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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual it is good to spend some time in meditation. It is good to find a comfortable and upright position. As we make an effort to find a comfortable physical position, we must also remind ourselves that the mind is equally important. Having the mind in a clear state that is focussed and happy is also very important. A state of mind which is clear, focussed and happy is a mind that is not only essential for meditation, but also for our ordinary life.

Along with the body, we come to notice the main function within our existence is our mental state. So along with a sound physical body, it is extremely important to have a sound clear mind. It is through the body and mind that we function - that is the basis of our existence. The mind that is developed to a point which is clear, focussed and happy is a mind that is a companion for us and makes our activities meaningful. So it is important to develop our mind to be in that clear, focussed and happy state, because we find that then really becomes our best companion in life.

Not only is our existence based on the combination of the physical body and the mind, but as we further investigate within ourselves, we come to realise that the mind motivates us in whatever we do; the mind initiates our actions. Whatever we do physically and say verbally follows the decisions the mind makes. The mind itself is influenced by a secondary state of mind, which in general we can identify as being either positive or negative. If we are influenced by a negative state of mind, then our actions on a physical or verbal level become negative, and that in turn lead us towards harm.

Whereas if the mind is in a positive frame, it leads to physical and verbal actions that will have a positive outcome. We come to realise that our actions are influenced by the thoughts in our mind, depending on whether they are positive or negative.

When we come to realise that, then we can take a step back and motivate ourselves to generate and cultivate a positive state of mind, and slowly reduce and eliminate the negative state of mind. This becomes our main goal: to constantly make sure that we have positive state of mind so that our actions become positive, and that we try to eliminate the negative state of mind so that our actions will not become negative or harmful towards others. We develop a strong determination within ourselves: 'I will do everything in my ability to overcome the negative state of mind as soon as I notice it, and then I will do everything in my ability to generate and cultivate the positive state of mind'. That sort of determination is a very useful tool to further develop our analytical wisdom,

which is a wisdom we use to distinguish between what is positive and what is negative.

Check the mind to make sure that it is in a positive frame; trying to maintain that positive frame of mind is the purpose of meditation. If we meditate, then it is more likely that our mind will be focussed and in a positive frame. However, in reality we spend more time out of meditation than in meditation. Most of our lives are in engaged in outside activities. As we strive to achieve a focussed, clear and happy mind during meditation, it is most important to try and bring that to our normal daily activities.

The training we do in meditation is a means to help us maintain a focussed, clear and happy mind in our everyday activities. This is possible to achieve because we have the tools to maintain such a focussed and clear mind. The main tool is mindfulness and introspection. Mindfulness, in a general sense, is having awareness, cultivating that awareness within one self, and checking up within one's mind what is going on. Doing this on a regular basis can help us, even in our normal activities, to maintain that sort of clarity and focus. This is possible to achieve and we can do that. So it is important to try to cultivate those qualities.

As we develop our analytical wisdom during meditation, and as the purpose of developing the mind becomes clear to us - i.e. to recognise and overcome the negative state of mind - we will not allow ourselves to be influenced by the negative states of mind that make us engage in harmful physical or verbal actions, which are harmful to ourselves and others. This comes about by first recognising the negative state of mind, then having recognised it, we try to make sure we are not influenced by that state of mind. Basically this means, to refrain from the negative and engage in the positive.

By recognising the positive state of mind and familiarising ourselves with it, then we can allow ourselves to be influenced by it. This leads to engaging in positive actions. We will begin to really notice that this is our main task in life. So whatever activities we are engaged in, we need to check up to make sure that we are not influenced by negative states of mind, and that we are in a positive state of mind so that we can engage in positive actions. This is the main point. A positive frame of mind is something we need to cherish, and realise how valuable it is.

The actual process of overcoming the conditions which make us feel uncomfortable is, first of all identifying the object which makes us uncomfortable, and then what kind of circumstances, thoughts, objects or conditions make us feel uncomfortable.

