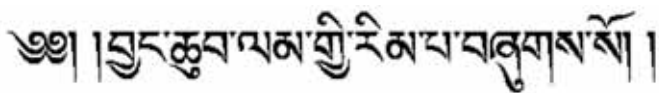

The Condensed Lam Rim



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As usual, we can spend some time in meditation. To meditate we sit in a comfortable, relaxed posture. After adopting the appropriate posture, which is upright and relaxed, the next stage is to ensure one's mind is clear, calm, bright and feeling settled. This combination of an appropriate physical posture and a proper mental state is necessary for meditation practice. If we have a feeling of both physical and mental wellbeing that is really good.

If we consider our physical and mental wellbeing it seems that one's mental wellbeing is easier to acquire. It is, of course, my personal view or opinion that we have more control over one's mind to secure mental wellbeing. Thus it is something that we should be able to manage. I have that opinion because I feel securing one's mental wellbeing is something that is within one's own control.

However, our physical wellbeing seems to be related to many external factors. Generally speaking, living a healthy state of lifestyle contributes to physical wellbeing. However, even though there is a general consensus that if we maintain a healthy lifestyle it will contribute to our physical wellbeing we find that many who do live a healthy lifestyle still seem to be affected by physical ailments. There are others who do not seem to have a normal, healthy lifestyle and we would assume would get physical illnesses but who seem to be quite healthy.

When we consider this it seems quite strange that no matter how much effort we make in maintaining our health, and we may take every measure to maintain good health, our physical wellbeing seems to fail sometimes. When we consider our time and energy, we would find that we spend most of our time and energy trying to maintain our physical body. We feed it and we clothe it. When we consider why we are so busy it is basically to get the essentials to take care of the body. So, in that sense, when we think of how much time and energy is spent maintaining the physical body it seems as if we are slaves to our own body. Yet we find that it does not guarantee or secure good health. As we age our body becomes weaker and more fragile and frail instead of becoming stronger and healthier. When we look at it from this point of view, that is the reality. Of course with children, it is the time when they are maturing; so feeding and clothing the body seems to contribute to physical strength, but after a certain point it starts to only decline.

If we were to spend as much time and energy maintaining our mental wellbeing as we spend maintaining our physical health, that would really contribute to our overall wellbeing. If we were to investigate we might notice that the more time and energy we spend in improving the state of wellbeing of our mind, the more it gets better. The state of the mind and our attitudes are something that can improve in time. The more time is spent, the more we improve.

On the physical level, we can say that there are clear and obvious signs and measures of what can contribute to our wellbeing and a general sense of what is detrimental to our health. Similarly, if we seriously look into our state of mind and attitudes, we would begin to notice the disadvantages of not protecting one's mind and the great advantages of having spent some time in securing positive attitudes. That is something that will become apparent. If we can clearly detect the faults of not protecting our mind then, in contrast, we will also begin to notice the great benefits of protecting the mind.

When we consider the state of our mind we will see that when our mind lacks protection it is easily influenced by delusions or negative states of mind, such as anger, strong attachment, jealousy or a sense of competitiveness with others. We can clearly see the disadvantages of our mind being influenced by intense negativities such as anger. It is very clear that when our mind is infested with anger we do not experience a calm and quiet mind. The mind is not settled. It is agitated, so there is no real peace and calm in a moment of intense anger. It is the same when it is infested with jealousy or a wish to compete with others.

It is the same with attachment, but it might be harder to immediately recognise the disadvantages of attachment. If, however, we were to reflect upon the times where we had intense desire or attachment in our mind, we would see how it affects our view of things. When one is afflicted by strong attachment it is clear that one is not able to really think properly. Even meals are not eaten properly and one would be deprived of sleep. When we reflect upon our state of mind when strong attachment is present we can see that the mind is restless. It is not a settled and peaceful state of mind.

