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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual, it would be good to spend some meditating. When we engage in meditation, it is important to have a good motivation. The best motivation is the motivation where one generates the bodhicitta mind.

To develop what we call a contrived bodhicitta attitude would be to generate a thought such as: "I wish to benefit all sentient beings by freeing them from all suffering and leading them to ultimate happiness. In order to do so, I need to myself achieve the ultimate goal which is the state of enlightenment, in which I myself obtain all the qualities and remove all faults, thus gaining the perfect wisdom to be able to benefit all other beings. Therefore I need to engage in all the methods and the means to achieve enlightenment".

So the bodhicitta mind is based on the altruistic wish to benefit others and there is no higher wish to benefit others than generating an attitude of wanting to free all beings from all suffering and lead them to ultimate happiness. That is the ultimate way to benefit others. Generating such an attitude where one wishes to free others from suffering and lead them to ultimate happiness becomes the basis for developing bodhicitta.

We can see the value of such a noble attitude when we think of how we appreciate it when others wish to benefit us in such a way – when they help to free us from suffering and discomfort and wish to make us feel happy. We should check up to see whether we really do appreciate that or not.

When we relate to our own experience – of how we definitely wish for complete well-being, for every happiness that we can experience, and of how we do not wish to experience the slightest suffering – we can see that this is, of course, the case for all beings. There is no being who voluntarily wishes for suffering and does not wish for happiness. All beings have this natural desire. In relation to this desire, we decide who our real friends and enemies are. We consider someone who brings us happiness and helps us avoid suffering – someone who is kind to us, who benefits us – as a friend. In reality, anyone who helps us experience happiness and helps us eliminate suffering is in fact the ultimate friend. On the other hand, anyone who contributes to our suffering and hinders our happiness we would consider an enemy. This is generally how we distinguish between a friend and enemy: someone who brings us real happiness and helps us to eliminate suffering would be a friend, and someone who brings us unhappiness would be an enemy.

When we consider how we rely on friends and

companions for our well-being, we can see that the best way to pursue friendships would be showing genuine concern for the other person's well-being – helping them experience happiness, and helping to relieve them from suffering. This is the best way of having genuine companions, because when we help others, as a natural consequence they will appreciate and trust us. Therefore in whatever relationship we may be engaged in, a friendship or a close relationship, it should be based on the attitude of wishing to benefit each other and help each other experience well-being, as well as helping each other to be rid of any discomfort or suffering. This is the real way of true companionship.

If we analyse in this way and find that this is the best way to find real companionship, when we pursue this way of gaining companionship, the practical benefit is experienced in this very lifetime – not to mention the benefit of future lifetimes. So, even if we did not consider future lifetimes, there is definitely a practical benefit that we can experience in this very lifetime. As we said earlier, we do need companionship, we do need help and friendship, so when we pursue it by generating a genuine concern for the welfare of others, we will achieve what we wish for, and that benefit can be experienced in this very lifetime.

By applying the dharma in this practical way, we can experience the benefits immediately. When we pursue what we wish for, which is meeting with happiness and not meeting with suffering, by implementing the actual means of achieving that wish, we will definitely experience the results. Where there are faults, we can identify them and understand the causes from which they arise. The main point is that we should see that there are external causes and conditions for our well-being – such as companionship – and, in order to pursue those external causes and conditions, we should generate the internal causes and conditions through our own mind, our attitude.

We need to understand that there are two contributing factors – external causes and conditions, and internal causes and conditions – in pursuing our well-being. To obtain what we wish for, which is happiness, and to avoid what we don't wish for, which is suffering, we need both external and internal conditions. For example, we call that which hinders our well-being an 'enemy', but 'enemy' can be twofold – external and internal. For those of us who practice the dharma, when we analyse deeply, we come to realise that the real enemy, the ultimate enemy, actually lies within ourselves.

Thus it is important to identify the internal enemy, which causes us unhappiness and the experience of both physical and mental suffering. The internal enemy that causes all the sufferings we experience are the delusions within our own mind, such as attachment, anger and ignorance. As long as we harbour delusions within our mind, it is like harbouring an enemy within. And as long as we harbour enemies within, there will be no real peace or contentment within our mind. We will perpetually experience the shortcomings of having delusions within our mind.

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Therefore, if we wish to experience some real peace and happiness within our mind, it is essential for us to slowly overcome our internal enemies, the delusions, by gradually applying the antidotes. As we apply the antidotes, the delusions naturally become weaker. As the delusions become weaker, our mind becomes more relaxed and peaceful. So to experience real well-being, we need to combat the real enemy – the delusions within our own mind. When we are controlled by an enemy and don't have the power to combat it, our enemy can harm us. Likewise, as long as we allow our internal enemies to control our mind, to that extent we will not have real inner joy and peace.

The most essential point in our practice is to constantly generate an awareness of not allowing our mind to be controlled by the delusions. That is the main important thing – not to let the delusions overpower our mind. The way delusions overpower our mind is by arising in the form of distractions. As long as we let our mind follow distractions, to that extent we are allowing our mind to be overpowered by the delusions.

