



**Stress Management**  
**by**  
**the 12th Chamgon Tai Situ Rinpoche**

I have been requested to speak on Shinay and Lhaktong and also something related to prayer, particularly to help people overcome something that these days is quite common, I think the medical term for it is stress. I personally don't have one word for it because one person's difficulty may not necessarily be another person's difficulty; things work differently for different people and that way I really don't know exactly what so-called stress is. But of course people get tired, people get confused, people are overwhelmed by other people's expectations or their own expectations of themselves, all kinds of things which become unreasonable. So an individual feels it and doesn't like it, doesn't appreciate it and would like to overcome and do away with it if possible, so I think that is what everybody calls stress.

According to Lord Buddha's teaching, if we look at the very beginning of Lord Buddha's teaching, the first noble truth that he taught was the truth of suffering, which means that every sentient being, as long as he or she is not free, then that person is not exempt from suffering and that person suffers one way or another.<sup>1</sup> So it is not the individual potential that deserves suffering, on the contrary, it is because of the individual's lack of development of their potential and their lack of full usage of their potential that they are suffering. Therefore, the truth of suffering was the first noble truth that Buddha taught, and I am quite sure it will include stress.

I know people who have a lot of stress and they describe it by telling me that they cannot sleep so they have to take sleeping pills. They say, "I can't do my job and perform efficiently because everything is too much for me." So from this kind of thing I understand what stress is supposed to mean. I think everybody is trying to manage their stress all the time. I think in this world 5000 million human beings in every twenty-four hours are doing everything they can—eating, cooking, sleeping, walking, making money, trying to do good things, trying to do bad things. I think we can say all of that is to fulfil their wishes, and a big part of their wishes is to be comfortable and have peace of mind. If you have peace of mind then you don't have stress, I think. That way we can say everybody is doing everything to manage their stress. But many people do not manage their stress efficiently so they go to gurus, they go to doctors, they go to therapists, they go to all kinds of services to help them do something that they can not do themselves; they go to others to do it for them. That's where centres like this particular medical institution become relevant, because here you have a team of people who are fulltime

and can collectively do something to relieve people's stress.

I think your service here is using more physical therapy to relieve mental stress, but maybe you also use mental therapy, which is more direct. It is very interesting because in the west there are so many places like this. A very good friend of mine, a Rinpoche, he teaches a lot therapy and once I went to look at one of the classes. I was peeping through the doors and saw all these people of all ages, from twenty years to sixty years old, lying on the floor and sucking their thumbs! Some people were crying, really crying and going back to the past. I couldn't understand that. I don't know how to do that, but some people do that and it works. So there are many ways to manage stress.

The physical aspect of stress I describe as tension, because if you are physically tense then your blood does not circulate or flow properly and your muscles don't function properly, your nervous system doesn't function properly, therefore it becomes worse and worse. So you get so used to certain physical conditions, including postures, breathing, and also the way you put pressure on different parts of the body, and so the flow of energy and flow of something as simple as blood circulation is affected and the oxygen becomes out of balance. As a result of that you don't have the necessary energy and you are not able to do what you normally should be able to do physically. And as result of that, since mind and body are inseparable—definitely not inseparable, each one of us, one day, our mind and body will be separated, but until that sacred day happens we are not able to separate our body and mind—when the body is in tension then the mind is naturally affected by it and the mind becomes tense also. As a result of that many people go the wrong way, they take cigarettes and alcoholic beverages and even heavy drugs. That is to relieve the physical tension so that their mental tension will be less, and that they are able to somehow function in a stop-gap measure; they just become temporarily well. Once you get into that sort of thing then you need unnatural things such as alcohol, cigarettes and drugs, more and more. There is no end to it and after some time you become addicted. For that reason physical therapy as well as some form of exercise is useful, but not done by others to you. My definition of therapy is that someone does something to you. But exercise is something that somebody teaches you and then you do it yourself. That is my definition of the difference between physiotherapy and exercise. It's actually the same but therapy is when somebody does it for you.

