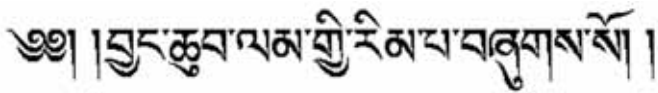

The Condensed Lam Rim



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As usual we can spend some time in meditation, adopting a comfortable and relaxed posture. As mentioned regularly, one of the main purposes of meditation is to try to adopt a technique that will allow us to have more peaceful and calmer mind, even if it is only a temporary benefit. The practical benefit of acquiring a relaxed and peaceful state of mind is that it contributes to our well-being. It also becomes a cause for us not to disturb or cause trouble for others. If our own mind is disturbed and agitated when we interact with others, then that is when we are most likely to disturb others with our gestures and manners. So we need to be mindful, at the very least, of not disturbing or harming others. Acquiring a peaceful and relaxed state of mind will have a definite positive effect on us, as well as a positive outcome in relation to others, i.e. benefiting others. When there is a twofold benefit for ourselves and others, then it is definitely worthwhile for us to consider taking on the practice.

At this stage you might sort of agree that it is worthwhile to have a relaxed and calm state of mind, however, you might think that a relaxed mind doesn't come about easily. It might not be too easy to achieve this, so I don't blame you for having these queries. Many of you might feel it is quite an ideal state to be in, a great ideal to have, but it is too difficult to attain. A few people have confided in me that listening to advice about meditation brings solace to their mind; it feels peaceful and relaxing. But putting it into practice is another thing. So they are telling the truth.

What we need to consider is that if we do find the practice beneficial and meaningful and we find that it all makes sense, then we need to resolve to put it into practice. If it seems like a good thing to achieve, then we need to resolve to put it into practice and not become daunted by the hardships and difficulties. We need to take it upon ourselves to put the meditation theory into practice.

If we can acquire a relaxed and peaceful state of mind, combined with a clear mind — and we all agree that this is worthwhile — then the natural question to ask is: how can we achieve that? This is where the practice of meditation comes in. Meditation is simply a technique to bring about these positive conditions and good qualities within our mind. The very fact that we are investigating about how to achieve a calm mind, means that we are using and increasing our wisdom to achieve something worthwhile.

As we develop this analytical wisdom within ourselves, we actually gain a certain amount of wisdom that allows

us to discern what is useful to us, what is it that we have to achieve. When we develop that wisdom within ourselves then we will not be easily influenced by others, because we have gained our own wisdom, where we have the ability to discern what is right for us. The Buddha mentioned that ultimately we need to be our own guide and our own protector. When we gain that wisdom within ourselves, then it becomes stable and very firm. It becomes a good guide for us in making the right decisions in life.

When we see how our own wisdom develops and increases as a result of our meditation, then through our own experience we begin to see the positive effect of meditation and any other spiritual practice. This is when we begin to see the real value of the practice and meditation. Stable wisdom helps us to protect our integrity, where we do not easily become influenced by others, for example, not accepting what others are saying until we see sound reason. We will not easily follow their advice just because it sounds good; we will have the inner wisdom to discern whether it is proper, sound advice or not. However, we also need to be careful not to go to the extreme of always being critical about what others and not accepting useful advice. This is what we call stubbornness. So, there is the danger in being stubborn as well.

The main point I am emphasising is to really develop wisdom, so we are not gullible and accept whatever others say, while also being careful not to become too stubborn as well. Achieving inner wisdom becomes a good basis for us to discern whether something is right or wrong for us. Our wisdom and intelligence helps us in whatever activity we do. We will be able to assess the situation ourselves and be able to make a good decision; based on good judgement and analysis. Of course this doesn't mean that we shouldn't rely on others' advice and opinions at all - we do need to rely on their suggestions or opinions as well. However we need to use our wisdom as a basis to judge for ourselves what is right or wrong. The decisions we make based on our inner wisdom are firm and stable, and whatever we do works out well. This is the practical benefit of wisdom and intelligence.