If we take the time to analyse our state of mind when we are affected by strong delusions it is clear that the mind is not settled and is restless. So that is what is disturbing the calm and peace of the mind. When we can detect that clearly, it then becomes apparent to us that we can reverse that state of mind, from an angry state to a non-angry state, and acquaint one's mind with an object that does not cause anger to arise in the mind. At the moment the mind of anger is replaced with non-anger or an absence of anger, the mind naturally settles down. It is the same with attachment, jealousy and a sense of competitiveness. As soon as we are affected by them we become restless and disturbed. When we acquaint ourselves with their opposites, non-attachment, non-jealousy, non-sense of competitiveness and so forth, we will find that the mind becomes more tranquil, calm and peaceful.

When we can clearly recognise this we will also begin to appreciate meditation, because meditation is none other than a technique to acquaint our mind with the opposites of delusions such as non-anger, non-attachment and so forth. That is what the technique of meditation is. When we clearly detect and recognise that the meditation technique serves that purpose we will begin to appreciate meditation and take the initiative to adopt meditation, because it is useful and beneficial for oneself.

When we genuinely and honestly assess our own state of mind and begin to recognise the causes of the disturbances in our mind, negative attitudes or delusions such as anger, attachment and so forth, we will see that meditation is a technique that allows us to familiarise ourselves with a positive state of mind by intentionally forgetting or not

acquainting ourselves with an object that causes our mind distress.

Whilst a negative state of mind such as anger and attachment is something that is developed within oneself there might be an external object, a condition, for that negative state to arise. So, intentionally avoiding focusing on objects that cause us distress and focusing on objects that cause positive states of mind, is the essence of meditation technique. When we begin to recognise certain kinds of antidotes for overcoming certain negative states of mind, then it is a matter of acquainting ourselves with a positive state of mind commonly presented in the teachings.

There are specific positive states of mind that oppose specific negative states of mind. When strong anger arises within oneself one of the immediate remedies is to meditate on compassion. When one meditates on compassion it serves as an antidote for overcoming intense anger in one's mind. Likewise when we are afflicted by strong attachment to an object, contemplating the natural defects and faults of the object will reduce attachment or desire for the object. If when we are afflicted by jealousy we can start to cultivate a sense of joy and happiness for the other's success, or whatever good things are going on for them, it will serve as an antidote to overcome jealousy within one's mind.

So it is in this way that we become familiar with the positive attitudes in our mind. With acquaintance and familiarity they start to replace the negative attitudes. That is how meditation technique works to benefit us. It is essential that we pinpoint and recognise the states of mind that disturb us. That is the initial stage, the crucial stage, of overcoming a negative state of mind such as anger. It is the same for attachment and jealousy. We need to recognise them as the cause of disturbances within us. When we begin to clearly recognise the disturbing attitudes, the delusions, as a cause of our distress and disturbance we should then consider them as our real enemy.

If we don't recognise this enemy within, we will harbour the enemy and do nothing to combat it. We will not take the initiative to overcome the enemy and it is as if we are befriending the enemy that is harming us. In order to combat and defeat the enemy that disturbs us, the inner negative states of mind, we need to take the initiative. First we need to recognise it then we need to make a commitment that, 'I will not allow this disturbing attitude to infest me. I am not going to allow anger to control and over-power me. I am going to be determined to overcome anger within myself and likewise attachment, jealousy and their like'. Taking that strong initiative is what we need to do in order not to succumb to the inner enemies. The great Indian Master Shantideva has said that the real enemy is the disturbing attitudes within one's own mind. So, as he has identified, we need to recognise our inner enemies and combat them.