The next step is to move our attention away from those objects that disturb the mind; otherwise our mind will become more and more disturbed and agitated. We need to change the focus of the mind.

In meditation we identify either a neutral or positive object and keep our focus on that. As long as we focus on a neutral or a positive object, the mind naturally feels tranquil and peaceful because it is not focussed on an object that disturbs the mind.

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We then try to use this process that is learnt in formal meditation in our every day life. Again, we identify the object which disturbs the mind and distance ourselves from it, or change our focus away from it. We familiarise our mind with positive objects as much as possible.

The objects that disturb our mind do not necessarily have to be external or physical objects. They could be the thoughts that we focus on when we allow our mind to be distracted. Those thoughts are then objects that disturb the mind. So in meditation, we are attempting to intentionally distance our mind from all disturbing conceptual thoughts and bring the mind to focus only on one single object.

Here we will choose the breath. If we keep our focus on the breath, then the mind naturally becomes tranquil and peaceful, even for a short time. We can train ourselves and familiarise ourselves in this process. That natural tranquillity and peaceful state of mind is not something we can easily achieve right away. Even if we do achieve it for a few moments, we find that it fades away and the mind becomes distracted again, being taken over by other thoughts which seem to be coming randomly and continuously. But if we don't make any attempt to distance our mind from the distractions, then a clear and focused mind would never come about at all. The attempt that we make now, even for a few moments, is the process where we are familiarising ourselves to be focussed and to have clear mind. If we are determined, we can choose to do that. So, for the next few moments we will focus on our breath, distance our mind from all other thoughts and objects, and just keep our mind for a few moments on the breath, on the natural in flow and out flow of our breath. *(pause for meditation)*.

We notice that we gain some sort of peaceful and tranquil feeling through our meditation. If we can spend some time like that everyday, and most importantly develop a general attitude of appreciating what we have in our life now, we can develop a sense of contentment and joy. It is ironic that even though we have sufficient means to sustain ourselves and we are quite well and have good reasons to be happy now, we seem to disturb our own happiness by worrying about the future. While we enjoy good circumstances right now, rather than appreciating that and being happy about it, we destroy our existing happiness by worrying about what will happen next year or the year after that, or when we get older.

Rather than just constantly thinking about it and do nothing about it, if we could actually do something about it and maybe work harder or save more money or whatever, then maybe it would be worthwhile to think about the future. But we can't do much about what may come in the future anyway. Even if we were to work hard enough it doesn't really guarantee anything in the future. However we can start to appreciate what we have now and be happy by minimising our worries.

There is no end to our worries if we let ourselves worry about the future. There could be so many things that can happen; in our mind we can conjure up the 'ifs' and 'buts' and all these things that come up in the mind and disturb whatever peace and happiness we have now. So instead of worrying, we can focus on the well being we actually

have now, our good circumstances, and just try to maintain that sort of state of happiness in our mind now. If we live with that sort of attitude, then in general we will have a much happier life. If we constantly think about things that can go wrong and don't appreciate what we have now, then that can also lead to arguments and fights with those around us. It might involve situations that may happen in the future with your relationship, so that may lead to arguments. And it might lead to situations like: 'They have so much and why I don't have it?', and that envy may also lead to unrest in the mind.

The main point is that if we don't let our mind settle on what we have, and instead allow the mind to wander off and speculate and focus about things which we don't have yet, then that will lead to the mind being restless. Constant worrying about what we don't have and what we need to achieve leads to a worried state of mind. If we were able to do something to actually get what we don't have, and if we can exert ourselves to achieve that, then maybe we could say that such worry is worthwhile. But since we are not able to exert ourselves to that level of satisfaction, then it is far more realistic to maintain our mind, and to focus and settle it on what we do have, by appreciating what we have.

If we share whatever resources we have now with the people we associate with - our loved ones, family, partners or whoever we may be associating with - and be happy and appreciate that, and be kind to them, then that will lead to a really contented and happy life.

