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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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We can practise some meditation as usual. Sit in a good meditation posture. After assuming a proper meditation posture, we can then begin to meditate.

If we think about it deeply, we can recognise the significance of subduing our own mind and reducing unsuitable thoughts. If we develop some wisdom and insight, we can recognise the importance of this.

It is important to subdue unsuitable thoughts, because if we don't, these thoughts will cause mental unhappiness and anxiety – they make the mind agitated, anxious and stressed. Basically, they take away our opportunity for happiness. If we don't change those thoughts, it will be difficult to attain happiness.

On the other hand, positive ways of thinking – thoughts of love, affection and so forth – naturally bring happiness and peace to the mind, so there is no need to change those thoughts. If one wants to attain happiness, one needs to effect an internal change and generate the two thoughts of love and compassion.

The main enemy is within us; the main enemy is the negative states of mind. If someone possesses the two thoughts of love and compassion, happiness and peace will come effortlessly to them. Even if the person says: 'Now I have enough happiness and I am peaceful enough', still more happiness and peace will come – even if the person doesn't want it – if that person possesses those two thoughts of love and compassion. Therefore, one has to effect an internal change. As one of the Dalai Lamas said, 'The main enemy is within' – that is, the main enemy is harmful thoughts such as anger.

One needs to develop an understanding of what causes happiness and suffering. One who has an understanding of the Dharma knows that the causes of happiness and suffering are internal. This understanding will naturally induce one to improve one's mind, increasing positive states of mind and decreasing harmful ones.

It is very important to develop an understanding of the psychology of the mind – which mental states bring happiness and which bring suffering. This wisdom should not just be focused on our immediate temporary situation, but should also look far into the future and be broad. Otherwise, if we are just concerned with our immediate situation, we will do many things that are harmful to us.

At the same time, it is important that we aim to have happiness in this life. If we have happiness in this life, the loss given to us by unsuitable mental states will be avoided. One needs to develop the wisdom that

understands the psychology of the mind – what gives happiness and what gives suffering – and act according to that wisdom.

Why we find it difficult to be happy, even if we have conducive outer conditions, is because the mind is acquainted with harmful, unsuitable mental patterns. Because the mind is so familiar with harmful, unsuitable mental patterns, these mental states arise automatically, even if there are no external disturbances in our lives. This is a sign that these unsuitable mental patterns have become firmly established within one's mental continuum.

So, those unsuitable mental patterns are the reason we can't experience happiness – even though there are no external problems and even though our external situation is conducive to happiness. To overcome this, we need to acquaint the mind with positive mental patterns. By acquainting the mind with positive mental patterns we can reduce unsuitable mental patterns.

The practice of meditation is about building up positive mental patterns – that is what meditation is. So, now bring the mind back home, away from external objects, and focus it inwards. After having completely focused the mind internally, place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. We can meditate in this way for a few minutes. (*Short pause for meditation.*)

As usual, generate the motivation of bodhicitta thinking: 'I have to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, and in order to be able to do so, I shall now listen to this profound Dharma. Then I shall put it into practice for that purpose'.

### ***The four greatneses***

**The first greatness, understanding all the teachings of the Buddha to be complimentary.**

Last time we finished explaining the three characteristics of the instructions presented here. Now, we come to the four greatneses of those instructions. The first greatness is that, by relying upon these teachings, one comes to understand that all the teachings of the Buddha are complementary.

There is a line in the text that says: '***All the multiplicity of the Conqueror's teachings***'. This is saying is that, by relying upon the Lam Rim teachings, one will come to realise that all the teachings of the Buddha are not mutually exclusive, but complement each other.

When the text says: '***The greatness of realising that all the teachings are complementary***', what is the definition of 'the teachings' here? The answer is those teachings that unmistakably show what has to be known, what has to be abandoned, what has to be realised, and what has to be meditated upon in order to attain a human state, a divine state and a state of liberation. What is meant here by the term 'Buddha's teachings' are those teachings that explain in an unmistakable manner what to practise, what to abandon, what to realise directly, and what to meditate upon to those who wish to attain a human rebirth, a divine rebirth as a god, or the state of liberation.

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That is what the Buddha taught, so those teachings that convey this are referred to here as the teachings of the Conqueror.

When the text refers to 'all the teachings' it is referring to what we just discussed – that all of the teachings of the Buddha show what has to be practised and abandoned in order to attain a human rebirth, divine rebirth, or the state of liberation. Here, the greatness of realising that all those teachings complement each other is from the point of view of one person – all the teachings of the Buddha constitute a graduated path to enlightenment for an individual who wants to attain enlightenment.