What we are attempting to do in meditation is to recognise the enemy. Having recognised the enemy, which are the distractions, we do not allow the mind to be influenced by them; we do not let the mind be persuaded by the distractions, but rather keep it focused inwards on a chosen object. By training the mind to be focused on a chosen object, it will become stronger in its ability to remain focused.

To be free from the control of delusions or distractions, we must identify how the mind becomes distracted by focusing on what kinds of object distract the mind. This is the first point – to identify how the mind gets distracted, and then to withdraw the mind from the objects of distraction. Having identified the objects of distraction, we bring the mind inward to focus on a virtuous object. When we focus the mind on a virtuous object, it naturally withdraws from distractions or worldly objects. As long as the mind is focused on the virtuous object, to that extent it will become more relaxed and subdued. By training in this way, we gradually begin to focus naturally on the virtuous object for a longer time, and the mind seems to become happier and happier.

An example of an object of distraction is one towards which one has attachment. As soon as we think about the object of our attachment, the mind becomes restless and uncomfortable. So we intentionally divert the mind from that object of attachment and focus it instead on a virtuous object. Forgetting the object of attachment and letting the mind instead be influenced by a virtuous object will bring more peace to the mind.

The reality of our situation is that we have many different objects, attitudes and ideas that we can focus on. If we allow the mind to choose randomly what it wishes to focus on, it is more likely to choose an object it is familiar with – objects that cause desire or anger to arise in the mind. In the practice of meditation, we are pursuing familiarity with virtuous objects that do not cause mental disturbance, but which contribute more to our mental

peace and health. In the practice of meditation, we learn to recognise which objects are harmful to us and try to avoid focusing on those objects; having identified which objects are virtuous objects that benefit the mind, we to put more attention and focus on those.

Ultimately, we do not wish for suffering and wish for happiness, so we need to wisely choose objects that contribute to our wellbeing and happiness and focus on those, and avoid focusing on objects that contribute to our unhappiness.

Here, we are emphasising our analytical wisdom. We all possess a certain amount of analytical wisdom, which we can perfect. This wisdom is based on our experience: as we pursue our meditation and focus on virtuous objects, we can experience the result within ourselves. Likewise, we all have experience of how we feel when we focus on a non-virtuous object, an object that causes delusions to arise, such as strong attachment or anger. We can recollect the type of experience we have when we focus on an object of anger.

When anger arises in the mind, how do we feel? When strong attachment arises in the mind, how do we feel as a result? It is definitely our experience that we feel restless, because the mind is not peaceful, not happy, not tranquil. On the contrary, when we focus on a virtuous or neutral object, we immediately experience the mind becoming calmer, more peaceful. Having had that experience, whether of short or long duration, it should motivate us to put more energy into focusing on virtuous objects that contribute to our wellbeing and peace of mind. The more we become familiar with that object, the more natural it is for our mind to focus on it. As a result, we will experience well-being and mental peace and avoid focusing on objects that cause delusions to arise in the mind. This is the real pursuit of meditation.

The main points we mentioned earlier, are that first, we need to generate a good motivation for doing meditation. We emphasised the importance of developing a good motivation and reminding ourselves of our main goal. Generating a good motivation ensures that what we are doing now will contribute to our ultimate goal. The next point is to sit in an upright, relaxed, but attentive position with a straight back so that the subtle energy – what we call in Tibetan the *tsa-* which circulates through the channels within our body, clears as the channels straighten when we sit upright. When this energy flows freely in our body, it contributes to the mind becoming more focused. That is the purpose of sitting upright position in meditation.

Following these points, we can spend some time in meditation. Having assumed an upright posture, it is also important that we remind ourselves to completely focus the mind on the meditation object, keeping the mind 100% focused on the object, not half-focused on the object and half-distracted with something else. Rather, we should try to keep it completely focused on the object, which in this case is the breath.

The way we do this is to have the mind combine with the breath, as if the mind was one with the breath. When we

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focus on any object of meditation, it is advised that we should not regard it as an external object that we are looking at. For normal objects, there is a distinction between 'I' who is looking at the object, and the object that is out there. But in the case of meditation, the object should be an internalised mental object. As with any virtuous object of meditation, we may first look at the external object, but then bring an image of that object into our mind. The actual object of meditation that we should be focussing on is this internalised mental object. Then it becomes really firm and stable within the mind.

Here, we try to imagine the mind becoming one with the breath by focusing on the breath as though we were focusing on our own mind. In this way, we keep the mind completely focused, maintaining that stability. We will spend a few minutes focusing on the breath. (*Pause for meditation*)

It seems that we have used most of our time tonight on explaining meditation,!! If anyone has any questions now, we can have some time for them.

*Question: Can you give an explanation of giving and taking upon the breath?*

*Answer:* There is an explanation of a practice where, as we breathe out, we focus on love, and as we breathe in, we focus on compassion. However one needs to be familiar with that practice before engaging in it. It can be a little bit complicated if we start to do it right away.

*Question: What is the definition of bodhicitta?*

*Answer:* It is the altruistic mind. A general definition of bodhicitta would be an altruistic mind which, by focussing on other sentient beings, wishing them to be free from all suffering and to obtain ultimate happiness, generates the wish to achieve enlightenment for their sake. That is what is called bodhicitta mind.

