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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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We can meditate for a little bit as usual. You should sit yourself comfortably and relaxed in a good meditation posture, and then on this basis make the mind clear, peaceful and fresh. To lead a spiritual life and to look for true happiness does not mean that one throws away all of one's possessions and starts some search for inner happiness externally. It means that one looks after one's mind through meditation to find inner happiness, and to make the mind clearer and more peaceful. Without practising meditation it is impossible to attain proper mental happiness and to protect the mental happiness that one has.

To generate mental happiness and protect one's mental happiness one needs to practise meditation. The situation can arise where one becomes unhappier without any change in one's external situation. Sometimes one feels unhappy, but if one looks at one's external situation then there has not really been any change in one's external conditions. The unhappiness came about because of internal causes and conditions.

Now we can practice some meditation. First turn the mind inwards, stopping engaging external objects and then, after remaining within this state for some time - with the mind totally focused inwards without thought - place the mind single pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. The placement of the mind on the breath should not be in a dual manner, like looking at some external object, but the mind should become one with the breathing, enter the breathing. We can meditate in that manner for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

It is very important that one uses the dharma information that one gains from teachings for one's practise. One should repeatedly reflect upon the dharma information that one gains from the teachings. Otherwise one will accumulate dharma information and just be able to talk about the dharma. One will know this is this and that is that but if one doesn't put it into practice by starting to contemplate what one has heard one will not get the point of the dharma.

It is very important that one actually affects a change in one's mind. It is possible through continual meditation, which it would be good for you to do regularly, that one is able to achieve a calm and peaceful mind while sitting in meditation. If one does not really aim that meditation towards changing one's mind then, after one gets up from one's meditation, the mind will be the same as before. It will be as disturbed and as negative as before and there will not be any benefit. It is really important that one affects a change in one's mind. If meditation

does not become the method to subdue the mind then one does not counteract one's mental afflictions such as anger, attachment, jealousy and so forth. Then for a very small tiny reason one can become incredibly angry or generate incredibly strong attachment for some insignificant object. One is in a situation where small conditions give rise to very strong and intense mental afflictions.

On the other hand, if one meditates properly the opposite will happen. One will be able to increase the positive states of the mind and very great benefit will arise. If one has meditated well and the mind is trained well, very small conditions will generate very strong love and compassion for others, strong patience and so forth.

Lama Tsong Khapa said that there is nothing surprising about being very mindful while one meditates. What is infinitely more important is that one stays mindful after one has stopped meditating. While one meditates one is mindful and the coarse disturbing thoughts subside because one is able to keep the virtuous object in mind through one's mindfulness. The danger lies when one arises from one's meditation and becomes careless and all the coarse mental afflictions start to arise again to disturb one's mind. This is very profound advice by Lama Tsong Khapa.

This applies specifically to ordained practitioners, but also to everybody who has taken vows or precepts. While one sits in meditation there is no danger that one receives a downfall, but the danger lies when one stops meditating and engages into other activities. If one is not mindful at such a time one is in danger of breaking one's vows and that applies to everybody who holds vows or precepts. It is infinitely important that one practices mindfulness between meditation sessions in order to not break one's vows and precepts.

It is also very important for those who don't have any vows or precepts. One has to remain mindful even though one does not sit in meditation, so that one for example does not retaliate to the harmful ways of others. If one is not mindful of one's actions then sometimes one will react in a negative way even though the other person has treated one well. Or, vice versa, if one treats another person well and they react negatively, and one is not mindful of one's actions, one will react negatively in return.

Human beings are capable of very great positive actions and have a great capacity to be very good, positive, wholesome and beneficial. But that capacity needs to be harnessed with mindfulness. In a less specific dharma context, it is good to exert mindfulness and introspection when one is drinking. If one knows that one's limit is four drinks then it would be good if through mindfulness and introspection one stops oneself at the third drink. Through this one will avoid the problems that otherwise arise if one has that fourth drink. Through mindfulness and introspection one practices restraint and avoids sufferings. For example, one should be mindful not to drive after having had a drink. If you practice in such a way, with mindfulness and introspection trying to be a

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good person, it will have a good result.

