obeying, likewise introspection is used to remind one to focus on the meditation object. When one notices that one is drifting away from the object it reminds us to bring our focus and attention back again. Then, once our focus is placed on the object, just try to maintain that. This is a measure of how we focus on the object. So, for the next few minutes, we apply this to the best of our ability. We will apply our full commitment to withdrawing our mind from all forms of distractions and placing it on our breath and try to maintain that. (*Pause for meditation.*)

So, as you would have experienced now, there is benefit in meditating isn't there? The way to apply the meditation technique so that it is effective is not to apply it for a long duration. To begin with we just have a short duration on a regular basis. During a short session the primary attempt would be to have a really good focus. That would then bring the benefit of the practice.

We could go through the text because we have gone for a few sessions without reading through it. Nevertheless, if anyone has a good burning question we can also address that. If anyone does have a question, just raise your hand. If there are no specific questions, then we can go through the text.

4.2.2.1.2. The actual way to take the essence

4.2.2.1.2.3. The way to train the mind in the stages of the path of beings of the great scope

4.2.2.1.2.3.2. The actual paths

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2. How to develop an awakening mind

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1. The stages of training the awakening mind

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1. Training the mind in the pith instructions on the six causes and effect, which comes from the lineage traced to the great master Atisha

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2. Extensive explanation

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2. The actual training in the stages

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1. Training the mind to strive for the welfare of others

In our last session we were covering the topic 'The actual training in the stages' of developing the seven cause and effect sequence of developing the awakening mind. 'The actual training in the stages' is divided into two main points; 'Training the mind to strive for the welfare of others' and 'Training the mind to strive for enlightenment'.

The first of these, 'Training the mind to strive for the welfare of others' is subdivided into two 'Establishing the basis for that mind to arise' and 'The actual development of the mind that strives for others' welfare'.

In more lay terms what is called the awakening mind is non other than the state of mind where one has perfected the wish to benefit others. When mentioning a perfected state of mind of wishing to benefit others, it implies the wish to benefit others without any of the stains of . Normally when we express a concern for other's well-being, whether we express it verbally or even when we feel that we have some concern for others, we may initially not really be aware of it, but we might have a biased mind, which means that it is not a genuine, complete concern for the other. Some self-interest is involved in it as well. While one may consider it a thought of concern for others, if it is mixed with an ulterior motive, it is not a genuine wish to benefit others because it is mixed with a self-interest. What is being described here is a procedure for developing a genuine wish to benefit others that is a pure wish, because it is only for the interest of the other. That is the state of mind to be developed. When we think about it, it is an incredible state of mind. It is something that can be developed and these are the methods and techniques to develop that state of mind.

The wish to benefit others is, indeed, a very noble state of mind. The irony of that state of mind is that when it is genuine, even though one may not have self-interest, one naturally gets the benefit oneself. The natural benefit that one gets, to give just an example, is that when one engages in any activity to benefit others, we experience a genuinely joyful mind. When there is no self-interest involved, because it is purely for the benefit of the other, it is a joyful activity. It is not seen as something burdensome or heavy but rather a joyful activity. So we get the immediate benefit of being joyful ourselves when engaging in an activity to benefit others.

Further, and more importantly, once we have completed that activity of benefiting others, at any time later when we remember that activity it brings a great sense of joy and fulfilment within one. One feels good about what one has done; not proud and contemptuous, but a genuine sense of well-being within oneself and the fulfilment of having done something worthwhile that contributed to someone else's well-being. That brings great solace for oneself. So there is joy during the activity and a great

sense of joy and fulfilment at any time later when you recall those good deeds of benefiting others. It brings a great sense of joy and fulfilment rather than a sense of regret and feeling weighed down for having done something bad for others. The mind of having benefitted others only brings a sense of uplifting joy.

On another practical level, if one actually extended a service and benefited others then that would naturally be appreciated by others. Of course there may be cases where others may retaliate and show signs of a lack of appreciation and so forth but that is rare. Normally where one's help and one's sense of benefitting others have been genuine, it is definitely appreciated by most. If one has extended that genuine sense of help to a person then that person has now become one's friend—someone who really likes and appreciate us. If the benefit is extended to two people, we have got two people who really appreciate us, and two genuine companions. When we have true companions and friends, that brings about great joy and solace within.

Now contrary to that, if we have a sense of disagreement or feel uncomfortable with even one person, then whenever we recall or see that person it brings about a sense of unease within us. It is best not to have even one person who causes us distress. Even that is too much. Whereas it is never too much to have people who really appreciate and relate to us in a good way. Therefore, even on a practical level, when one extends from one's own side a genuine sense of caring and the wish to benefit the other, even though one hasn't asked for it and it's not one's intention, one naturally gets the benefit for oneself. Though the wish to benefit others is considered a really noble and worthwhile state of mind, it actually has practical benefits for oneself as well.

This state of mind of wishing to benefit others is not just a noble state of mind that one could just merely wish for. It is, in fact, a state of mind that has to be developed. That is the whole point. Even though right now whenever we feel concern for others we might detect some self-interest, ulterior motive or some sort of agenda in relation to some benefit for oneself, it is possible to replace that. It is possible to develop a pure wish to benefit others that is a genuine wish with no ulterior motive or self-interest involved. That is something that can definitely be developed. We need to aspire towards developing that state of mind. Thinking about this in this in a practical way, would really be a good way for us start to see the sense of what is being presented here.

We can conclude here for the evening. It is best not to rush, but go through the material slowly and steadily. Let us again adopt a meditation practice before we end the session. The meditation practice that we will adopt now will be focussing on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. Again we adjust our posture, withdraw our mind from all forms of distractions and temporarily place our full attention and focus just on the sound that we hear. Then, as the recitation subsides; we maintain the focus for a few moments. In that way it becomes an actual practice of mindfulness.

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