
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual, we can spend some time in meditation. To practice meditation we firstly try to adopt a comfortable, relaxed posture. Then we need to generate a good motivation or intention for the practice. We would find it relatively easy to relax physically as we are quite used to physically relaxing. However we also need to ensure that the mind is relaxed, because if the mind is constantly in a chaotic state and very busy that does not contribute to our well-being. So we need to learn how to relax our mind as well. If that does not come about naturally then we need to learn that technique.

There is a Tibetan saying that if you lay back and the sun is shining and all the conditions are right you can be really relaxed and feel very comfortable. This saying relates to a more conventional, mundane relaxed state. However real relaxation comes when there is a combination of the physical body as well as the mind being relaxed. When that combination takes place then there is real, genuine relaxation that contributes to our well-being.

So we need to look into how we train our mind to be genuinely relaxed. If it does not come naturally then this is something that we need to train in and pay attention to. The benefit of a relaxed state of mind is that at the times when we might be quite alone we can resort to our relaxed state of mind and feel very comfortable and peaceful. When we are quite young it may be possible to have many friends and in fact we do spend a lot of time in our younger age associating with friends. But, as we get older, friends become fewer and fewer and there is a danger of experiencing loneliness. If we have spent sufficient time developing a genuinely relaxed and calm mind then, when older, we can utilise our time to really practice and genuinely have a relaxed mind.

As I very regularly emphasise, my advice to the younger generation is to pay special attention to developing one's state of mind. Whilst there might be more distractions at that age it is also the time when the intelligence is quite sound and you have a clear mind. So utilise that intelligence and fresh mind to firstly pay attention to your studies and also put some time and energy into cultivating the means to have genuinely calm and peaceful mind.

If we combine our studies and train our mind in meditation when we are young then that will contribute to our well-being at a later stage of life. The academic studies that one has engaged in will secure a well paid job. We depend on a stable economic situation to have comfortable external conditions, thus having accumulated some wealth will contribute to our external

conditions being comfortable at a later stage in our life. On the other hand, if we have worked on developing our mind through the practice of meditation, then at a later stage of our life we will also have a genuinely calm and peaceful state of mind. If, at a young age you don't pay attention, it is very easy to waste your precious time and energy on meaningless things.

I have made this point about the effectiveness of the young, fresh mind between the ages of 16 or 17 up to 30 years of age, several times previously but I really feel it is important to stress it again. As I have explained previously, I can relate from my own experience, the fact that in early childhood one may be quite distracted and not pay enough attention to one's study. However, when one reaches the age of 16 or 17 it seems that one begins to take the initiative from one's own side; this comes along with a heightened state of intelligence and one's mind is very receptive to knowledge. Whatever one puts one's mind to can be very effective. At the age of 30 that intelligence and fresh state of mind begins to diminish. This can also be seen in the area of sports like football. In football matches we can see that the youngsters, between 20 and 26, are really energetic. There is a clear difference.

That heightened state of mind or intelligence around 16 and 17 is something that I can attest to from my own life story. It was around the age of 16 that, of my own accord, I left my home in the eastern part of Tibet and travelled to central Tibet. I took upon that journey willingly to pursue Buddhist studies. On reaching the Sera monastery in central Tibet I spent the rest of my time pursuing Buddhist study. From my experience in Buddhist philosophical study, I found that the mind can be really very sharp in the teen years.

I like to share these points because they are really essential, and I share them with you as a family member or close friend. True friends will always try to remind each other of the good values in life. I have no intention besides trying to express my deep felt concern for how to make your life more meaningful. Younger generation or older generation, it is my intention to share whatever I can to try to make your life a little bit more meaningful. That is why I express these points again and again.

I have mentioned that, from the point of the view of development, there can be heightened intelligence at this age. However, in this country it seems that teenage is considered a difficult period. Parents seem to find it difficult to manage their children and consider it a difficult age. In past years I have mentioned that when children reach this age parents have to take even more responsibility and initiative to care for the children because of the very reason that they are going through a difficult stage. Because of their heightened intelligence they will be naturally more curious about life and so forth.

As I have also said in the past, the reason why I understand the teenage years to be considered difficult is because they have passed the age of being children and are growing into adults, however their minds are still relatively fresh and there is a lot of pressure to make up their mind to do something, but they are not very clear to as what they want to do yet. There is still a lot of

uncertainty in their mind in relation to study, choosing the right subjects, and where to live; there is peer pressure and family pressure. Around the age of 18 or 19 they may be expected to move out but they may not feel completely ready to take that leap. The combination of all these concerns becomes a bit too much and they become overloaded. That state of uncertainty can easily develop into feeling a bit depressed. This is something which can definitely happen.