The process of recognising our inner enemies, the delusions or disturbing attitudes within us, is by being constantly vigilant of one's state of mind and constantly checking one's thoughts. If we keep a constant vigilance over our own thoughts and emotions then, as soon as a disturbing thought arises, we will be able to detect it. We will be able to recognise it before we are overpowered by it. When anger starts to arise we will be able to detect it and having contemplated all the disadvantages of anger, we will be able to tell ourselves, 'Okay, the disturbing mind of anger is beginning to arise within me. If I don't take heed or nip it in the bud', as the saying goes, it will overpower me and

completely consume me. It will disturb my peace and calmness and it will also disturb others'. In this way we need to recognise the delusions at the very moment that they arise and try to combat it. The mere fact of recognising anger for what it is and not allowing oneself to succumb to it is, in itself, one of the best remedies to diffuse the intensity of anger.

So, on one hand, it may seem that it is actually not that complex or difficult to shape one's own mind in a positive way because if we can recognise the negativities for what they are it is just a matter of acknowledging that and not allowing oneself to be overpowered by them. Of course having mentioned it is not difficult we would find that, on the other hand, it doesn't come about naturally and easily for us to completely overcome intense anger, attachment or jealousy when it arises. We might find that we are still victims to the negative states of mind. That is, of course, because of our familiarity and acquaintance with those negative states of mind. If, however, we take the initiative to do the self-analysis and to be vigilant with our own state of mind, it will be possible for us slowly and gradually, to overcome these negative states of mind and not allow them to completely dominate one's mind. That is definitely possible and it will come about through acquaintance.

The process is to take the initiative and ask ourselves, 'How am I feeling now? Am I feeling settled? Am I feeling disturbed and a little bit on edge here? What's causing me to feel on edge? What is causing the agitation within me?' We actually need to question ourselves in that way. Then we will be able to detect what is disturbing us. So often what we fall victim to is looking at things that are causing us distress on the outside. We fail to check within ourselves and think that it is what is out there that is disturbing us and causing us problems. With that habit of thinking that something external is causing us distress and disturbance we fail to pinpoint the real cause that lies within us. When we detect that the real cause for one's distress, agitation and disturbances lies within us it becomes more manageable for us to try to combat and control. If we were to try to constantly destroy the things outside that are causing us distress there will be no end to the things we will have to try to overcome and that will never solve our problems. We will not be able to overcome all the causes and conditions that we think are causing us distress out there, because there are too many of them. So if, instead, we were to get a grip on our own disturbing emotions, our own negative states of mind, and recognise that they are the cause of our disturbances and agitation, we will then be able to overcome the real cause and source of our distress and agitation.

So what I am basically suggesting is, in simple terms, to take the initiative to adopt this self-analysis as a very practical and useful tool to assess one's own state of mind rather than having to resort to asking others. Constantly being vigilant of our state of mind is the process that will gradually help to transform our mind into more positive attitudes. We particularly need to recognise a negative state of mind for what it is and how it is causing distress. It is clear that a negative state of mind is dependent on an attitude that determines how we view someone else. A so-called enemy is someone who we would normally consider as irritable or someone that we dislike. With acquaintance with such a person we might get to know them better and we might start seeing positive qualities in them, and then such a person who we would normally consider as disagreeable, or someone whom we don't like, may turn out to be someone

that one begins to like. As we become more familiar with them they might turn out to be a good friend in the end.

The same could happen with someone who is close to you, maybe someone who is committed to you. Being together because you feel attracted and close to them might lead to you to start seeing their negativities and focussing on and exaggerating their faults. You may start to see more and more faults in that person. Then the person whom we consider as very close to us can turn into an enemy too. If you were to check within yourself and your own life do you find that it is true that certain people that you have seen as disagreeable at one stage may turn out to be a good friend and companion and vice versa? Has someone whom initially you have considered to be very good and nice and a good companion later turned out to be someone who you do not want to associate with or even talk with? So, if that is the case, what is happening? What is determining that others are considered as either a friend or enemy? When we really look within oneself, it is one's attitude isn't it? Depending on what you are focussing on in the other they may turn out to be either a friend or an enemy. If we were to truly investigate and analyse our own state of mind we would be able to detect the reality and truth of this fact and thus train the mind to be more positive.

