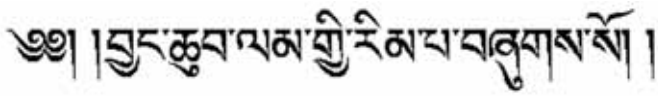

The Condensed Lam Rim



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Since we are a gathering of meditators, it is appropriate that we spend some time in meditation. When business people get together, they naturally talk about business, so when we meditators get together, we meditate.

Compared with business gatherings, our gathering here is quite unique. Business meetings are about the ways and means of acquiring wealth and so forth, which is related to external means. Whereas our discussion about meditation is the complete opposite — we gain the resources for our inner peace from within our own mind. That is how it is unique.

It is really good to see this distinction between external means and internal means. We acquire material gains by seeking external means and conditions, whereas the conditions needed to acquire the results of meditation are developed within one's own mind. So acquiring inner peace should be relatively easy because you don't have to look outside for it, but rather develop it within.

The methods and techniques for acquiring material gain involve focusing our mind one hundred percent outwards. From the Buddhist perspective, however, focusing on outward conditions is allowing our mind to be completely distracted.

If spending all our time and energy focusing outwards were to bring a good result, where we experience well-being and genuine sense of happiness, then there would be nothing wrong with that. However the reality is that when we focus completely on material things, allowing our mind to be completely immersed in external distractions, we end up becoming more miserable and dissatisfied. This is how we lack a sense of genuine well-being.

If spending all our time and energy focusing outward doesn't bring about a meaningful result, then it is worthwhile to seek methods and techniques that enable us to acquire a sense of true well-being; a genuine sense of peace and happiness. Thus the meditation technique involves completely withdrawing from all external distractions and placing our focus inwards, i.e. focussing on an inner object rather than on external distractions. In that way, all the distractions actually subside, and we gain a genuine sense of inner calm. That is why the meditation technique is such an effective technique.

When we consider what it is that we are actually looking for; we realise that we have this natural inclination to be happy. That is undeniable, regardless of whether or not we are consciously striving for happiness. Ultimately, we are all naturally looking for happiness, so the question whether we are adopting the right methods to find

happiness. We can gauge whether we are adopting the right means simply by doing an inner check. Is the happy state of mind progressing or is it declining? Is one's mind getting happier and happier or feeling more depressed?

Since our goal is happiness, it is worthwhile to sincerely look within ourselves and check whether our happiness is increasing. If it isn't, then there might be an element missing in the methods we are adopting in our pursuit of happiness. These are crucial points that we need to consider.

We should also be very alarmed when whatever level of happiness we may have achieved is threatened, and remind ourselves, 'If I don't pay attention to the state of my mind I could easily lose any sense of joy and happiness that I already have now'. We need to be more alarmed about that, rather than worrying about other insignificant things in life. We really need to understand that the real source of genuine happiness and joy lies within ourselves, and thus pay attention to maintaining and enhancing that.

Just as we strive for happiness, we naturally don't wish to experience any kind of suffering, difficulties and problems in life. Thus, we also need to consider whether we can solve whatever problems and difficulties we may be facing. The reason why it is possible to solve any kind of problem is because it is created by none other than ourselves. Human problems are created by humans, so they can also be solved by humans. That is a natural consequence; the person who creates something can also counteract it. So, at a personal level, if we have created our own mental difficulties and problems, we can definitely overcome them when we put the right conditions into place.

What are the main factors that contribute to our own well-being? In the Buddhist tradition there are noble beings called bodhisattvas, who have taken upon themselves the responsibility for helping all living beings, and who strive towards bringing happiness and well-being to all beings. Now, we may not have actually developed such a noble attitude yet, but at the very least it is fitting that we develop an attitude of taking care of one person – which is ourselves. We definitely need to take responsibility for our own well-being and really look into ways how to gain genuine happiness.

We need to take responsibility for ourselves rather than complaining that others are not taking care of us. If we don't take the initiative for looking after ourselves, then how can we expect others to help us? We need to take the initiative from our own side to be kind to ourselves, to be really responsible for our own lives and ensure that we take care of our own well-being. Then we become much more stable, regardless of whether we receive help from others, and regardless of the external situation.