If they seem negligent or don't seem to be very clear, then that is only a sign of the mind being a little uncertain and of a little bit of frustration. So that is why I encourage parents to pay even more attention rather than scolding them for not doing their work or studies well, or not helping in the household. Rather than trying to get on top of them and scolding them, give them some time and try to understand what difficulties they could be going through. You may understand why they are doing certain things that may seem unreasonable if you realise their frustrations.

I have said this to parents who have confided in me and later that they have said it was very useful advice. Having implemented this advice with their teenage children and tried to understand them better, their communication and mutual trust with their children actually got better. So if there are parents here who have teenagers this might still be useful advice. After passing the period between 16 or 18, at around 19 or 20, they will start become clearer about the direction in their life. As they get a clearer idea about what to head towards, their energy and life direction becomes clear and that's when they flourish again.

To add to the difficulties or frustrations that teenagers go through, we undeniably have to accept the difficulties of puberty. This means that they need to have friends—boyfriends or girlfriends. That is natural. If parents are not mindful of that and not aware that they need friendship, and try to restrict them, then that adds to their frustration. To be very blunt, if a father or mother needs to have friends themselves it would be unreasonable not to allow their children to have friends.

So, rather than restricting or interfering with their relationships with others, it is much better to encourage them to bring their friends home and to include their friends in the family in order to make the children feel much more comfortable, and as a way to gain their trust. Frustration arises if they bring friends home, and their parents seem to be unaccepting or unwilling to have their friends at home. If they have to meet away from home, where should they go? They don't have a place to go. This can add to the pressure on them.

Instead, as parents you can encourage them, saying that their friends are welcome and give them healthy advice. You can be reasonable with your children, telling them to bring their friends home, and let them have a good time at home. You can tell them to help themselves to food and drink and don't need to resort to substances that would harm them, such as alcohol or drugs and so forth. You can explain in a reasonable way that these substances would damage their mind and way of thinking. They can accept that if you explain it in a reasonable way. And

then again, while restricting them from having drugs and so forth, if you don't offer normal food and drink then what is there for them to enjoy at home? You need to be reasonable and when you are reasonable, then that is when you will gain their trust.

Both parents and children have the responsibility to have a good connection and good communication, but parents need to take the upper hand to show more responsibility and understanding of their children and their needs. When children see that their parents are taking genuine responsibility and a willingness to understand them, they will be more open to accept themselves and to share their feelings, and in that way there can be the mutual benefit of good communication and a good relationship. This is something we really need to be mindful of. Rather than restricting children, if the parents themselves are in need in of relationships how could it be reasonable to think that their children don't need this even more? These children are growing up to a mature age, they are going through puberty so there is definitely the need for friendships and the cravings are much stronger. That needs to be understood. So, rather than trying to pressure or restrict them, you need to be more open, more accommodating.

The reason I am saying all of this is because I am treating everyone here as part of my family and I feel like I am discussing family issues. As I have a feeling of family with you, I feel that it is not out of place for me to share thoughts and feelings that would contribute to the harmony of the family. This is the spirit in which I share this advice.

So when parents, from their side, are open with their communication and accommodating towards their children and try to understand their needs then their children, from their side, will naturally start to open up and share their feelings and so forth. In that way you can get good understanding, good communication and a good relationship. The importance of the relationship between children and their parents, and vice versa, will be discussed in the teachings themselves later on. However, these are very important points that are not to be taken lightly. The relationship between parents and children is unique and one must really think about having a good healthy relationship. This is really important in life.

As I understand it, the best happiness for ordinary beings is the happiness of a harmonious relationship. For ordinary beings, that is the highest happiness that one can experience. When there is harmony in a family or with a companion or friends, then there is a real sense of joy and happiness.

As we work towards having a healthy relationship with outer friends, through the expression of genuine concern and love and compassion, we naturally develop the inner friend that is love and compassion. The attitude of genuine love and compassion developed within one's own heart is said to be our unflinching inner friend. Wherever we go, whatever we are doing, it will never fail to give us real protection and a real sense of well-being. So the inner friend, which is the qualities of love and compassion, should always be present particularly when

we are with others. As I emphasise again and again, it is the very people that we associate with in our daily life, be it our partners colleagues, friends or relatives, who are the people that we need to express genuine love and compassion towards.

