
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual we can spend some time in meditation. For that purpose we adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture. Likewise we encourage our mind to be in a relaxed state – particularly a clear and bright state – so that we can ensure we are physically and mentally settled. The person who has a clear, focused and bright mind, and who is relaxed physically, will definitely benefit and will be able to say, 'I'm truly relaxed.'

We all wish to be happy. Adopting a meditation practice helps to promote our natural wellbeing and happiness. A relaxed mind and body can develop a sort of intelligence that knows how to bring about a genuinely happy state of mind. Since we all have a natural inclination to be happy, seeking the right means to be happy, is reasonable and wise.

Meditation is also a method for protecting the wellbeing we already possess. We are born with physical and mental happiness, but we may neglect protecting this innate quality and thus it can diminish. Therefore, we need to apply an appropriate technique to maintain our physical and mental wellbeing. Our meditation practice will help us to protect whatever level of physical and mental happiness we already possess, and it will also increase our wellbeing.

I feel that all our activities should contribute to our personal happiness, particularly our mental happiness. Our mental happiness is dependent on our mental attitude: a positive attitude contributes to and promotes our mental happiness; but a negative attitude can destroy and decrease our mental happiness. The close relationship between our attitude and our happiness is evident if we pay attention to the state of our mind. When we harbour a negative attitude or emotion our mind immediately becomes distressed and uncomfortable; it can feel sad, heavy and depressed, depending on the sorts of feelings that arise in response to the negative attitude we have. Whereas when we have a positive state of mind, our mind becomes happy and joyous. In other words, as soon as certain negative attitudes arise they cause us distress and unhappiness, but when they are replaced with positive attitudes we have a sense of joy and happiness. This connection becomes very clear to us when we pay attention to the relationship between our attitudes and the state of our mind.

If we pay attention to emotions related to memories that cause us distress, we will naturally feel depressed. However, the technique of meditation enables us to stop thinking about negative memories and helps us to be mindful so that we don't allow our mind to cause us emotional suffering. Conversely, meditation helps us to retain a kind attitude and causes us happiness because it enables us to pay attention to positive attitudes or memories, which brings us joy. Nevertheless, we have to be careful that we don't get carried away with sensual pleasure, but are joyful as a result of a more concrete and positive attitude that is based internally.

In any case, the main point is that our state of mind is influenced by the attitude and emotions that we harbour, so we need to pay attention to it; and recognise and acknowledge that understanding this relationship increases our own wisdom. Knowing how our mind functions is profound and this inner wisdom is invaluable.

When we begin to notice for ourselves how a negative attitude disturbs and stresses our mind, and destroys our happiness and calmness, it is to our advantage. This is because we can then turn away from the negative attitude and not allow it to influence us. If we allow ourselves to be influenced by negative attitudes, memories or emotions we will become familiar with negative attitudes, which will preoccupy our mind and cause us more distress. For example, many people have negative feelings, such as doubts and fears, in relation to situations that have not actually occurred. These negative feelings might persist for weeks, months and even years because of the fact that attention is given to it; the negative attitudes reoccur because it as if one is obsessed with it. However, if one were to analyse the situation, one would realise that nothing has happened and it is the unnecessary worry that is causing the distress. So this demonstrates that we must turn away from negative attitudes and tell ourselves not to pay them attention so that we do not experience distress.

The way to turn away from and not be influenced by negative emotions is to practise meditation. Meditation is a method for developing a clear, bright and focused mind. We can then use this clear state of mind to discern which attitudes and emotions are useful and which are not. Further, a clear and focused mind will protect itself from negative attitudes and emotions. The more familiar we become with meditating, the more we will be inclined towards a focused and clear state of mind. Most importantly the increased quality of our meditation practice will help cultivate a kind attitude.

When we develop a kind attitude we easily associate well with others, and friends naturally come about; we all need to have friends and having many is better than having one or two. Sometimes, however, the few friends we have decreases because of our attitude and behaviour. This is because our negative state of mind is not only distressing to us, but is also uncomfortable for others: no one likes to be around someone who is always gloomy and negative. Therefore, the best way to gain genuine friends is by developing and increasing a kind and compassionate attitude.

Adopting a meditation practice requires effort and some hardship might be involved, especially for beginners, because it is not easy, and takes energy and time. However, the difficulties we experience are worthwhile because, as the teachings often remind us, a little hardship can help to relieve greater suffering in the future.