I have a joke; actually it's not really a joke but an idea. I might like to patent it. If there was a machine that you could physically get into and program so that it does all your exercise for you. So you would go inside it and just sit there, put your fingers and hands into it and it does everything, walking and jogging for you, maybe for two hours! Initially maybe you do it for fifteen minutes otherwise you will get cramps and pain everywhere, but after that you could increase it and do it for two hours. But I wouldn't call that exercise, I would call that therapy—it is a machine that is working for you to move your limbs so that your heart pumps faster and

you get oxygen and everything, that is more like therapy. When you do it yourself then it is exercise, and I think physical exercise like that helps very much.

Anyway, I think all of these things work to a degree, like mental therapy, physical therapy, exercise, and also diet—don't eat things that make your blood circulation or oxygen supply or nervous system function with difficulty. Cut down on those things, because if the blood is very thick then the flow will be difficult, and if the blood is not very thick with oils and those kinds of things then it flows more fluidly. If you don't have lots of fat then the circulation and everything is much easier. It is much easier on your heart because the heart has to pump a certain number of times a day and it has to pump that number of times to supply a certain amount of oxygen and blood to the body. So it will be more difficult for the heart if the blood is thick or if the body is too large—the heart has less load on it if you have less mass to supply. In this way diet is also extremely important, but diet can mean different things to different individuals. For some people it is good to be thin, and for some people to be a little bit substantial is also good. If you are really thin and never get sick then it is okay, but if you are sick and are very thin then you've had it because you have no reserves. For example, somebody could last for three months with a little bit of sickness, but a very thin person may not last for three days with the same amount of sickness because they don't have the reserves of energy to maintain themselves. For example, it is like, I don't meant to be sectarian, I am not saying anything against or for any religion, but the way Mormons keep a supply of food in their basement so that if anything happens they have enough food there. So being a little substantial is good for you because if you get sick then there are enough supplies to keep you going. The Doctor here is looking at me, I can't read your mind but I know what you are thinking, you are thinking I have to say this because I am a little bit substantial (laughter). When you are a little bit overweight then saying these things becomes a little bit self-conscious.

Anyway, I think the physical aspect and mental aspect of exercise and therapy work, but it does not work very deeply. Because, for example, you can be physically fit and mentally fit but still have stress. Also you might have so many problems and have stress, which is understandable, but also you might have no problems and you are still stressed. I know people who have no jobs, nothing to do and no responsibility whatsoever, but they have a lot of stress and are tired. It's true. I also know people who have so much responsibility and work but they are not stressed. I am not talking about spiritual people, but just ordinary people who have a full time job and work very hard as well as having full time responsibilities at home and have no stress at all. This way stress management as physical therapy or mental therapy, or physical exercise or mental exercise, does not take care of all of it. Therefore, why you are inviting me to talk here is I think to say something about this aspect.

Actually, the capacity of our mind cannot be compared to anything, it is incomparable. The

only suitable example is that mind is like the sky, there is no boundary for the capacity of the mind. How much you can know, how much you cannot know, how much you want and how much you don't want; there is no limit to its capacity. Therefore I can practically say the impossible is only possible superficially, but the truly impossible is impossible because the capacity of the mind has no boundary. Because of that, with things like stress, there is no end to what kind of reason there is or what kind of form it will take because the capacity of mind has no boundary, therefore the capacity of the manifestation of stress has no boundary.

For this reason in the fourth noble truth Lord Buddha taught ways to tackle the particular impossible-ness of the suffering of sentient beings. There is an ordinary Tibetan saying, it is not a dharma teaching but I am sure it was influenced by dharma, but it is an ordinary folk saying which is, 'A king cries in his palace, a beggar cries under a tree, but the tears are the same.' A beggar cries because he doesn't have anything to eat for three days and has nothing to wear, therefore he is sitting under a tree and crying. A king has hundreds and hundreds of robes, hundreds of courses of cuisine—old time kings had hundreds of queens, thousands of servants, hundreds of cooks and their kitchens could be the size of one hundred beggars' homes—but still a king cries for something, and it is stress. In this way it is impossible to fulfil the wishes of a sentient being. It is impossible to fulfil the wishes of one person if that person does not decide to be content. When a person does not decide to be content we call them greedy, but there is no limitation to greed.