When we genuinely take the initiative for our ultimate well-being and a state of mind that is genuinely calm and peaceful, then our mind will not be disturbed, regardless of what's going on externally. When one reaches the state of being able to remain genuinely calm and peaceful regardless of the immediate situation then we have secured a happy and joyful state of mind.

I have found this to be true from my own experience. I don't need to be occupied with external things, or have to go out and engage with external things to be happy. When I am alone in my room, I find a great source of joy and happiness within myself; regardless of what is going outside it doesn't seem to disturb me when I have secured my own inner well-being. This is something that I have experienced, which I share with you. It is not that I am boasting, but it is definitely the case that, in general, I am not too concerned about my external conditions.

My main energy and focus goes mostly into looking at the ways and means to be happy and contented within myself and in my own mind. I remember many years ago when I first settled here, a kind lady called Jules Gardner was responsible for my general care. At one point I think she might have noticed that my shoes were quite old and scruffy, so she said, 'Geshe-la, I think you need some new shoes'. My response was, 'These shoes are fine for me, and I don't need a new pair of shoes'. Her response was, 'It might be fine for you Geshe-la, but it is not good for us'. So I had to accept her offer. As the Centre was then located in St. Kilda, we went up to Chapel Street to buy the shoes.

Our well-being seems to be very much related to our attitudes and how we think about things. That seems to be very clear. When we adopt the right attitude, then regardless of the situation and regardless of how others treat us, we can manage quite well because of our own positive attitude. If someone's attitude is not good to begin with, then that is when they start to have a complaining mind — always blaming others for neglecting them, and not paying enough attention to them. When one doesn't have the right attitude then one becomes self-obsessed, always blaming others for 'not paying attention to me' or 'not being nice to me'. Everything is always in relation to 'me'. 'I am not taking care of myself, others have that responsibility'.

Whereas, as I mentioned earlier, with the right attitude and a positive state of mind, we can take responsibility for taking care of ourselves and our mind, not expecting others to do it for us. Then we start developing the right conditions for our own well-being. It is a fact that we need to take care of our physical body, and thus we have to clothe and feed it to sustain it. I feel that although external conditions take care of our body, our general well-being in life comes from our mental happiness. That is something that I emphasise again and again.

We need to have a happy and joyful mind, because without a happy and joyful mind we cannot sustain our life. That is something that I am certain about. There are some who question, 'Why is that so? Why do we need happiness to sustain life?' The fact is, without a sense of joy and happiness, one begins to feel that there's not much point in life.

From my own limited experience in life, I can share the importance of having a clear and bright state of mind coupled with genuine wisdom. Analytical wisdom is a type of intelligence that knows what is appropriate and what is inappropriate for oneself. It knows what is useful and what is harmful for oneself. With such wisdom one doesn't need to resort to others, rather, one can decide for

oneself what is beneficial and what is harmful to oneself, and then adopt that which is useful and discard that which is harmful. Thus, the combination of a clear, bright state of mind and wisdom brings about a genuine sense of well-being and happiness. This is something that I humbly share with you from my own experience, and I encourage you to also try to adopt the same approach.

We all want to have long life, so it is worthwhile to consider the importance of having a happy long life. We certainly don't look forward to a miserable long life. So while we try to pay attention to achieving the conditions for a long life by external means, we also need to develop the internal means that support and contribute to having a meaningful and happy long life.

The ultimate way to develop that happiness and to maintain it, is by acquainting ourselves with good habits. Good habits consist of having the right, positive attitudes and behaviours, and we need to familiarise ourselves with them again and again. That process of familiarising ourselves with these positive attitudes is the function of meditation. Meditation is none other than a method or technique that allows us to become familiar with the positive things we need to support a happy life. That is the practical benefit of meditation.

We will now spend some time in meditation. As mentioned in last week's session, one description of the posture for meditation is the seven-point Buddha Vairochana technique. In this the legs are in either a full-lotus meditative position, or, for those who cannot manage a full-lotus position, a half-lotus position. It is also mentioned that it can be done sitting with one leg tucked in, and the other leg slightly stretched out where, rather than being on top of the thighs, both feet are actually below oneself, and in some cases one leg can be slightly tucked in and the other slightly stretched out, which can also be a comfortable position for a long meditation for some people. While these particular sitting postures, the full-lotus and half-lotus positions, are mentioned in the teachings, the main thing is to find a comfortable position for the meditation.