For some practitioners, certain topics of the Buddha's teachings form their main practice, while for other practitioners, those topics are more of an auxiliary, conducive condition. For example, the practice of renunciation is central to the practice to the beings of small and medium capacity. However, from the point of view of the being of great capacity, the practice of renunciation is but one step within the path to enlightenment; it is a conducive condition to go further along the path, but is not the main practice.

Thus, we can see that all the teachings of the Buddha fit together. Even though certain teachings of the Buddha are not the main practice for a certain practitioner, that doesn't mean that those practitioners don't have to do those practices at all – they still have to do those practices, but in those cases those practices become a conducive condition, an auxiliary practice.

For example, from the point of view of a practitioner of great capacity, the main practice is the practice of bodhicitta, and all the other aspects of Buddhist practice become conducive conditions for the generation and practice of Bodhicitta. Likewise, the practice of wisdom is a primary practice, and the practice of calm abiding is an auxiliary practice that facilitates the generation of wisdom. In such a way, all the teachings of the Buddha have to be practised in order to attain enlightenment. From the point of view of different types of practitioners, different aspects of the teachings become primary and others become mere branches or auxiliary practices, but to attain enlightenment they all have to be practised.

Otherwise, one could get the idea that since the Buddha's teachings have so many facets, so many different aspects, that these different aspects of the Buddha's teachings are like different teachings for different people, and one does not have to practise all of them.

Within the Buddha's teachings, we have the teachings of the small vehicle and then the teachings of the great vehicle, within which we have the sutra teachings and the tantric teachings. Thus, one could get the idea that these are different types of teachings are for different types of practitioners, and that those who practise one don't practise the others. However, the reality is that the whole set of the Buddha's teachings outline the whole path to enlightenment and that some of these teachings form the main body of the person's practice, while the other teachings are auxiliary, conducive conditions that still have to be practised, even though they are not the

main aspect of the teachings for that person.

Using the analogy of someone who has attained a high university degree, all the lower stages of learning are not the main topic of that person's study or thesis, but they were necessary for that person to get where he or she is. At the very beginning, for example, that person had to learn the alphabet, then they had to learn the different combinations of letters and words and so forth, and then they had to go through all the different stages of learning until they could attain the highest university degree. While all those previous stages of learning before the university degree were not the ultimate subject of that person's study, they were still necessary for that person to get where they wanted to be.

Likewise, this is how it is with Buddha's teachings. There are certain steps within the learning process that one has to go through. No one will be able to go to university without having first learned the alphabet. No one can go straight from knowing nothing to completing a university degree. Rather, one has to go through the different stages of learning to be able to go to university. Likewise, in order to become a Mahayana practitioner, one has to go through the lower stages of practice.

When the text says: '*the greatness that realising that all teachings are complementary*', this means that what the teachings 'complement' is the attainment of enlightenment. All the teachings of the Buddha facilitate the attainment of enlightenment – there is no teaching that does not do that.

There are various lines of thinking through which one can understand that all the teachings of the Buddha are complementary. **First**, they facilitate the attainment of enlightenment by complementing each other and forming a graduated path to enlightenment. **Secondly**, from the point of view of accomplishing the welfare of others, all the teachings of the Buddha are complementary. Even if a teaching may not be relevant to one's own practice, it might be something one needs to know in order to benefit others. In such a way those teachings are complementary from the point of view of facilitating the attainment of enlightenment by becoming a tool with which to help others. They become a feature of the Bodhisattvas knowledge with which they accomplish they welfare of others. **Thirdly**, all the teachings are also complementary from the point of view of the practice of tantra. So from all the various points of view all the teachings of the Buddha become necessary and are complementary.

Maybe we can leave it there for tonight. Do you have some questions?

Question: I beg your indulgence because I'm afraid this is a stupid question, but how does one know whether one's actually in the right vehicle. For example, is the wish to generate bodhicitta enough to consider whether one should be studying in a higher vehicle?

Answer: That is sufficient, even if we haven't generated bodhicitta yet. If one studies the Dharma on the basis of having effortful Bodhicitta, then that study and practice

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will become a Mahayana practice to accomplish the welfare of others.

Question: What do you think about the creative expression of negative emotions like anger, like therapeutic drawing or writing?

Answer: Regarding the question of the usefulness of expressing negative emotions, I normally say that a drawing or a painting can have the benefit of focusing the mind internally, collecting its focus from external objects and focusing it internally. I'm not sure how much help drawing or painting is for getting rid of a harmful mental pattern, but it does have the benefit of focusing the mind.

When you begin drawing the picture, it focuses the mind, and then while you are painting, the harmful mental habits are absent. So, you have the benefit of spending that time drawing or painting without those harmful mental patterns. I don't know how much a drawing or painting will do in terms of getting rid of or reducing harmful mental patterns, but at least while you draw they won't be present and it won't increase them.