There is what is called a contrived bodhicitta mind and a spontaneous bodhicitta mind. Contrived bodhicitta refers to an attitude which is developed through reasoning, and through creating the prior causes and conditions for it to arise in the mind. Initially bodhicitta cannot just spontaneously arise in the mind, but has to be based on many other preliminary attitudes that need to be developed first.

For example, first we need to develop renunciation, which is a genuine wish to be free from all suffering and to gain happiness for oneself. When we develop that genuine wish to be free from all suffering ourselves, which is called renunciation, we can then focus on others. We can generate a wish for others to be free from suffering.

There is actually a teaching called 'the sevenfold cause and effect sequence' for developing bodhicitta. First, we develop equanimity, seeing ourselves and all beings as being equal in wishing for happiness and not wishing to experience any suffering. Based on that equanimity, we generate the recognition of all beings as having been extremely kind to us by contemplating the fact that all beings have been our mother at one time or another. By seeing the kindness of all beings, we then develop a wish

to repay that kindness. Then, seeing all beings as being extremely deserving of our love, we generate what is called 'great love'. Based on this, we develop 'great compassion' after which we develop the altruistic wish or superior intention which is to take responsibility for their ultimate happiness. After developing superior intention, we can develop a contrived bodhicitta mind – this bodhicitta mind will arise as a result of all of the earlier causes.

Once the contrived bodhicitta mind has been developed and you have become familiar with it, you meditate on bodhicitta again and again until you develop what is called the spontaneous bodhicitta mind, where bodhicitta is always in your mind, spontaneously, naturally.

*Question: What is meant by sentient beings? What kind of other beings are there?*

*Answer:* The term 'sentient being' is a translation of the Tibetan word *semchen* - which literally means 'that which has a mind'. Here, it refers particularly to that which has an unenlightened mind.

So a buddha would not be considered a sentient being. If you are talking about living beings, of course Buddha is a living being, but a sentient being would be a being with a mind that still has some faults or delusions but nevertheless has the potential to become enlightened. Any living being or sentient being is said to have the potential to become enlightened. Of course one is a sentient being oneself.

There may be some western scientific theories that even plants may have a mind, but according to Buddhism that is going too far! That would be an extreme.

When I am asked to give the definition of sentient being, I like to add that part about not just having a mind, but a mind that has the potential to become enlightened – meaning that even though a sentient being's mind is temporarily obscured by delusions and has faults, they are not ingrained, not intrinsic faults that cannot be removed. Any fault that sentient beings may have in their mind is removable and this is the unique characteristic of a sentient being – it has the potential to become an enlightened being.

When we relate this to ourselves, we definitely may see faults within ourselves, but it is important to recognise that these faults are not ingrained. There is no fault that cannot be overcome – any faults, ignorance or obscurations we may have can be removed when we cultivate the wisdom that will overcome the faults. Our qualities can be developed up to the point where the ultimate quality of enlightenment can be developed in the mind. It is very important for us to contemplate the fact that even though a sentient being's mind has faults, at the same time it has the potential and power, to get rid of the faults and develop all the qualities.

*Question: Is there benefit in focusing on the breath while swimming?*

*Answer:* Yes it is possible. If you can be sure you are not distracted and keep the mind focused on the breath and nothing else but just the breath, it may be possible.

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You could develop further what we could call the 'virtuous act of swimming', which is that when you lift your hand out of the water, you can imagine that you are trying to gather all the virtues, all the good qualities towards yourself then, when you take your hand back down, you imagine you are removing all faults.

Once we have the technique of training our mind, we can apply the practice to anything we do. As long as it is not harmful, whatever we do can be combined with the practice of subduing our mind.

Many of the teachings in the texts use the ocean as an example to illustrate cyclic existence: the analogy used to reach enlightenment is like crossing the ocean. Once you cross the ocean and reach the other side, you reach enlightenment. Using that analogy from the teachings, when we are swimming in the ocean, we can imagine that we are swimming across the ocean to reach enlightenment and our two arms are the two main tools that we need to reach enlightenment – wisdom and method.

Therefore, one arm can be symbolise method and the other arm can be symbolise wisdom. So you can think that: "Using both method and wisdom, I am swimming across the ocean to reach enlightenment". With such an attitude, for however long you swim in the ocean, it can be really meritorious and you can gain a lot of merit.

We can also relate to other analogies given in the teachings of using a simple act like sweeping to gain much merit and purify much negative karma. One text mentions that, as we sweep dust away, we regard the dust as symbolising the delusions within our mind – anger, attachment and ignorance. The broom that we use symbolised our wisdom, so through wisdom we are sweeping away the delusions. So even the act of sweeping can be an extremely powerful practice. If we use this practice, whenever we sweep, it becomes very practical not only to make the house or room clean, but also to make the mind clean at the same time. Otherwise, when we spend much time and energy cleaning our room, it won't really help the mind.

We can conclude the teaching session for this evening with some meditation, this time focusing on Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. Please sit upright in a relaxed manner, bring the mind inward and focus it on the mantra.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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Edited Version*

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