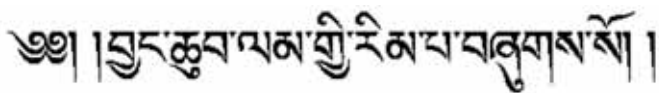

The Condensed Lam Rim



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As usual we can spend some time in meditation. In order to have a good meditation session we first need to adopt a proper posture, which is relaxed, comfortable and upright. Just as we sit in an appropriate physical posture, it is also important to have a clear and bright state of mind. It is good for us to recognise that while we might be physically relaxed our mind might still be in turmoil. Even if we find ourselves physically comfortable and relaxed, if the mind is still filled with a lot of anxiety and a lot of frustrations then that disturbs our calmness and peace. In fact we don't really feel a relaxed, calm and peaceful state of mind.

We also need to recognise that while we might, initially, be disturbed by some external situation, yet even when that is solved and there is nothing immediately happening externally to disturb us, we might find that our mind is still affected by the situation by constantly recalling it. Even when there is nothing happening externally we keep thinking about the situation again and again and that causes us mental angst. If we continuously think about the situation it causes a lot of mental difficulties and problems. On other occasions, where things are not going well externally, we may maintain an inner tranquillity and calmness and our mind may not be disturbed. There are situations like this that it is worthwhile for us to note.

The great Indian master, Shantideva, mentioned in one of his works that it would be quite an impossible feat to vanquish all our external enemies. We would never be able to do that. It is, however, possible for us to vanquish an inner enemy such as anger, which is within our own mind. He further explained that when we conquer an inner enemy, such as anger, it is equivalent to having conquered all external enemies. Naturally, all external enemies will subside. We can apply that thinking to our problems. For us to try to solve all external problems would be quite impossible. Realistically speaking, it is not possible to control all external situations from causing us any problems. However, if we were to have some control and balance within our own mind then that will be equivalent to having solved all external problems, because our mind would not be affected to a great extent. In that sense, it would be similar to solving our external problems.

Shantideva also mentioned in the same work that it would be impossible to try to cover the whole earth with leather to protect one's feet from sharp objects, such as thorns, piercing our feet. That would be quite an impossible for us to do. However, if we were to cover the soles of our feet with leather that would be equivalent to having covered the whole earth with leather because one's feet would be protected from sharp objects such as thorns. This analogy is used to further explain that if we were to subdue our own mind then that would be equivalent to having solved all external problems as well.

These analogies that the great masters give can have a great effect when we contemplate them and think about their meaning. It is not sufficient for us to just leave it as a 'nice example or analogy'. We need to try to implement them in our own life. Indeed, if we don't have control of our own mind then even the slightest thing going wrong externally will have a great effect on our mind and cause us much disturbance. It deprives us of a happy state of mind. Whereas if we apply a certain amount of control in subduing and calming our own mind then, when things don't go well externally, they will not cause us much anguish. It will not affect us to a great degree. So, to that extent, it is good for us to understand these points and try to implement them in our life.

When we understand how problems and difficulties are experienced in relation to the state of our mind, it becomes apparent that whether we interpret something as a problem or not is very much dependent on the way we look at and think about it. It is mainly our attitude towards it. Therefore, when we carry a certain kind of attitude everything appears to be a problem. Whereas if we have a more positive attitude then even when there is some difficult situation it will not appear to us, or affect us, as a big problem. When we detect that we carry certain negative attitudes that give rise to problems and unnecessary difficulties we need to commit to ourselves to change that attitude. If we don't apply measures and change our attitude then the situation will not change. It is as simple as that. If things being problematic is dependent on our attitude, and we can see that then, unless and until we change our attitude the problem will not be solved. There will be no opportunity for us to have a real sense of tranquillity in our mind.