Summarising the main points that I presented earlier, it is worthwhile gaining a clear, bright, and focused state of mind combined with a peaceful or calm state of mind. Now, having accepted that these are good qualities to achieve, the question arises - how do we achieve that? Adopting a technique of meditation helps increase our wisdom and intelligence. This is the main point.

To answer the question 'how do we achieve that?' we need to understand that there are two factors, to consider: things that oppose a clear and bright state of mind and things that are conducive factors. As with most activities, there are always two, hand in hand, some opposing and some conducive factors. We need to recognise and understand both.

In recognising the opposing factors, one essential point we need to understand is that the main opposing factor for achieving those mental qualities lies within ourselves. We need to recognise and understand this. The reason we

need to pay particular attention and do an investigation at this point, is because we are normally used to seeing fault outside of ourselves. Whenever something goes wrong for us, whenever our mental peace is jeopardised, we are typically in the habit of trying to find faults outside, with some external reason that we think is causing our unhappiness. So we need to overcome that habit and begin to investigate where these opposing factors lie within us.

Then we come to recognise negative concepts within ourselves, and that the evil or destructive concepts within are the main opposing factors. If we pay attention, if we look inwards and engage in self-analysis, then it is obvious that the negative concepts within us are the main opposing factors to achieving a peaceful mind.

Negative conceptions are the distractions that we normally let ourselves be influenced by. Distractions are mainly focused on external sensual objects. Conducive factors are a state of mind that intentionally withdraws our focus away from all distractions; we bring our focus completely within, and place it on a particular object. We do this mainly to move our attention and focus away from external distractions. This becomes the conducive factor within us, and the ability to do all this is within our own mind.

When we recognise both conducive and opposing factors and are able to identify them within ourselves, then this is already a great achievement. This means we have gained a grip on what we need to improve within ourselves. We need to increase the conducive factors and overcome the opposing factors. It is only by first identifying them that we can begin to cultivate the positive and discard what is harmful. This is done through the practice of meditation.

So again, this is where a meditation practice becomes an essential tool for developing the positive qualities within us, generating a positive attitude, and overcoming things that are detrimental to our happy state of mind. This is not something that happens quickly though; we shouldn't expect quick results.

Nevertheless, over time, if we practise meditation day-by-day and week-by-week, then gradually we will find the positive effect of this practice taking ground within us. To engage in the practice of meditation, we need to befriend joyous effort. Laziness will not help us to achieve our goal of regular meditation. To meditate, we need to have joyous effort.

We need to identify what promotes conducive factors and what opposes them, i.e. the negative factors. The main thing that we are trying to achieve is concentration. Joyous effort is conducive to practising meditation. We need to have that sense of joy in applying the effort needed to practise meditation. Whereas laziness is conducive to developing negativity within our mind. We need to overcome laziness. If we are interested in developing a meditation practice, then we need to have joyous effort, and laziness is something we need to get rid of.

When we understand how the meditation technique works and start to meditate, then we begin to experience

the meditation taking effect. A lot of problems and difficulties in our life will begin to slowly clear away, and we will be able to deal with difficulties in life with this tool that we have developed. We will be able to withstand and accept the challenges in life without them causing mental distress in our mind. This is how we benefit from regular meditation.

Now that we understand the practical benefits from the practice of meditation, i.e. that it is a tool to achieve a better life for ourselves, we can make a determined effort to practise meditation regularly. As mentioned previously, with the appropriate physical posture we need to make sure that we are in a right state of mind to meditate. For the next few minutes, let's resolve to put our full energy into meditation. Let's focus and try to develop a focused mind. The meditation that we are doing here is a particular technique to develop concentration.

In order to develop concentration, we need to understand what concentration is. There are two main attributes to concentration, the first is having a stable mind and being able to *single-pointedly focus* on an object. The second attribute is having *clarity and sharpness* in our focus. In order to gain these two attributes of concentration and clarity, we need to understand that the two main obstacles to developing concentration are laxity and excitement. *Laxity* is a state of mind that becomes dull and unfocused; it is the main obstacle to having a stabilised, focused mind. *Excitement* obstructs the brightness or sharpness of our focus. In order to develop sound concentration, we need to overcome the two obstacles of laxity and excitement.