#### **4.2.1 Exhorting the disciple to take the essence of this basis with endowments**

##### **4.2.1.2 Reflecting on their great importance**

Last time we talked about the precious human rebirth and specifically about the rarity of the precious human rebirth. We first mentioned an example of why the precious human rebirth is rare and then there were the different reasons for this rarity. It is very difficult to attain a precious human rebirth because most sentient beings are engaged in the practice of non-virtue, which is the cause for a lower rebirth. Most people generate exactly the cause for a lower rebirth, not the cause for a higher rebirth. Secondly, there are very few people that generate the cause for a precious human rebirth, which is to stop engaging in non-virtuous actions and to purify the past non-virtuous actions. If there were many such people one could say a precious human rebirth is not very rare. But since such sentient beings are very rare one can say that a precious human rebirth is very rare.

One should be aware that one's present situation is the result of having created lots of virtue in the past and one should form the determination not to let it go to waste. One should become aware that it is something very, very special that should not go to waste. When one becomes aware of how rare and special it actually is, one will blink and wonder whether one is dreaming.

There is a story in Tibet of a king lost who had a castle and was the king of lots of counties. He lost the kingdom and the castle to some other king who invaded him. He had to spend many, many years in exile until the opportunity arose for him to retake possession of his fortress. After waiting for many, many years, having all this time the hope to be able to retake possession of his fortress and his counties, when he actually arrived back there he felt it was so special. He said, "I feel like I'm dreaming. I have waited so long for this and now it has come about. Its almost like its not true, its like a dream". And that's how one should feel when one realizes the rarity of one's precious human rebirth. It is something that is so rare, so special and one has waited for so long for it to come about its almost like a dream.

If one does not make use of this very special opportunity that has come about through the accumulation of great merits it will indeed be a great waste. One should meditate on the rarity of the precious human rebirth until one generates this type of feeling. There are then four reasons given why one should take the essence of the precious human rebirth. But for tonight, if you have questions we can have some time for questions otherwise I am going to continue.

*Question: How many rebirths would the average person have all together? More than one?*

There are many births. Actually there are limitless births. If you think about 100, 1000, 100,000 that wouldn't cover it. There are limitless, infinite rebirths without count because there is not a first moment of mind. Each moment of mind of a mental continuum needs to be

preceded by a prior moment of mind that acts as its substantial cause and, therefore, there cannot be a first moment of mind of a mental continuum. Therefore there are an infinite number of rebirths. For example, the substantial cause for the mind of today is the mind of yesterday. The substantial cause for the mind of this year is the mind of last year. So the first moment of mind of this life, of the child, also needs to have a preceding moment of mind that acts as its substantial cause. This preceding moment of mind can only be of its own continuum. It cannot be the mental continuum of the father and the mother. It cannot be form because form cannot act as a substantial cause for mind and it cannot be the mental continuum of the father and the mother because the mind of the child is not the continuity of the mind of the parents.

Even though the parents would wish that the child's mind is a continuation of their own it usually becomes very obvious when the child grows up that they have very different ideas. There are also many examples of parents that are quite peaceful and have a subdued mind who have a child that is incredibly angry. The mental habits of the child are very different from the mental habits of the parents and this shows that the mind of the parents did not act as the substantial cause for the mind of the child. The mind of the child is not the substantial continuity of the mind of the parents. So the only possibility for the substantial cause of the first moment of this life is a preceding moment of mind that can only be in a previous life. In this way there can never be a first moment of mind and that's how one arrives at infinite rebirths.

It also becomes obvious if there are several children, brothers or sisters, that they will be very different from each other in their mental makeup, in their mental habits, despite coming from the same parents. This also shows that the minds of the parents are not the substantial cause for the minds of the children. The minds of children are not a substantial continuity of the minds of their parents. If one thinks about this then one can come to understand how one's mind, how ones self, needs to have a special uncommon cause that belongs to one's own continuum. One can observe that parents that live very wholesome and very virtuous lives can gave birth to a child that is very vicious and harmful. If that happened in Tibet we used to say, "Oh, those parents got the child that no parents." Sometimes a child ends up actually killing their parents.