There are also other factors that contribute to a content and happy life: being kind to those we live and associate with on a daily basis. Those are the very people that on a practical level can receive our kindness and consideration; they can appreciate it and return it. Having grand ideas about helping others in a big way is unrealistic if we can't deal with the people we associate with on a daily basis. If we are determined to be kind and considerate and share our good feelings, resources such as money and so forth, then that's fine. But if we are limited in being able to share our material resources, then we can share our concern, our love, even saying a few nice words to someone can brighten up their day. Saying a few kind words to someone is something that we can definitely share, it that is something we can actually do. Being kind, considerate and compassionate with those we have daily contact with now, is a way to train ourselves in being able to share with a larger number of beings in the future. This is possible.

I can't underestimate the importance of cultivating a good relationship with the people that we associate with on a daily basis. Whether it is our partners, our relatives, or our work associates, those people that we see on a daily basis are the very ones that we need to be considerate and kind towards. To imagine that we can help on a large scale, in a big society where there are many other people to help, when we fail to even be considerate and kind to the very people we live or work with, is like being a hypocrite. How can it be possible to help others on a large scale when we cannot help the very people that we live and work with? Our training is

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developing concern and kindness for the people that we deal with every day. This is a practical way for us to have a good, content and happy life, by contributing to a mutual good relationship which leads to happiness, and the ability to help others on a larger scale later on.

On the same note, it is also important for us to recognise that even youngsters need friendship and companionship. Often I hear complaints that children are going off with friends, boyfriends and girlfriends. But do the parents themselves want companionship or not? Besides their partners, do they have other friends or not, and do they need other friends or not? Parents would answer 'Yes', they do need friends and companions, and that they cannot limit their friendship to only one person. It is natural to need and long for companionship and friends.

Likewise teenagers need friends. We can pay attention to whether they are making the right choice of friends or not. But with teenagers we shouldn't go to the extreme of restricting them by not allowing them to bring friends over, and not allowing them to associate with others at all. That will then really make them feel hollow and empty because their longing for companionship is not met.

Instead, allow them to bring friends home, welcome them, and then being a good example for their friends will make them better. It is good for them to have access to companions and to have friendships. Encourage and allow them rather than restricting them. It is hypocritical to think that while you can have friends and companions, they cannot bring anyone over to the house and so forth; that is not being realistic. If you tell your children not to bring any friends home, then you must actually consider what that could lead to, and what kind of feelings the child could have if they are restricted in that way. This puts a big burden onto the child's mind; it actually brings difficulty for the child. The advice to families and parents is to have a good relationship with their children, and be good and kind and considerate to each other. Think about the children's needs, think about how they also long for companionship and need friendship, and allow them a certain amount of freedom to have their friends as well. That is something that is important for families. Our happiness begins with the associates and companions that we live with.

The main point is to nurture and to look after the younger generation, especially in a family situation. In order to have a good harmonious relationship within the whole family, it is really important for the parents to consider the well-being and upbringing of their children, especially when they are teenagers. When they are very young, of course we can discipline them, and it may be easier then to limit their friends. However, when they are teenagers, they have come to a point where they are longing for a certain amount of freedom, and they are also able to think for themselves. So that is the age where they can do with fewer restrictions.

They can interpret restrictions as being completely suppressing and controlling, and that can develop a rebellious attitude. It is important to give them freedom, but that does not mean giving them the license to do

whatever they want. Acknowledge them as people, and then if rules are laid down within a certain amount of freedom, then the rules might be respected and accepted more readily. If you say 'No' and completely restrict them, then that will bring about difficulty and a real problem in their mind. To illustrate the main point: if someone were to completely control you and restrict what you do now as an adult, would that be something you can appreciate or not? Would complete control over what we do, where we go and so forth be something that we will appreciate or not? If the answers to all these questions are that we wouldn't appreciate it and that we cannot function in that way, then we realise that it is the same for children who reach a certain age.

Before we conclude for the evening, let us again take a few moments to focus inwards and this time focus on the sound of the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni. Try to distance our mind from other distractions and just try to maintain the focus on that sound.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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