So from the very beginning, when we meditate we need to be mindful that we don't allow our mind to be influenced by either excitement or laxity. For the next few minutes let's make the commitment to put our full attention and energy into focusing on the object which is our breath. Readjust your physical posture, making sure that your mind is a clear state of mind by withdrawing from all other conceptual thoughts and distractions. Bring your entire focus on the breath for the next few minutes.

[meditation]

As we have attempted in our short session here, it is worthwhile adopting a regular meditation practice in our daily life. It will be useful and the main thing is to reassure ourselves, again and again, that this is the main purpose in our life. Meditation is an attempt to have a happy state of mind and we need to remind ourselves that on a daily basis, to think about all the reasons of why we are in a good and happy state of mind. We need to put some effort into generating that happy feeling within ourselves, because on a daily basis, moment-by-moment, day-by-day, our life is ending. We are getting nearer the end of our life, so it would be a pitiful situation if at the end of our life we felt like there was never any moment where we felt happy. Assuming that we will become happier at in the future is misleading ourselves. It is much more worthwhile to generate a sense of happiness and joyous effort in our daily life, on a daily basis. That is how I see it anyway.

The main causes for us to feel unhappy or sad, or a little bit down, are mainly external reasons that prevent us from being in a positive state of mind. External conditions don't change so rapidly, it is not like that there is some dramatic change from one day to the next or within even the same day. One day we might feel a little joyous and then suddenly the next day or even later in the day we might start feeling a little bit down or depressed. What is happening is that some changes are taking place within our own mind. Meditation is a way to stabilise our mind, and gain more mental equanimity. It is important for us to secure sense of joy and happiness within ourselves, and to make sure that it doesn't decline.

While the meditation practice is one technique to develop a calmer, more relaxed and peaceful state of mind, the main cause for us to feel joyous, happy, and relaxed in our mind is a sense of love and compassion within our heart. We use the meditation practice to further develop and cultivate the sense of love and compassion within us, and that becomes the main source of our joy and happiness. I am not claiming that I have great love and compassion, however if we look round we can see those who do clearly exhibit a true sense of love, compassion and care for others. They are the most joyous and happy people; we can see that with the examples around us. As we develop more love and compassion, it becomes a source of joy and happiness within us. We all have those qualities; we all have the basis of love and compassion within ourselves. It is just a matter of further cultivating and developing them. We need patience to develop love and compassion. If we don't have patience then it becomes difficult to maintain love and compassion.

We have not covered the text for a few weeks, so I can try to cover a few passages, unless there are some meaningful questions that help them to resolve queries in your mind.

Question: I get angry with being lazy, so how can I deal with that?

Answer: The main source of anger might arise when there is some sense of unease within us. It may be attributed to laziness, however, the main cause may be that when you don't achieve something, you feel uncomfortable and uneasy within yourself. It is based on an uneasy, uncomfortable feeling. This is when anger arises within us.

It is the same thing with the laziness of others. Under any circumstances, whenever we feel anger it is because of not being able to accept the situation or the unpleasantness that we experience, whereas attachment arises when there is a pleasant sensation or a pleasant feeling towards something. This is how attachment and anger arise within us.

Feeling angry towards someone for being lazy - I assume that it is most likely someone who is close to you. If a stranger is being lazy, then that would not affect you so much. If we have a disagreement with someone we don't like, if they have been lazy, we might start feeling happy about that. We can investigate how our mind works. Our mind fluctuates. If we change the object, then our attitude towards the object will change as well. As I related in a past example, when someone holds a cup of tea initially

they seem to be happy, but just when a little bit of tea spills, then suddenly that whole pleasant atmosphere suddenly changes into hostility.