We are quite clear right now that as human beings we have managed to get rid of all our big predators. Big birds that can carry us and eat us are gone; big lizards that can just pick us up and eat us like a sandwich are gone, all the dragons are slain, most of the tigers and lions are in cages and we ride elephants and make them work for us. So we have no big predators; they are all gone. Of course there are still small predators, but we are working on them. There are all kinds of small predators and we have to find solutions for each one of them. Some of them are so small that we have to use many tools to find out how to get rid of them. The bigger ones are easier to find, but the smaller ones are more difficult and there are so many types. So small predators are still there and some live in us and prey on us from inside. Big predators just fly down on us and pick us up and take us to their nest and make a nice kebab out of us!

So we as human beings have managed to get rid of almost everything that we don't like, at least externally. We have colonised and managed to make so many gadgets, even some to climb stairs. For example, to come here I didn't need to climb the stairs; I came in an elevator and didn't have to use my legs. Also now we can fly from one part of the world to the other and we can talk to anyone even if they are on Mars. We can also see them, it may cost a lot of money today but it is possible, maybe in twenty or thirty years from now it will be like using a mobile phone to call our friend who lives on Mars. Even now we have phone and video conferencing.

So in all these ways we have managed to progress, but still we are not able to take care of our problems and our stress. I am quite sure that today, this year, more people killed themselves than a hundred years ago. Also a hundred years ago more people killed themselves compared to two hundred years ago. I think a long time ago we would have been afraid that we would be killed by somebody rather than by killing ourselves. In my mind this unbelievable self abuse that we inflict upon ourselves today is a sign that we did not achieve what we wished to achieve. We have so much, yet we feel so desperate that we would rather die than live—living becomes more frightening, more disliked, more unfavourable than dying, so people kill themselves because they think that it is a better thing than living. This proves that all of our external things have not really accomplished anything.

Looking at the fourth noble truth of Lord Buddha's teachings, we see that there he teaches us how to handle this. He says, "The solution for fulfilling your wishes is in you. The solution is in you, not somewhere else." Since he taught the four noble truths Buddha's teaching then manifested in many different levels, but that was his first teaching and it remains the foundation of all the teachings of Lord Buddha. In Tibetan we call Buddhism *nangpa*, which means insider. Insider does not mean that we as Buddhists are insiders and everybody else who is not a Buddhist is an outsider. But the meaning of insider is that Buddha is in us, the solution is in us, the potential is in us, it is not somewhere out there. So when we look for the solution out there, that is not Lord Buddha's teaching. We look for the solution in us, that is Lord Buddha's teaching, that is what is mean by nangpa.

Now I will go a little bit further into this. Actually if you are able to simply be at peace, then fifty percent of the stress or whatever you call it is taken care of. You might have pain and pressure and all of those things, but if you are at peace with yourself then fifty percent of that is gone, it is transformed. For example, I have a terrible neck, maybe you have a terrible knee, somebody else has a terrible throat, someone else a terrible back, we can have all kinds of things—ten kids to feed, a lawsuit—but if you are at peace in your mind then you can manage all of that without that much stress. But if you are not at peace in yourself, then even if you are single with no responsibility whatsoever, except to please yourself, to fulfil your own wishes, if you do not get things your own way then you will still have stress, suffering is still there.

I personally call and describe the way we all think like this as creating the conditions for our suffering, all the time. By trying to create the conditions of our happiness, for example, we say, "I will be very happy if I have this and this and these things together, only two or three things together." But the world is enormous and there is so much, so that by making conditions for our happiness with a few things then we are creating the conditions for our suffering for everything else. It is like shooting at a target: there is an enormous space but we make one little bullseye and put it as far away as possible—the further away it is the better the

shot we are. We like to be the best shot so we put it as far away as possible and then what we are shooting at is a small thing. Then we shoot and shoot and shoot and try to get that bullseye. Then wherever we hit we are not happy because we only want to hit the bullseye, but to hit that is difficult because it is a very small thing and we are using a bullet, which is a very small thing, to hit it with. The way we torture ourselves in samsara—Buddha describes it as the suffering of samsara—is by creating so many conditions for our happiness that happiness becomes very difficult to get. So whatever we have we are not going to be happy with until we get the difficult things. But once we get that we get fed up with it very easily, we get enough of it very easily and then want something else. That is quite natural, because we have developed a habit for it over countless lifetimes. Therefore the first thing that Buddha teaches us is to develop peace within ourselves.