It is worthwhile for us to consider how our mind works. There are often times when we hold onto ridiculous and unrealistic ideas and try to achieve something that is beyond our capabilities. You might daydream that it will be wonderful to achieve certain things in life but if they are practically beyond one's capacity we could then worry because we are not able to achieve it. We need to have a realistic approach as to what we can achieve in our life and stick to that realistic approach. The other extreme is where we feel completely despondent and think we are not able to achieve anything. That, again, is not based on reality. We do have potential and we need to connect with our own inner potential to be able to achieve certain things that are within our capacity and encourage ourselves to engage in those things that we are capable of achieving.

Having recognised that we have a lot of unnecessary worries and problems in life that are caused by discursive and superstitious thoughts within us, if we wish to overcome those thoughts, then we need to make a commitment to ourselves such as, 'I need to apply whatever measures possible to overcome such superstitious states of mind and have a more realistic state of mind within myself'.

For us, at a beginner's level, the best technique to overcome such discursive, superstitious thoughts within one's mind is the practice of meditation. (Beginners are those who are affected by lots of discursive, superstitious thoughts.) One of the most suitable objects that we can focus on in our meditation is own breath. The reason for focussing on the breath as the most suitable object is that it allows our mind to settle down and be relieved from the hundreds of different kinds of thoughts that our mind is constantly occupied and busy with. When we focus on the breath we definitely feel the mind settle down and move away from all

of these discursive, superstitious thoughts and naturally become calm and tranquil.

We will now adopt the meditation technique. Let us readjust our physical posture to be upright and relaxed and then adopt a proper state of mind and commit ourselves to temporarily withdraw from all forms of distractions. That includes all the discursive thoughts that go around in one's mind. We temporarily completely set that aside. When we have made that commitment we bring our full attention and focus onto our breath and focus on nothing but our breath. When we commit ourselves in this way to bring our attention within ourselves and then just focus on our natural breathing in and out it will allow our mind to settle down. So, for the next few minutes, we will just focus on our breath and nothing else. (*Pause for meditation.*)

If you have found some benefit from the meditation now, then it would be good to commit yourself to applying the meditation technique in your daily life. Meditation practice is the ultimate means to maintain a somewhat clear and bright state mind; with a clear and bright state of mind comes a more tranquil and happy state of mind. We need to consider this as our most prized and valuable possession. When we consider how much angst, worry and loss we feel when we lose a thousand dollars, we might feel quite down about it. But that is nothing compared to the prospect of losing one's clear and bright state of mind and particularly a happy and joyful state of mind. If we were to lose that, then that really is the most pitiful situation for one. Money is something that can be easily replaced whereas if we lose a happy and joyful state of mind, particularly a bright and clear state of mind; that is not easy to restore. Of course it is relatively more difficult to maintain a joyous and happy state of mind. But once we lose it, it is hard to get it back again.

So it is important that we put some attention into preserving that. When we consider what it is that we are trying to achieve in one's life, whichever way we look at it, our ultimate goal is to be happy in whatever we do. Our happiness can be experienced on two levels, physical happiness and mental happiness. Of the two, the primary one is mental happiness because, relatively speaking, it is easier for us to gain the means and conditions for physical happiness. That relates to the basic needs and conditions to maintain our physical body such as food and clothing. It is easier for us to obtain food and not difficult to get clothing and shelter, with others trying to help us. But if we lose that clear and bright state of mind, that happy and joyful state of mind, others can't easily help us. In fact others can't really give us a happy state of mind but can only provide us with the means for achieving it ourselves. Therefore, it falls within our own responsibility to try to maintain that. It is important that we pay attention to maintaining whatever good conditions we have right now. If we are in good physical health, then do whatever is necessary to preserve and maintain that good health. Eat proper food and have a proper diet. Most importantly, if we have a certain amount of joy and clarity we should maintain that, and this is done through the practice of meditation. So this is where we need to focus our attention for our well-being.