In a worldly context, this is similar to what I often remind the younger generation regarding their studies. Young people's minds are fresh so it is worthwhile for them to pay attention to their education. At school there are times when you are hungry, tired or bored and you feel like a break, but if you endure the hardships and continue to attend, your study will definitely relieve greater future hardship by contributing to your future wellbeing. An example of this would be one of the earlier prime ministers of India, called, Lal Bahadur Srivastava Shastri, who was from a very poor family that could not pay for his ferry travel to his school across Ganges River. Since Shastri did not have the money to

pay for the boat fare, he swam across the river so that he could study. He later became the prime minister of India. Shastri's zeal resulted in his successful future, so being aware that education is a priority in one's life is very important.

Naturally, teenagers from around seventeen years old onwards start to mature and appreciate their independence. They, of course, want to have friends and they want to have a good time with them. This is fine and important, but I remind them not to only have fun and to not make partying their priority, because neglecting their education will reap negative consequences. Many people tell me that they strongly regret wasting their opportunities to study well when they were younger. Some of these people are able to study again in their mid 30s or 40s, but often they find it difficult, particularly if they are not familiar with studying.

Therefore, we must utilise our time well, especially when we are young. We must pay attention to developing the inner qualities of our mind and the outer qualities of a worldly education. This is ideal because our meditation practice helps us to develop, nurture and promote our internal qualities of kindness, while worldly education helps our external wellbeing. In this way we will not be deprived of developing our internal qualities, which contribute to our mental happiness, and we will not be deprived of developing our external wellbeing, which contribute to our physical happiness. Some hardships and difficulties are worthwhile, whether in the context of worldly studies or in the context of meditation, because the hardships are for future benefits.

Having good external conditions will contribute to our physical happiness, whereas having the internal qualities of kindness will contribute to our mental happiness. The internal qualities of our mind are most important because even if our external conditions are good, there may still be an unsettled feeling inside because our mind is not peaceful. Quite a few people, who are not particularly religious or Buddhist, have come to me and shared their feelings of discontent with me about everything that they have. They have confided in me that they have a good job, a good career and are successful, but they don't have a sense of wellbeing and they never seem to be really happy. They tell me that they sometimes feel it would be best for them to go off somewhere in the bush where there are no phone calls or meetings so that nothing will disturb them [*Geshe-la chuckles*], but then they say in their next breath, "Of course that is not possible because I have so many responsibilities!" [*Laughter.*] This goes to show that even if someone has the external conditions to be materially successful, the external conditions do not bring about a happy mind. In contrast, developing our internal qualities and a positive way of thinking secures a happy, calm and peaceful mind, and contributes to our physical wellbeing. Therefore, we must pay attention to developing our inner qualities.

When our minds are genuinely peaceful and calm, our physical conditions become better, whereas when our minds are distressed we can get physically ill. This is because the stress we feel in our minds is felt by our physical body too. This is obvious when you consider how you experience aches and pains in your body, like having sore shoulders and a tight neck when you are anxious. The very close relationship between the mind and body has been explained in the Buddhist world from ancient times. In this day and age, the state of mind affecting our physical body is something that is known medically and scientifically.

Now that I have talked about the benefits of meditation we can take some time to practise it. Again we remind ourselves to sit in a comfortable, upright and relaxed posture, and try to have a clear and bright state of mind. We can also generate a positive motivation for the intention of our meditation to the best of our ability. It is important that we make a commitment to ourselves that for the next few minutes we will not allow our minds to be distracted by thoughts, worries, memories or external distractions, but to instead completely focus within ourselves.

When we have brought our attention within and have withdrawn from all external distractions, we place our focus on our breath – the effortless and relaxed rhythm of our breath. All we have to do is naturally breathe in and out, and allow our breath to come and go effortlessly as we inhale and exhale. We focus on the breath as we inhale and imagine that we are seeing the breath coming in, and then we focus on the breath as we exhale and imagine the breath going out. You can count your breath if it is helpful, but the main thing is to focus entirely on the breath itself and not to allow your mind to be distracted with any other thought or object. This focus is the real benefit of this practice. So, for the next few minutes, we will do this.

[*Pause for meditation.*]

Any questions? Raise your hand if you have any questions.

Question: So pain can be internal as well as external? If I pinch myself do I feel physical or mental pain?

Answer: The pain you experience when you pinch yourself is classified as physical pain because it is in relation to your physical body. All pain we feel that is associated with any physical aspects of ourselves is physical, but mental pain is something intangible – it is not something that we can pinpoint and say, "This hurts." Physical pain is much easier to relieve because, for example, if we have a headache, we can buy headache medicine to counteract the physical discomfort, but if we have mental pain we cannot buy medicine to cure it. We need to understand this point on a deeper level. Of course, not all physical suffering can be entirely removed by external means, but in terms of external conditions, we have plenty of resources to relieve physical discomfort and pain, especially here in the West, where there are many medical facilities and the conditions are good. Some older people have told me that taking certain kinds of medication seems to prolong their life, and even though some of the pills they take have side effects, they feel that their lives have been lengthened as a result.