*Question. I am very new to all of this and finding it very difficult to get to any level of proper meditation. Is there a specific type of meditation that would assist a beginner?*

I think the best meditation for that purpose is the meditation on the coming and going of the breath because it is a very easy meditation. It places the mind in a state of equanimity because the object of meditation does not have any specific colors or shapes, and also achieves single pointed focus. It is not a meditation where one needs to think a lot. One can just sit down and without much thinking place the mind on the coming and going of the breath. When one has advanced more

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there are meditations that involve greater mental activity.

It is also important at the beginning not to aim for long periods of meditation but to aim for good quality meditation. It is not desirable to sit there for a long time just having the mind wander off and being distracted all the time, having to bring the mind back to the object all the time and then the mind wandering off and bringing it back to the object. It is better if one has a short session, just a few minutes, where one has a good meditation with a mind that is single pointedly abiding on the object. One can then take a break and do some more meditation because it is important that when one starts to meditate that one starts out to meditate properly. To lay a good foundation it is important that one trains the mind right from the beginning. Sitting there for a long time with the mind wandering off all the time and having to recall it is not the proper way. The mind just gets accustomed to that. It's better to train the mind in single pointedness from the beginning.

*Question. Is there any special practice or prayers that we should do at Saka Dawa?*

The best thing to do on Saka Dawa is to meditate on bodhicitta. Saka Dawa is a special day when the merits increase greatly partly because of the constellation but also because three special Buddhist days fall on that day. It is the Buddha's day of enlightenment, the Buddha's day of birth and the Buddha's day of passing into paranirvana. All fall on that particular day in the year and that's why it is a special day where the merits generated increase greatly. The name Saka refers to a particular constellation of stars, and Dawa means month.

*Question: If our mind is from an infinite journey of other lives, is it possible to reminisce from a past life and if so how do we distinguish it from delusion?*

If you have proper clairvoyance attained through meditation you can recognize whether it is valid or not. If it is proper clairvoyance attained through the force of meditation it is valid. Sometimes small children can have memories from their past life without any special practice of meditation because the mind is still fresh. Those also can be valid. His Holiness tells this story of a child in India, who, when she was able to talk repeatedly told her parents that they were not really her actual parents and her real parents were living in a specific town in such and such a street. She would describe it all very, very clearly and she wouldn't let up. Her parents were not particularly religiously inclined. Her father was a scientist and they didn't believe in past lives but because the daughter did not relent and in order to humor her and to put an end to it, they set out to find the parents that she claimed to have. First of all they found that there really was such a town with such a street. The people that lived there were exactly as she had explained. When they talked to this couple they found out that they had had a daughter who had been killed by in a car accident on her way to or from school. After that her father believed in past lives.

There are many instances like that. This is without the child being regarded as a rinpoche, as a specific

reincarnation of a lama. When we went to the enthronement of the incarnation of Geshe Dhargye two years ago the boy would greet people that he had known from his previous life by their name before being introduced and before anybody could tell him who they were. He addressed them by name. Sometime after Lama Zopa Rinpoche's mother passed away a small boy was recognized as her reincarnation. That small boy also had very clear recollections of his previous life. For example, he recognized nuns that he had known in his previous life.

*Question. I've been in a relationship for the past seven years living with some girls with issues relating to alcohol abuse. I have helped them as good as I can, and I do not feel it would be good to go away to some place to practise meditation.*

To meditate to improve your mind you don't have to necessarily go away to some other place. If your lifestyle increases your love and compassion and you practice love and compassion then you are doing what's right even though you don't sit in the seven-point posture. Practising the dharma does not depend on sitting in the seven point posture. Generally the best thing is to firstly generate a good motivation, train the mind in meditation and then go and help others. This way it turns out very well. When we meditate it's not only for one's own purpose. It is also to help others. If you live a life where you help others then you practice the dharma. I want to thank you for what you do. I always say that to help those that are sad, that are sick, that are impoverished and so forth is a very good thing.

As we said earlier, turn the mind inwards and place it single-pointedly on the mantra.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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*Edited Version*

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