One is also able to notice that when we are in a joyous and happy state of mind, whatever activity we engage in is quite easy to do. That is because we are in a joyful state of mind. Whereas if we feel down and a little bit unhappy then whatever work we do it feels like a huge burden. It becomes really difficult for us to engage in that work. We

can see that, dependent on our state of mind, whatever one is doing appears to be either lighter and easier or more difficult and harder to do. That is how we need to see the correlation between our state of mind and our general well-being in relation to activities and so forth.

These are important points for us to consider for the well-being of our life. In particular it is essential that we come down to the main point and ask ourselves, 'What is it that I am striving for?' 'What is it that I really want?' As long as we believe that happiness comes from an external source, to that extent, we have missed the point.

We need to be certain about what we really want and are seeking and that answer lies within us and comes about by transforming one's own mind. That is where we find the source, not somewhere out there. Relating back to the great Master Shantideva's advice, if one conquers one's own state of mind and has control over one's mind it is the equivalent of conquering all of one's external enemies. One's inner negativities or demons such as anger are the real enemy. When we have control over our own mind so that we are not affected by our anger and other negative emotions, we have gained genuine control over our situation in life. This is an important point. He is giving very practical and sound advice that we need to take to heart.

Of course I wouldn't blame the normal way of thinking that is, 'If I am deprived of certain basic necessities and essentials in life, then how can I be really happy?' That is what most people would be thinking. As I mention regularly, though I can't claim to have any high spiritual realisations, I am an example of a person who, even when deprived of all external comforts, was able to maintain a sense of joy and happiness within. That is something that I have experienced which I can share and boast about.

Practically speaking, when we do that search within oneself 'What is it that I need to achieve?' we determine that, 'What it is I am seeking is well-being and genuine happiness. That is what I am seeking'. When we resolve upon that as a fact there is one further question, 'How do I experience well-being and happiness? There are only two levels on which to experience well-being and happiness; the physical level and the mental level. There is no other way. When we refer to 'my happiness', we are referring to either a pleasant sensation on a physical level or a mental level. There is no other way for us to refer to our happiness and well-being other than our physical and mental. There is no separate 'self' or 'I' that can experience without the body and mind, therefore whatever we experience on a physical and mental level does affect the 'I', which is like the 'possessor' of the happiness. In this case, the 'I' is like the owner and what I own is the physical body and mind that is with the self all the time. Thus whatever happens on the physical and mental level affects the 'I' or 'me'.

So, that being the case, 'How do I preserve my physical well-being and happiness?' The answer is through good health. Therefore we need to apply whatever is necessary to maintain good health so that we have physical happiness. We need make the resolve, 'it is my responsibility and I will do that so that I can be happy on a physical level'. Then, more importantly, We need to question, 'what are the contributing factors for my mental well-being and happiness? What are the practices that provide mental well-being?'

When we refer to our well-being and happiness, if we are physically well and happy we would normally say 'I am

healthy and well'. When we are mentally happy we can say, 'I am well because I feel happy.' We can detect what is of primary importance to ourselves. If we are mentally happy, even though we might be experiencing some physical hardship like sickness for example when someone ask us, 'How are you doing?' we might respond, 'Well, I am not too well physically, my body is aching, but my mind is quite happy. So I am ok'. That attests to the fact that, despite our physical condition, if we are able to maintain a level of happiness within our mind, we can consider ourselves to be well. That shows the most primary cause of one's well-being is a happy state of mind.

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

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1. Establishing the basis for that mind to arise

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.1. Establishing a balanced attitude towards sentient beings

We need to cover some parts of the text that we haven't covered previously. We have come to a point called 'Establishing a balanced attitude towards sentient beings'. This is also called developing equanimity towards sentient beings. This is divided into two, 'The preliminary stages' and 'The way to cultivate equanimity'.

In relation to 'The preliminary stages', the author says that he has previously explained the stages of preliminary practice in the 'The Person of Small and Medium Capacity'. So the preliminary practices can applied here as well to sustain your meditation. Those practices regarding developing equanimity that were explained in the earlier part of the text in relation to the small and medium scopes are also adopted here.