The meditation of Shamatha is to develop peace within us. Shamatha is a Sanskrit word which means resting in peace. *Shama* means peace and *tha* means remaining or being in peace. Then Vipashyana, in order to reach the state of Vipashyana you have to have Shamatha, first you have to be at peace. What does Vipashyana mean? In Tibetan we say *vi she shya*, which means especially, extraordinarily, not normally, especially, differently, additionally. Then *pashya* means looking or seeing. So you will see it very specially. What it really represents is that once your mind is at peace and once your mind is calm, then everything around you, outside you and inside you, you will see it more clearly and more specially. You might have thought something was terrible but if you calm down and if you are able to look at it with a peaceful mind, then maybe you will see it is as a good thing—maybe it is something nice, maybe it is not a problem. But you will not see it that way until you are at peace. I will give you an example. Some people have no children and they are terrified by this, they think that it is terrible not to have any children. Then other people have too many children and think that is a problem. But if you are able to be calm and have peace of mind, having no children could be wonderful and also having lots of children could be wonderful; both of them have reasons to be wonderful or terrible. When you are able to be at peace then it is guaranteed that there is something good in it and there is some reason in it, there is some meaning in it, there is some use for it.

I will tell you a story—actually it is not really a story it happened. When I was eight or nine years old in Sikkim, there was a monk who used to talk and argue a lot and he had a roommate (who was also a monk) who was very short tempered. One day this monk was talking a lot and teasing his roommate a lot then his roommate, who was short tempered and a little bit older than him, got very angry. When he got angry he would get really furious, like a Doberman. So he went to the kitchen—in those days there was no gas or electricity, we used wood to cook our food—and he got a large piece of wood and hit the monk who was teasing him on the head with it. He was so mad that he couldn't even argue, he just went to the kitchen and brought a stick and hit him on the head. The person whose head was hit was

bleeding very badly with blood shooting out like a fountain. Then the monk who was hot-tempered got so scared because the person didn't fight back, he didn't even stand up, he just sat there. He then put his hand up and said, "If there isn't anybody that I can get angry at, how can I practice patience?" The monk who hit him was so shocked that he put down his stick and quickly went to his medicine box and pulled out everything to treat him—he was a doctor, a Tibetan doctor. Then they became best friends. Actually the monk who was talkative knew that the other one was short-tempered so after that incident he stopped teasing him, and the other monk who was short-tempered also had to do what he did—he had to see that the person that he had hit when he was so angry, instead of hitting him back was smiling and laughing and saying things like this while he was bleeding. So it was really a very good lesson for both of them. If it hadn't happened to them, I don't know, but the one who talked a lot would've kept on talking and the one who was short-tempered would still be ready to hit anybody. Also if had hit someone who hit him back then he would not have learnt this lesson. And the monk who talked a lot, if he had not met the short tempered monk then he might still be talking and teasing everybody, and sometimes that can be bad.

In this way if you calm down, like the monk who was talking a lot, after he got the big lesson right there, then he managed to calm down and be at peace. It's true. It took that big blow on the head to get that lesson and be at peace with himself. So that was necessary because that big knock made him peaceful; he couldn't think or talk for a few seconds but what he realized from it is the Vipashyana, which is better vision, a better view of the other person and the situation.

So this is the definition of Shamatha and Vipashyana, but the practices of Shamatha and Vipashyana are many. Shamatha practice normally is done through sitting meditation and there are a lot of Shamatha practices through breathing practice; simple breathing practices and very advanced breathing practices. We are not allowed to teach the advanced breathing practices because they are dangerous if the person is not ready for that, but the simple breathing practices anybody can do, as long as they know how to do it.