Parents need to serve as an example for their children's well-being and their direction in life. So if the parents are argumentative and always fighting with each other then that becomes an example for their children. Certain children have confided in me that, 'I am afraid to get married because I can see the result of my parents' marriage. They are always fighting and seem to be really unhappy together. So I am really afraid to have a married life and children of my own.' That is the sort of message children seem to get if their parents are not having a harmonious, good relationship. Therefore it is really important that parents have a good harmonious relationship with their partner, to be an example for their children to have a good direction in their life.

One of the main points mentioned earlier is that it all comes down to the practice of utilising a technique that really brings about a genuine calmness and happiness in the mind. This comes through the practice of meditation. If, at a young age, one utilises these techniques then, at a later stage, the practice of meditation becomes much more natural and easier to do.

I have many stories of elder people. One, which comes particularly to mind is Bea Ribush, the late mother of an old Dharma student. She might have been 93 or 94 when she passed away. Earlier in her life I think there was a Sri Lankan Buddhist temple around where she lived so she had some association with Buddhism and had tried some meditation. Then later she came here and also did some meditation here. On one occasion before she passed away, she would have been maybe 92 at the time, Lama Zopa Rinpoche was visiting. Dorian one of her children was here, I think, and Lama Zopa was planning to go and visit Bea. I asked Dorian how his mum was and he explained that she had just come back from hospital because she had had a fall and had a broken hip. However, in spite of being in a hospital and having to deal with ordeal of the surgery, her mind was very calm and peaceful and Dorian, even though he was not into practising meditation, mentioned that having done meditation seemed to have really helped her to be calm and handle everything very well. So, there definitely seems to be a benefit from the practice of meditation.

I have many such stories of elderly people who have experienced good results from their practices. These stories of the benefits of meditation are not something from ancient times but situations that I have witnessed myself where the benefits of the practice of meditation are very obvious. We will not spend more time this evening relating those stories. Instead we can now go on to the actual practice of meditation.

The appropriate posture for meditation is a relaxed posture. As mentioned previously, it is not sufficient just to have a relaxed posture; we also need to have a relaxed state of mind. What I find from my experience is that it is very difficult to actually have a relaxed state of mind. If we question why is it so difficult to have a really calm

and relaxed state of mind we would find the answer is that our minds are busy, being completely immersed in all forms of thoughts and distractions. So, for as long as we allow our mind to be completely immersed in external distractions and conceptual thoughts the mind is very agitated and not relaxed. Put very bluntly and simply, if we don't have a relaxed mind it is because we have allowed it to wander off externally everywhere. When we can see that is happening and acknowledge that our mind is constantly distracted, we can take the initiative to withdraw our focus from external distractions and bring our mind's focus within ourselves. We make the commitment to discipline our mind and not let it wander off in every direction, following every whimsical thought or every distraction. Instead we bring our focus within ourselves.

Because we are beginners we need to have an object to focus on so that we can anchor our focus and keep our mind stable. As we regularly do here, the object of our focus will be our own breath. We need to develop the commitment that, 'for the next few minutes I will not allow my mind to go in every direction but rather I will keep my focus entirely on my breath'. The way to keep our mind focused on the breath is to keep our breathing very natural. This means it is free from laboured breathing and deep inhalations or exhalations and remains natural. Then, based on the natural rhythm of our breathing, we place our full attention and awareness upon the breath. It would be helpful to keep track of each 'in' breath and 'out' breath. As we breathe our thinking can be, 'Now I am breathing in, now the breath is going out.' So we keep our mind focused on our breathing, each in breath and each out breath.. That is what we will engage in for the next few minutes. (*Pause for meditation.*)

If anyone has a question, please raise your hand? Geshe-la encourages good questions.

Question: If someone who has bullied me in the past becomes a Buddhist, do I have the moral responsibility to connect with them, even if I still feel uncomfortable in their presence?

You do not have to feel any pressure to make contact with the person, just because they are Buddhist. That doesn't mean that one has a responsibility to go out of one's way to try to make contact. That would be unnatural.

Now, on one hand you need not feel the pressure to try to connect with her but, on the other hand, it is also useful for your own development to check your own state of mind and ask why you have those feelings. Usually if we have resentment it is because there was anger initially, and that anger then turned into resentment. When we hold on to a past experience then, in normal cases, the resentment can very easily turn into hatred as well. That will be not useful for one's own mind; resentment by itself is also not useful. As one works on one's own state of mind if one finds there are any feelings of resentment one needs to try to work over them, but meanwhile one need not feel obligated to make the connection.