The second sub-division, 'The way to cultivate equanimity', is explained in five subdivisions. The first is, 'The need to balance the mind by arresting attachment and aversion'. The text explains that from the outset one needs to establish an even-minded attitude and eliminate the bias that comes from attachment to some living beings and hostility to others. Otherwise any love or compassion you feel will be biased, and you will never feel unbiased love or compassion. So you need to cultivate impartiality.

We have also covered in previous explanations the need for one to develop an even-minded attitude, or an attitude of equanimity, focussed on all beings. If we were to question whether we have a sense of love and compassion, then the answer is that we do. Right now we all have the capacity for love and compassion within ourselves and we do express that love and compassion towards others. But, when we really check honestly within ourselves, we find that naturally our love and compassion is extended to those that we consider worthy of our love and compassion, namely our friends and relatives. Those are the ones who we would naturally feel compassion towards. We don't seem to have

that same feeling of love and compassion towards people that we see as disagreeable; namely our enemies. Therefore, although we do have love and compassion, it will be biased love and compassion. It is biased because it is extended only to a certain number of beings who one considers worthy of one's love and compassion. But we don't feel and express our love and compassion to a majority of others. So what is being explained here is that we need to overcome that biased sense of love and compassion and try to cultivate a genuine, unbiased love and compassion towards all.

The text says that in order to develop an even mind and attitude, or equanimity towards all, one needs to eliminate the bias that comes from attachment to some living beings, and hostility or anger towards others. We need to work towards eliminating the main cause for us to even have any enemies in the first place. The reason we have enemies is because there are certain living beings that we feel hostility towards. When we develop anger towards them, the person who actually loses out is us. When one experiences anger it immediately disturbs one's own mind. When we harbour ill-feelings and anger towards our so called enemy, then to the extent that we feel angry towards them, it disturbs our own mind. We need to consider how anger has no redeeming value at all. It definitely harms us.

In contrast to attachment, anger is a negative state of mind that is easier for us to detect as being harmful because we experience the effect right away. So when the ill-effects or the disadvantages of anger are mentioned it is something that we can easily acknowledge and relate to and think, 'Yes, I know anger is not good'. Whereas it is harder to see the ill-effects of attachment. But again, as explained in the teachings, the ill-effects of attachment are deeply rooted. It is due to the strong attachment that we have towards certain beings that, when they don't do things favourable to us, that anger develops. That uncomfortable feeling of anger arises with the strong attachment we have towards certain beings.

So, the reason why it is hard for us to immediately recognise attachment as a negative state of mind is because it seems to be conducive for us. We get some sort of pleasure from attachment. It is unlike anger that disturbs our mind and we immediately feel the effect of anger. Attachment is something that we don't immediately detect as being harmful to us. But, as the teachings explain in great detail, it may not be immediately detected but when looking with a far-sighted view we can see the disadvantages of attachment as well.

We need to consider arresting, or conquering, both negative states of mind of anger and attachment. Anger is something that we need to conquer because, for as long as we harbour the ill-feelings of anger, not only do we create more enemies but even our friends can turn into enemies. When we think about what it is that causes our friends to be against us, it is because we express hostility towards them out of anger. This is how we need to understand the ill-effects of anger. Not only do we maintain whatever enemies we have due to anger, even our friends whom we call our close companions can turn into enemies, if we harbour anger in our mind. Even though we may disagree with the people we call 'our enemies', if we feel anger towards them that only disturbs our own mind. When we think about it, if we didn't have any ill-feeling or anger towards anyone wouldn't that be really wonderful for our own mind? If you had to make a choice, would you like to have certain people that you feel angry towards? We wouldn't want to keep certain people in our mind to feel anger towards, simply because we don't

feel comfortable and happy doing that. Thus we need to detect the ill-effects of anger, on a practical level, within one self.