There is another aspect to Shamatha practice, which is that it will not really be successful if you don't have a few conditions. For example, you have to cut down on your greed, because if you don't cut down on your greed your Shamatha practice will not really work. Also you have to cut down on your unnecessary activities—you have to think very clearly before you do this or that. Think, "Do I really have to do these ten things, are they really necessary?" Look at them very clearly and then the necessary ones you do and the unnecessary ones you skip. Then you will have more time and more space by looking at your activity clearly.

Also moral discipline is very important. Moral discipline means our senses, our skandhas, like form, feeling etc, we are entertaining them all the time, but we should cut down on

entertaining our senses. What is necessary we do, but what is not necessary, if we have a serious habit on those things we cannot stop them right away but we can reduce them. For example, healthy food is necessary, healthy drink is necessary, healthy rest is necessary, healthy physical activity is necessary, but in France there are more than 300 types of cheese, in Germany there more than 300 types of bread and in India there more than 300 types of sweets, but we don't have to indulge in them all. We can cut down on those things. By cutting down on those things then our Shamatha will have a good base otherwise our Shamatha can be very good in the shrine or on the cushion, but the minute we stand up from our cushion or step out of the shrine we will be back in the same situation. It will be just like taking an aspirin for a headache—if you take an aspirin for your headache it will be gone but tomorrow you will have it again; an aspirin does not cure the headache it just kills the pain, it is a painkiller. So Shamatha practice will become like a painkiller and it will not become pure. But if we are able to create the right conditions by avoiding the things that will hinder our peace of mind and practice and develop the conditions that will be conducive to our peace of mind, then whatever kind of Shamatha practice we do will be effective, and effective in a deeper manner and effective in a more everlasting manner. So this is one important factor.

Another important factor is the conditions for Vipashyana. In order to have a good Vipashyana result you have to have good Shamatha. For example, if you want to see your face clearly in the mirror then you have to have a clean mirror. If the mirror is not clean then you will not see everything about your face, and if the mirror is distorted then you will see yourself as distorted. If the mirror is not flat then you might look ten kilos fatter or ten kilos thinner; then you are not seeing yourself you are seeing something else. The mirror has to be perfect. So Vipashyana is like what you see, and it is because of Shamatha that you see what you see, and the most important condition for Vipashyana is Shamatha.

At the same time there are other conditions for Vipashyana, which is learning, because true Vipashyana is omniscience. But for us to expect to be omniscient in this life by living the life that we live is very presumptuous; we will not be omniscient in this life. If we want to be omniscient in this life then we will at least have to live a life like Prince Siddhartha lived. We are not better than him; he lived on the banks of the river Niranjana in Bihar for six years without anything.<sup>ii</sup> He did not think of food or anything, he just had a few grains of rice and a few drops of water every day; that was it. But it was not because he was against eating but because he stopped thinking about that; he stopped acquiring them and he stopped storing them. If you stop storing and putting in effort in to acquire that then it won't be there, you will not have that. Then the minute that a lady offered Buddha yoghurt he took it. He was not against eating but he did not eat because nobody offered him anything; he just sat there totally concentrating on his meditation.

So somehow we have to give up everything in order to get everything—you cannot want one

thing and get everything. In this way becoming omniscient in this life by living my kind of life is impossible, maybe it is not too presumptuous to say living *our* kind of life it is impossible. But maybe living our kind of life and having good true development of Vipashyana, not just meditation Vipashyana, but true Vipashyana, closer to omniscience, to learn, that is very important. But learn from the lineage not just by reading books—you can read as many books as you like, reading books will add to your knowledge, but you also learn from the living lineage.

Lord Buddha's teaching continues in four main aspects (Vinaya, Abhidharma, Sutra and Tantra), each having numerous texts making over one hundred huge Tibetan volumes. Each Tibetan volume would make at least three or four English volumes because when they are translated into English it multiplies in size. Those one hundred volumes are the direct words of the Buddha, then we have over two hundred volumes of commentaries written on those hundred volumes. So these more than three hundred volumes are the main texts that were translated from Sanskrit to Tibetan since the time of Guru Rinpoche, around fifteen hundred years ago.