Quite often, disturbing mental states are induced by an outer object. So, by forgetting about the outer object, those mental states won't arise. By focusing the mind on the process of drawing or painting, the mind is removed from those external objects that cause unhappiness and agitation. At that time, those mental states will not arise and this is the benefit one can get from doing that.

It is similar to meditating on calm abiding – for example meditating on the coming and going of the breath. By meditating on the coming and going of the breath, the mind is removed from external objects and the external world. The external conditions that cause mental agitation and unhappiness are also forgotten at that time, so the mind can relax and feel some relief. So, the principle is the same.

Question: Geshe-la, how do you keep a happy state of mind if you have a child with an incurable, debilitating disease?

Answer: In that situation, it is difficult to have a happy mind, but there are ways of thinking that can produce a happy mind.

The Buddha said to Ananda: 'Ananda, don't mourn the sufferings of sentient beings caused by karma.' By reflecting upon karma, we come to understand that sentient beings experience sufferings that were not caused by us. Through their own karma – without any outside influence or harm – a person experiences sicknesses and so forth. Reflecting on this can bring some relief to the mind, because we come to understand that the fault and the responsibility do not lie with us.

One may feel that it is one's own fault that the other person is experiencing that problem. This will make us depressed and unhappy. However, when we come to understand that the cause for the other person's problem is really their own karma, it takes away the burden and the blame from oneself; it brings some relief, because one can shift the blame away from oneself.

On the other hand, because of the love and affection one feels for one's child, mental unhappiness can arise on seeing the child's suffering.

Sometimes people say they don't like to meditate on compassion because it causes them suffering. Of course, one will not experience the suffering of the child – which only that individual will experience – but by meditating on compassion, one may become unhappy. However, because it is based on love and compassion, this unhappiness will be the cause of happiness for the child because one will want to help that child. You will not end up in a situation where you remain unconcerned while the other person is sick. You will be protected from a situation where you did not care for the other person while they were sick and then generated great regret after they died.

So, you reflect on the fact that the suffering of the child was not caused by you or anyone else, but is something the child has to experience now due to the faults of their karma. There is actually no purpose in being upset.

You try to cure the sickness by whatever means possible, with medicine or different types of treatment and so forth, and if that is possible then there is no need to be upset and unhappy. If that is not possible then there is still no benefit to being unhappy – there is no benefit to the child if you are unhappy and upset, and there is no benefit to you.

There is certainly no benefit for that child – the child will not get better no matter how upset or unhappy you are. Certainly, for yourself too, being upset and unhappy is harmful and not beneficial. So, being unhappy and upset isn't beneficial in any case; it will not reduce the sickness of the child and is not beneficial to you, but will just make you unhappy and miserable.

If one is unhappy at seeing the suffering of the child, this is a sign that the love and compassion one feels for that child may be mixed with attachment. There are situations where parents may be attached to their children because the children appear desirable to the parents. The more desirable the children appear to the parents, the dearer they are and the more love and compassion the parents will have for those children. However, in this situation, love and compassion tends to be based on attachment.

There are other situations where parents may have several children and of those children, one may be particularly unfortunate and the parents will give this child more love and compassion than the others. This is a sign that the parents' love and compassion is less contaminated by attachment. However, if love and compassion for the child becomes stronger in relation to how attractive and desirable one finds the child then this is a sign that the love and compassion is mixed with more attachment. When parents can give more love and compassion to the less fortunate child, who is not so attractive as his or her siblings, this is a sign that their love and compassion is less mixed with attachment.

In the final analysis, even though it may difficult for us now to have love and compassion that is uncontaminated by or totally separate from attachment, it is definitely

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possible. When we generate compassion for another sentient being, it doesn't follow that one also becomes unhappy, because there is no person who has more compassion for sentient beings than an enlightened being. An enlightened person has pure compassion for sentient beings, but at the same time, he or she doesn't experience the slightest suffering.

So, it is definitely possible that the parents' love and compassion for their children is mixed with attachment. For example, if a mother gives birth to a child who has many defects and faults, of course when the child is born, the parents will have a certain measure of love and compassion for the child. But let's say these parents have one child with many faults and defects and then have other children who are more fortunate and attractive and have many qualities. Then, let's say the child who has many faults dies, and there is less sorrow in the parent's mind than if one of the other children, who have many qualities and are more attractive and fortunate, would have died. There is a difference in the degree of sorrow the parents experience. I think this is possible. This is a sign that one's love and compassion is mixed with attachment.

We can leave it here. As explained in the beginning, collect the mind internally, bringing it back from external objects and focusing it inwards. Then place the mind on the sound of the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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