So we need to think about this in a practical way. It may be hard for us to completely eliminate people who we disagree with. We might still have disagreements with others. However, what we can protect ourselves from is becoming angry towards them. They may remain people that we disagree with, but if we can protect ourselves from anger then, to that extent, we will remain joyful and peaceful. If we express anger towards them it is not as if that anger is going to harm them. Harboring ill will and anger towards our enemies and people we disagree with, is not going to affect them anyway; rather it affects us. For all we know, they might be enjoying their lives and having a nice sleep and enjoying a good time. Whereas on our side, because of the feelings of anger that we are holding towards them, we lose sleep, we lose our appetite and we lose our enjoyment in life. To that degree, we actually are depriving ourselves happiness by holding onto that anger.

When we analyse our own state of mind in these practical ways and detect the causes and disturbances such as anger we can see that for as long as we harbour ill will and anger towards others, whether they are strangers or people with whom we have a disagreement, it actually affects us. It doesn't really harm them. It harms us. One needs to use one's intelligence in that way to detect this for one self.

As mentioned previously, the ill-effects of attachment are, of course relatively speaking, harder for one to detect. However, when we have the experience of strong attachment we might then experience the great suffering that comes from strong attachment. Someone confided their experience to me. Initially they did not feel attachment was a negative state of mind and they did not recognise the effects of attachment. But when their relationship went wrong and they departed they experienced much suffering. This is what they related to me. They suffered so much that they lost their appetite, couldn't sleep at night and when they tried to sleep thinking about the situation brought so many tears to their eyes that they wet their pillow. This was related to me by someone who had that experience. They said that the suffering they experienced when the separation took place was immense; like a sharp pain in one's heart. This is an individual who initially would not have agreed with the ill-effects of attachment. They said that only when they had the experience of separation taking place, did they see the ill-effects and great suffering of attachment.

The usual advice that I share with others is that those who are in need of partners and a relationship; by all means have a companion in one's life. I am not suggesting to anyone not to have any relationship except for a pure relationship without attachment. As ordinary beings we cannot expect to have a pure relationship where there is no attachment involved. That is too much to ask for right now. If we have a relationship with others there will, of course, be attachment involved. However, along with attachment that one can recognise for oneself, try to also cultivate a genuine sense of caring and concern for the other. That can be developed as well. When a genuine sense of caring and concern is developed out of compassion for the other, then in the event of a separation taking place, not much suffering will be experienced. So try to have a good relationship. If there's some attachment, then just acknowledge and accept that, but try to focus more on a compassionate attitude and a genuine concern towards the other.

Other people have confided in me that when they have worked towards maintaining a more healthy relationship, based more on compassion and a genuine concern for each other, that when separation actually does take place the relationship became even better. The happiness and joy experienced in that companionship increased rather than decreased because even though the relationship had ceased, the mutual concern and genuine well wishing for each other was still maintained. Their sense of joy and happiness is still mutually experienced between them and that is something they have experienced and confided in me.

The reason why individuals confide this to me is based of earlier advice and instruction that I have given to them that it would be good to maintain a healthy relationship with genuine concern and love. Having given that advice earlier, they come back to me to confirm that has been true. Previously when the relationship didn't go too well and they came to see me, they came with 'long faces' whereas after the separation they both came smiling joyfully. What this shows is that it is definitely possible to train one's mind in maintaining a good and positive attitude. The mind can be trained in having healthy attitudes.

Some others who were going through a lot of angst and pain when separation was taking place, have come to me for me to console them. In that situation I had to say to the individual that it might take some time, even up to three years, before you can be completely free from the angst, anguish and pain experienced from the separation, but be patient. Definitely after three years it will go away. After the three years they confided in me that this was true. It did take that long, but they got over it.

Before we conclude for the evening, we can again readjust our physical posture for meditation. This time the object that we will focus on will be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. As we hear the sound of the mantra, we try to place our full attention and focus on the sound of the mantra and when the recitation subsides, we try to maintain that focus for a while. In this way it becomes an appropriate meditation practice.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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