The first one hundred volumes are called Tripitaka, and the second two hundred volumes are called the translated Shastras—translated from Sanskrit to Tibetan. Now the study of these by one person is almost impossible so we have five main groups of texts that represent the three aspects of Lord Buddha's teachings, and on top of that then Tantra is studied. The five main texts are: Vinaya, Abhidharma, Prajnaparamita, Madhyamaka, and Pramana (Logic and Dialectics). This last one is very, very interesting—out of all of them the one which is the most difficult and most interesting is Pramana. In it you break down everything, every aspect of belief, so that nothing is left without scrutiny, everything is scrutinised in Pramana. So we study these five and on top of that we study Tantra. The Tantras are the essence of all of these teachings, but that has to be learnt after the five aspects of teachings are learnt. In Tibetan Buddhism there is a little bit of high or long jump that takes place—we dive right into the practice without learning very much, just having faith and devotion. Because of the power of faith and devotion it works. But if you don't have enough faith and devotion then diving right into the practice without learning doesn't really work. With a lack of faith and devotion then the more you practice the more there is a chance of becoming proud; sometimes you even end up glorifying yourself instead of glorifying Buddha. This kind of thing can happen if we don't have a strong base of devotion and faith.

So this kind of serious practice of everything without learning is only suitable for those who have unconditional devotion, like Milarepa's devotion to Marpa for example, or Marpa's devotion to Naropa, or Naropa's devotion to Tilopa. If that kind of devotion is there then you don't have to learn much, just receive the transmission and practice and it works. On the other hand, if you just get excited and practice something without devotion, then the more you learn

the more proud you become and the more confused you can become.

So this is another good condition for Vipashyana, which is the development of knowledge. This development of knowledge comes not just through reading by yourself, but by truly learning, and learning it in a certain order, and this order is very clearly given. For a lay person there is a simpler way to learn all this, and if you are a monk or a nun in an institution there is a complete way to learn about this. In my monastery, in Himachal Pradesh, learning the five texts takes nine years, our first six monks graduated in 2003 after nine years of study. I built the monastery twenty-seven years ago but only six graduates of these five texts graduated this year, so it is not easy.

Then after that you do a three year and three month retreat in which you learn and practice tantra. So after nine years, plus three years and three months, you are fully conversant with the basics. This is what it takes in monastic life, as far as my monastery in Himachal Pradesh is concerned. But each monastery is different, they have their own ways and there is different timing and all of that.

Anyway, I think this much technical information of my definition of what is stress and my definition of stress management, also the definition of Shamatha and Vipashyana, what it really takes to have true Shamatha and Vipashyana practice, and effectively develop true realization of what is supposed to be developed, is enough for you

'Stress management' is a very nice term, I really like it, but it is not an end in itself because you are 'managing'. Finally you have to become and you don't have to manage anymore. Therefore we should look at such a concept of stress management as a path not as a fruition. It is just like dharma, just like meditation, we meditate but we don't meditate to become meditation champions, we meditate so that we don't have to meditate anymore. When we don't have to meditate anymore is when we don't have any more defilements and when we don't have any more discursiveness and when we don't have any more neurosis in us. When we totally manifest our ultimate essence, the Buddha essence, the limitless potential, when it fully manifests then we don't have to meditate anymore. So we are meditating in order that we reach the state where we don't have to meditate anymore.

So stress management is like meditation; we manage our stress to reach a state where we don't have any stress. If we don't have any stress then we have nothing to manage. Then I think the stress management service will be out of a job! Looking at the situation in the world though I think that we will need a few million more stress management centres every year though—stress is increasing not decreasing. There is so much happening already, so much brewing—like beer, intentionally or unintentionally more and more pots of beer are brewing. So it is not a very good perspective for humanity the way things stand today in comparison to

where we stood ten or twenty years ago, or even five years ago. The world is worse now than it was then, but anyway we pray and do our part by doing Shamatha and Vipashyana meditation so that we will be able to contribute a little bit for the betterment of everybody, which is peace of mind.

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- <sup>i</sup>. The first teachings of Lord Buddha. The four noble truths are: the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the path. These truths are the foundation of Buddhism.
  - <sup>ii</sup>. After leaving his palace Prince Siddhartha spent six years practicing austerities on the banks of the river Niranjana.