Having adopted a comfortable and relaxed posture for meditation, the next important thing, prior to engaging in meditation, is to have the right motivation for the practice that we do. It is essential that a good motivation precedes the meditation, which is basically having a good intention, a reminder of the purpose of doing this practice. That is really important.

It is good to be familiar with, and understand the conditions for our practice of meditation, such as the physical posture, the state of mind and the motivation that we need to develop. Sooner or later, when people hear that you are going to meditation regularly, they will, out of curiosity, start asking you, 'So what do you do? What is the physical posture you sit in? What kind of state of mind you need to adopt?' If you are already familiar with the answers to these questions, you will be able to confidently share them with others. That is why it is useful to know them.

About two to three weeks ago when I was down at St. Kilda sea baths, which I visit once in a while, I met an elderly man who seemed to be of Vietnamese descent.

When he saw me, he asked me, 'Do you do meditation?' I said 'Yes I do a bit of meditation'. He commented that he also does meditation and he showed me his cross-legged sitting posture. He said he was able to sit cross-legged very well and asked me, 'What do I do with my hands? How do I place them?' I just shared with him how we put one palm on top of one another and place them at our navel. When I explained the posture of the hands, he was very happy and said, 'That's very good, thanks for sharing that'. So I was able to share that with him in a simple way.

Next, we remind ourselves of the purpose of engaging our mind in meditation. We all naturally experience a very busy mind, distracted by various different thoughts about the external situations and conditions that are going on in our lives. Being completely immersed and focused outwards in that way becomes the cause for mental turmoil. All the uncomfortable states of mind that we experience, such as anxiety, stress and fear, are a result of our mind being completely immersed and distracted by what we call worldly affairs – discursive conceptual thoughts and situations.

Allowing our mind to be completely immersed in that way, we experience the unpleasant consequence of a troubled mind, and we don't actually want to experience a troubled mind full of worries and so forth. So in order to overcome a mind full of fears, anxiety and stress, we need to change our thoughts, so that we don't allow our mind to become completely immersed in, and focused on, external distractions. The way to do that is with the meditation practice and technique that we adopt here, by choosing our own breath as the internal object to focus on. We need to make the commitment to keep our full attention and focus on the breath itself and to be temporarily completely unconcerned about other thoughts, fears and forms of discursive thoughts.

We completely withdraw from that and make the effort to place our full attention and focus just on our breath. This means first of all, making the commitment to bring our focus inwards, and placing it upon our breath. We can imagine seeing our breath going in and leaving our nostrils. As a technique to keep our mind focused on the breath, it is helpful to keep track of our breath with a count of up to twenty one in-and-out breaths. This technique then becomes the optimum way to settle down our mind. It is important that during our meditation, we keep our mind completely focused on the breath itself. In this way we will adopt the meditation technique for the next few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

We can spend the rest of our time addressing some questions, so you may raise your hand if you have any questions.

Question: Geshe-la, you mentioned earlier that adopting wrong attitudes contributes to the problems in our life. Is that related to our karma as well?

Answer: The consequences of karma are explained on a more subtle level. What I was referring to earlier is that on a more obvious level, the immediate causes of our problems are related to our attitudes and states of mind. We can actually detect that for as long as we adopt a certain kind of negative attitude we will experience inner

turmoil and unease. So I was relating to the more immediate cause of our problems, rather than the more subtle level of causes which would be the explanation of karma.

A specific example of how an immediate cause will bring immediate consequences of an unsettled or unhappy state of mind is anger. At one moment everything is fine and there are no problems, but the instant anger arises we start to feel uncomfortable. These are the obvious consequences of anger.

On the karmic level, the unseen consequences of anger would be the ill effects to be experienced in the next life. In terms of karma, all our unhappiness is the result of our karma, which in the long term, at a more subtle level, is the consequence of the previous karma we created in a previous life. When we talk about karma we are referring to something on a more subtle level. But again, what I was referring to earlier is a more immediate cause for unhappiness in our minds. It is obvious from our own experience that we experience mental turmoil when anger arises.