This happened when I was waiting at the airport in India when the plane had been delayed. I noticed a couple who were also waiting and the woman brought over some tea. She was holding the cup of tea and was about to drink it when the tea spilled. The husband started to get mad about that, and then she got very, very upset, so upset that she stood up and walked away. She was very angry. Just witnessing that, where at one moment everything seemed okay, joyous and happy, and then in the next moment, just because of a small incident, the whole atmosphere changed.

Seeing that reminded me of how it doesn't take much at all for a pleasant situation to suddenly change. If we consider the incident, it seems very minor, just spilling a bit of tea; someone might have a giggle about it. But the angry attitude made the whole atmosphere uncomfortable and uneasy. So in everyday life, whenever we look at a situation, whenever there is some discomfort or some unpleasantness, it depends very much on our attitude. This is a strong point that we need to understand, that a change of attitude can change a whole outcome and atmosphere.

Regarding couples staying together, I find that a lot of care has to be given to mannerisms and how they speak to each other, even couples who have lived together for over 15 to 20 years, or even 30 years. It seems still they have to be careful with each other in what they say and their gestures. It seems like it is really a tough job. When people come and confide in me about the difficulties in their relationship, I feel like saying, 'I don't blame you, it must be difficult!'

I am not saying that all couples are in that situation; there are people who seem to be having a happy relationship and small incidents don't really interfere with their joy in being together. But in many cases I find that people have to be always cautious with each other in what they say, and how they react. That goes to show that even after so many years living together, there seems to be maybe a lack of trust or lack of patience with each other. When there is a lack of patience, then even the slightest thing that is not said well and seems a little bit inappropriate, the slightest incident can cause agitation and anger to arise. Anger arises because there is a lack of patience. That is why I emphasise again and again that the practice of patience is something that is essential to keeping a harmonious relationship, and in keeping a good, trustworthy relationship with others.

Question: While having a teacher and receiving advice from them, I find that it is still very difficult to implement it in one's daily life. How best to resolve this?

Answer: The main thing is to evaluate the advice that you have received. If the advice is sound and beneficial and you don't find any flaws in it, then just try to adopt in every way that you can. Of course, some advice may not be suitable for you; maybe it is not the right time or it is not suitable. In those cases we need to make a judgement. Just because it is advice that doesn't necessarily mean that we have to completely follow it to the last word. The

main thing is to evaluate the advice. Some advice may not be appropriate, especially if it is to do with a relationship. If your situation is not seen or understood clearly, then sometimes the advice may not work out.

We need to be mindful and evaluate what the advice is, and adopt what we find meaningful or useful. We ordained people don't have that much experience. Apparently some relationships are deep and complicated. There are a lot of things involved in a relationship that can't be resolved immediately. There was a monk who came here to teach. Apparently he had occasionally given casual advice to others on how to deal with relationships. However he eventually disrobed and then married and got divorced. So there were complications in his relationship. When I met him he said, 'Now I have finally understood the difficulties in lay people's relationships'.

If advice is given on the basis of having some experience or having a full knowledge of the situation, then the advice will be sound. Otherwise giving casual advice to people, especially involving relationships can be harmful. For example, when partners are not getting along - you can't just advise them to separate if you don't understand the real situation. You may cause a great division between two people who could otherwise live together well. So that sort of advice cannot be just given casually, without really assessing and understanding the situation well.

The general advice from all the previous great masters is that when your spiritual teacher or guide gives advice that is in accordance with virtue, for a virtuous way of living, then that advice is good to follow as best as we can. If the advice contradicts adopting virtuous deeds, then we can just leave it aside. We need not be critical, but just leave it aside knowing in our heart that that is not ethical, and not right for us.

Before we conclude for the evening we can adopt a few minutes of meditation. When the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni is recited, we place our focus and attention on the sound of the mantra and try to keep our mind focused on that sound. And then when the recitation subsides, just try to maintain our focus for awhile. This then becomes a complete meditation practice. When we end the meditation with a focused and concentrated mind, then that will also help us to drive home well, because it is raining and it might be dangerous on the road. So drive mindfully - this is something of immediate importance.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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