In relation to meditation, the hardship or difficulties that are worthwhile to endure are twofold: there may be a *mental discomfort* caused by exerting ourselves, and putting our time and energy into the practice, and there be a *physical discomfort* resulting from not being used to sitting in a certain posture. Initially when we practise meditation, we experience the mind wandering off again and again when we try to focus on the object of our meditation. This happens because we are still training our mind to become familiar with the practice. The very act of training our mind in this way means that we will encounter some difficulties, and when we are beginners of meditation, we might find the technique difficult and it might cause some internal distress. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, it is worthwhile to endure these hardships because once the mind is acquainted with and able to remain focused naturally, a real and genuine calmness associated with a blissful feeling occurs.

Within the definition of patience in Buddhism, there is a classification of patience that is described as, "The patience of definitely thinking about the Dharma", which is particularly applied to when we are practising meditation and thinking about certain Dharma teachings. If we find our practice difficult or don't understand it then we can keep practicing and thinking until it gets easier. Focusing on the breath does not require any analytical thought or investigation into Dharma teachings because it is a simple meditation that concentrates on the natural process of the breath. For us beginners it is said to be very effective in calming down our minds. There are many different meditation practices, but for new students, meditating on the breath is very useful.

Student: Is it OK to ask another question, or would it take too much time?

Geshe la: OK, you can ask a question! For me it is not really a concern, but it is for others who are attending! [*Laughter.*] The duration of the session is really important to many people because after an hour passes, they say that it is very difficult to focus! [*Laughter.*]

Question: The explanation that God created the world seems problematic to me, although many people believe it leaves little room for debate. They would say, "God created the world and that's the end of the story." But if, for example, Brahma created the world, then who created Brahma? And then who created Brahma's creator?

Answer: According to Buddhism, the suffering world is created by ignorance. The unpleasantness and suffering we feel is related to a cause within ourselves – a misconception or wrong view – which we can attribute to being ignorant and not knowing any better. There is a detailed explanation in the teachings of how the world and time was created by the coming together of the four elements – earth, water, fire and air – and that how, after a period of time, there will be a disintegration or disturbance of these four elements, which will consume the world. Currently we can see disturbances of the elements, such as with water and the recent big floods experienced here in Australia. What we call a "natural disaster" is seen in Buddhism as the elements being out of balance.

Today there are many fears and hypotheses about how the world is in great danger of becoming submerged when the ice melts because of global warming. Buddhist teachings explain that in the disintegration of the four elements, which make up the world, there will first be earth, followed by an upheaval of the water element, followed by an upheaval in the fire element, and then followed by an upheaval in the wind element. At some point everything will disintegrate and then there will be another formation that will take place because the formation and disintegration of the four elements continuously cycles. There are scientific explanations of how the continents separated because of the elements so it seems that this Buddhist explanation is possible.

Of course we won't be around when most of the planet is covered with water because the disintegration of the four elements takes a very long time, but it seems like a possible explanation. I remember when I was first here in Australia, someone came to me concerned about a prediction that the world will be submerged in twenty years time. I told him that I didn't think it would be the case and, now that twenty years have gone by, we can see that the prediction was incorrect. However, the person who made the comment was

very fearful at the time so I told him there was no need to be afraid. Another time someone told me that an expected drought would affect crops so that there would not be enough food for everyone. I told her that the real danger would not occur for quite a while so not to worry. Prior to the year 2000 many people were talking about possible technological catastrophes that might happen, such as computers breaking down, electricity not working and things not running as they should. I was in India at that time on my annual visit, but when the new millennium came, there were no problems.

So based on these anecdotes we can see that it is common for people to elaborate predictions, which makes them fearful and brings them unnecessary pain; there is no need to worry unnecessarily on events that have not happened as I have mentioned previously. We need to protect our mind from unnecessary paranoia and we need to use our wisdom and understanding to detect and see things as they really are, rather than exaggerating the situation and causing ourselves unnecessary suffering.

So before we end the session for the evening, let us again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time the object of our focus will be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. For this meditation we can try to put our full attention on the sound of the mantra, and, when the recitation subsides, we can focus on the vacuity of the mantra's sound. So let us do this with a happy state of mind for a few minutes, recognising that the main thing we want is to be happy and without fear.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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