I have mentioned in the past that I have personally experienced this fact. When I was growing up as a young novice monk I got into fights with other monks. There was a particular youngster with whom I got into an actual physical fight and we got wounds on each other's heads. Someone that I considered an enemy when I was growing up later became a best friend. We were such good friends that we ended up sharing everything that we had. We would share our treats and our time together. We even reached a point where in the other's absence we felt lonely. So, even an enemy can become a close companion.

It is through these experiences in my own life that I have learned the value of companionship and that what brings companionship is genuine concern and a loving attitude and kindness towards the other. That brings about genuine trust and companionship. What I discovered in my own life is that genuine companionship with trust and mutual concern is based on a positive attitude of compassion and kindness, brings wellbeing for ourselves and others.

So we see the great value of genuine kindness and compassion. The opposite of that is anger that destroys rather than nurtures good companionship with others. It destroys whatever friendship or companionship you may have with others. The moment anger arises something unpleasant occurs, whether it is words or physical actions. Even our unpleasant gestures disturb others and in return affect us. There's an ill-effect for oneself and for others. When we assess our own life experiences we will begin to detect and acknowledge that as long as we harbour anger there's no benefit or advantage. There are no redeeming qualities of anger. There are just disadvantages from harbouring anger and angry thoughts. Whereas there are only great benefits for us and the other if you nurture and cultivate a kind attitude. It is good to use practical experiences from life in this way to reassure us about this reality.

Using these examples from one's and other's lives we can learn something very valuable. We gain great insight and wisdom to know what it is that contributes to our wellbeing, what it is that we need to promote and cultivate further and

what it is that we need to slowly abandon, overcome and discard. That would be a very valuable lesson that we can learn.

To summarise the main points that I am emphasising, a happy state of mind is something that is dependent upon us rather than others. It is dependent on us because a happy state of mind comes from cultivating positive attitudes within oneself. So that is something that is within our own hands and control. We can do something to cultivate those positive attitudes within us and likewise overcome negativities and disturbances. Those we call our enemies are also dependent on us. We have measures and can overcome the negativities within us too. That is something good for us to recognise.

This is what I consider the main purpose in our life. My practice is to protect a happy state of mind regardless of what's going on around me with external situations. I have always been committed to recognising the great value of a happy state of mind and I have always tried to cherish that within myself regardless of my external situation. I constantly remind myself that no matter what's going on around me, I will not let it disturb the essence of my happy and joyful state of mind. That has been my practice in my daily life so far.

So, having explained quite extensively the benefits of the practice of meditation, what it really is, the main purpose of meditation, what it is to combat and so forth, I hope that you have got some insight into the purpose of meditation. We can now adopt the meditation technique. The technique we adopt here is a simple technique of focusing on one's breath. While it is a simple technique it is also very effective to overcome intense negative states of mind.

As mentioned earlier, there are specific remedies for overcoming specific negative states of mind such as meditating on compassion or patience when one wants to overcome anger. However for us beginners, when intense anger and attachment arises within us it may be difficult to try to analyse, contemplate and think about a specific object or antidote to overcome these, such as developing love and compassion or seeing the faults of the object. This might not come about readily because we are not too familiar with those types of meditation. It might seem a bit complex and difficult to implement right away. However if we can recollect that focusing on one's breath is an effective measure to overcome negativities within oneself, that is something we can easily adopt.

The technique involved is none other than taking some time to quieten oneself, sitting in an appropriate posture and focusing on one's natural breathing. As the teachings mention, focussing on one's breath is one of the best remedies for overcoming an overly excited and distracted state of mind. The negativities, whatever form they may be, anger or jealousy, are also a form of distraction. So focussing on the breath will help settle and quieten the mind to become calmer.