Now, if this person has become Buddhist in the true sense then some transformation might have taken place on their side too. There are many instances of people who earlier in their life may have been a little negative or easily agitated or even a bit malicious, but having found Buddhism and genuinely practised it, have undergone some transformation. There are many instances I have heard of from people who have gone through a Buddhist tradition, a Thai Buddhist tradition for example, who go and meditate and find that a lot of transformation takes place. So, if the other person has gone through a genuine transformation and become better as they pursue the practice of Buddhism and you happen to be in circumstances where you need to relate to each other it could turn out to be a good communication.

Unless it happens naturally there is no need to feel that you have that obligation. It all depends on your own side, your own state of mind. If you have been able to work with the issues of resentment and can genuinely give her a nice smile then that would be astonishing for her, and it would really help her mind if she recalls that she had bullied you. If she had the definite intention to do that, she would feel very grateful that even though she had done a negative thing towards you that rather than holding a grudge, you are smiling and showing a genuine sense of friendship and smiling. That would really help her to change her mind and she would think how wonderful it is that you have approached her. So that could really help her mind if you could do it genuinely. But if you are not able to do that right now, if you still have to work on yourself a bit, then there is no rush.

A great Tibetan master called Geshe Chekawa mentioned in his advice that to train ourselves in a spiritual practice we need go beyond the mundane worldly concepts and norms. The worldly norm is that when someone is nice to you, you return goodwill, but if someone harms you, you return harm to them. But in spiritual practice we need to completely reverse that norm. When others harm you, you show gratefulness and pleasantness. That would be the optimum way to practice.

These sort of mind training systems are good for us to understand because they help us to deal with our negative emotions and so forth. What we call the mind training teachings in Buddhism are none other than practical ways to deal with difficult issues in life.

Question: I am disabled person, diagnosed with multiple sclerosis at a young age, but have since been in rehabilitation and I can now walk and see. In fact I am quite fit. As such I have taken upon a mission to climb Mt Everest as way to encourage other disabled people. I have been told by my trainers that I need to seek help from the Buddhists to train my mind as well. So my question is how do I do that?

Answer: From the Buddhist point of view one of the most essential mental tools that you would need is mindfulness. The practical effect of mindfulness would be that you would pay attention, be mindful, of each stage and try not to think about other things and especially not look down (*laughter*). When you see the step fall, that could generate fear (*laughter*). If you become afraid you could cramp up. Fear makes you cramp up

and unable to go forward. So in order to be able to go forward and be mindful of each stage and step, mindfulness would be crucial and important. You must also have determination and courage to be able to do it. You should reason with yourself that 'Many others have reached the top who are also humans exactly like me with two arms and two legs. I have got all the conditions that they have got, I am not lacking in anything, so there is no reason why I can't do it. I have to muster up that courage and determination, and really reason'. Try not to let others reason you out of it and have the strong determination and reason with yourself that you can do it. That is something that you need to maintain at all times.

Your main assistants when you climb the mountain will be Sherpas. Without Sherpas apparently it would be difficult for you to reach the top. The Sherpas are dedicated Buddhists so they will be doing prayers. If you can learn some of their prayers, (*Geshe-la chuckling*), that would be good too. But the main thing is that before they climb they have a tradition of putting up prayer flags and doing prayers. When you see them putting up prayer flags and so forth, in your heart you can also make strong prayers too. That would be good.

Then, of course, if you are inclined to learn about Buddhism and feel that you have a connection with Buddhism then within our tradition we have a deity called Tara. That is her image over there. Tara is a deity or Buddha in a female aspect equivalent to the Virgin Mary in the Christian tradition. Tara is known for giving swift help in removing obstacles and danger and so forth. If you feel inclined to rely upon Tara and make prayers to Tara, she can definitely help you to overcome obstacles and difficulties. The main thing is to be diligent and cautious.

So there is the practical aspect of being diligent in training yourself in particular ways of mountaineering. That is something you have to do. On top of that, as a complementary measure, would be the mind training that can come from Buddhist study or through the Buddha's help through the blessings of the deities and so forth. This can definitely help because according to the Buddhist study and tradition what we call willpower is mind power. Mind power is much more powerful than any physical activity we can do.

Before we end the session for the evening let us again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time our object to focus on can be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. We try to maintain our focus on the sound itself as we hear the sound.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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