To explain a bit more about how the karma is involved in our uncomfortable experiences, we can use the analogy of taking a picture. On a traditional roll of film, you first develop the negative. With the right conditions, developing chemicals and so forth, at a later stage the actual image of the person will appear on the photo paper. The picture is first seen as an imprint on the negative, and then with the right conditions and chemicals, it manifests on paper. Another analogy we use is a seed, which carries the potential to sprout. But the seed needs the right conditions such as the soil, water and moisture for it to sprout.

With karma, whenever we create some negative or positive deeds, it always leaves an imprint on our minds. The moment after an action the deed has already ceased, but the potential for the consequences or results to manifest is left upon our minds. This potential is called an imprint. At a later time when the conditions are there, we experienced the results of karma.

Question: Does Buddhism perceive optimism as a good thing, or is it another form of attachment?

Answer: That depends on what you are optimistic about, as there are different kinds of optimism. If you are optimistic that all beings will experience happiness and will be free from suffering, then that is a very good optimism. Optimism about one's own happiness will involve attachment, whereas optimism for other beings is good.

The main point about one's own practice is that we need to start to develop an attitude of being happy when we experience problems and difficulties, and unease when things are going well. The mind training teachings tell us that to overcome worldly concerns we need to adopt the practice of feeling uncomfortable when things are going well, and a sense of joy and happiness when things are going wrong.

This might seem like quite an absurd way of thinking, but it is a very important point in relation to the Dharma and our practice. Our own experience is one of being joyful

and happy when things are going well, but that actually induces an attachment. We start feeling attached to that situation and thus the attachment increases. If we follow the habit of being joyful and happy when things go well, then when things don't go well and there are problems, we can become really upset and angry. Therefore, in order to combat both attachment and anger we train our mind to reverse the situation; when things go well we try not to be happy about it lest it increases our attachment, and when things don't go well, we try not to get upset about it lest it causes anger to arise in our mind. This is how the mind training teachings work.

Another way of looking at this practice of mind training is to understand that whenever things go well for oneself, one's good karma is ripening. But just indulging in the good karma could exhaust it, and if all of one's good karma is exhausted then there will be no more good karma left. So when things go well there is no reason to be too joyful and happy about if all of one's good karma is being exhausted. Therefore it is reasonable not to be too excited and joyful when things go well. When bad things happen, that is the result of one's negative karma ripening, which uses it up, which is something that we can be joyful about, because it is good to exhaust our negative karma.

At face value, as I have mentioned before, the Buddhist view that one needs to be wary and not so joyful when things go well, and be glad when it doesn't go well, may sound like the talk of a crazy person, because it goes against the conventional way of thinking. Who wouldn't be happy when things go well, as we have every right to be happy when things go well? Who wouldn't be upset and uncomfortable when things don't go well. So for anyone who is only used to this conventional way of thinking, this practice will be considered crazy. However, when one understands the point of the practice, how it is actually utilised to develop one's maturity, then one will see the value of these significant and important points.

Furthermore, training the mind to willingly endure and accept sufferings and problems in life, and not being distraught and upset about them, will enhance one's practice of patience. One of the categories of the practice of patience is employing patience by willingly accepting hardships. The definition of patience is the state of mind where one does not allow oneself to become upset in the event of any harm or suffering, and developing that state of mind needs training and practice.

The way to protect one's mind from becoming upset when one faces problems and difficulties is by willingly accepting them. Then they do not become a cause for mental disturbance. These are really essential points and very profound practices in Buddhism. Willingly enduring hardships is said to be one of the best ways to solve problems. That is because when we willingly accept the hardship, it does not become a cause to disturb our mind. Because our mind is not disturbed by being upset about it, we can easily find effective ways to solve the problem. You can see the benefit of such practices.

So on the one hand this is a very profound practice, but on the other hand it is something that we can obviously

relate to. When we really think about it, the benefits of such a practice are quite obvious.

Before we conclude for the evening we can again spend a few more minutes in meditation. This time our object of focus will be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we hear the sound of the mantra being recited, we try to maintain our entire focus and attention on the sound and when the recitation subsides, try to maintain a focus on the residue of the sound. So in this way it becomes a practice of concentration as well.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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