So, now we will adopt this technique for meditation practice. Again, we readjust our physical posture to be comfortable and upright and ensure our mind is free from distractions. We intentionally withdraw our mind from all forms of distraction, all thoughts, and temporarily just forget about everything else and bring our full attention and focus on the breath itself, just observing the natural rhythm of our breath. So, for the next few minutes, that is what we will adopt.
(Pause for meditation)

Since we have used up quite a bit of time for our session, we might leave the remaining time for questions rather than going through the text; perhaps two good questions.

Question: In charity organisations they talk about 'compassion fatigue' which is when one becomes weary, tired and may even develop resentment. So, from the Buddhist point of view, how would you deal with that?

Answer: Of course from the Buddhist context, developing compassion would not be restricted to a certain measure or a certain limit. In fact the term limitless is used in regard to compassion. When you develop compassion, it should be limitless. Now in an ordinary context, or even a Buddhist context, there might be times when one might feel disheartened after developing compassion with a genuine attitude of helping others, but sees that the help is not received completely and is not being completely effective. One might feel a bit weary about that. There might be also cases when you start feeling compassion and you actually feel a little bit uneasy within yourself. Some might feel that they do not want to feel compassion at the expense of feeling uncomfortable. However, from the Buddhist point of view, that uneasiness that one feels is worthwhile. One should not restrict one's feeling of compassion. In terms of one's attitude, compassion is to be developed limitlessly. However there are certain measures to how we practically carry that out. As far as attitude goes, there should be expansive and completely selfless compassion towards others. That is what is encouraged.

There might be some charity organisations that have restrictions on who you help. They might feel you shouldn't be helping enemies and only help those who are worthwhile. There might be some of those measures too. Of course from a worldly perspective, being nice and kind to those who are receptive and who appreciative of help is worthwhile but if others are trying to take advantage and harm you, then that is not appropriate. They would not be seen as appropriate from a worldly perspective. However the Buddhist attitude of love and compassion takes us beyond the perspective of enemies or friends or strangers and tries to develop that sense of equanimity and then, based on that, compassion towards all.

As the teachings describe, the logical reasoning to use to cultivate that unbiased equanimity, love and compassion is the reasoning of how any other being, whether they are considered to be a friend, stranger or enemy, is equal in wanting to experience happiness and not wishing to experience any suffering. It is exactly the same in relation to oneself. Just as I wish to experience only happiness and no suffering, likewise each and every being is also exactly like that. So taking the initiative and using that as a logical reasoning, you develop the commitment that I need to consider the wellbeing and happiness of others.

Question: If we get agitated or disturbed by being with relatives and so forth for too long, should we limit the time we spend with them?

Answer: I know a couple who choose to live separately because of similar reasons. They can't stand each other for too long. Even though they are a married couple as husband and wife, the husband has a separate house and the wife has a separate house. They get together once in a while, but live separately.

It seems that they do care for each other and that is why they decided to be a couple and generally to have a committed relationship. Nevertheless both have agreed to live

separately. It seems that both see the value and cherish their own freedom and feel it is better to live separate lives. But, on occasions, they go for holidays together and enjoy their time together, but they live separately. That may seem inappropriate, but there's a mutual agreement.

The main thing to consider is maintaining a good relationship in whatever form it takes. If being together for too long is going to harm the relationship, then try to limit being together for too long. The main thing is to try to nurture and harbour good feelings or a good relationship with the other, whoever they may be.

For those who have taken the measure to live separate lives, it doesn't mean that one has taken the measure of freedom to have a promiscuous relationship. It still remains a committed relationship but they prefer to live independently. So the main thing is supporting and helping each other at all times and always maintaining the attitude of caring for each other. Whatever is the best way one can assist each other and have a commitment of helping each other, that kind of attitude is what will maintain a good relationship.

Before we conclude for the evening we can spend a few more minutes in meditation. This time the object of our meditation, our focus, will be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. So as we hear the sound of the mantra try to maintain your focus just on the sound and when the sound subsides just hold that focus on the residue of that sound for a few moments. That itself becomes a proper meditation practice.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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