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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation. For that purpose, we will sit in a comfortable physical posture.

As well as finding a comfortable posture physically, it is equally important to make sure we are in a positive frame of mind. To quote from one of the great Tibetan masters, Lama Tsong Khapa: 'If the mind is kind, then whatever practice one does, the path and grounds leading to enlightenment will also be a kind or good path and procedure; whereas if one has a negative state of mind, then whatever one practises, such as the path and the grounds, will also be negative'. This is sound advice to keep in mind. It indicates that all of one's happiness and suffering is related to the attitude in one's mind.

From our own experience, we can observe that when we have a positive attitude in our mind, whatever actions we do become more meaningful. With a positive and kind attitude, when we interact with others, whatever we share and give to others is well received and whatever activity we do in relation to others becomes fruitful. However, if we are in a negative state of mind and cultivate negative attitudes, whatever actions we do in relation to others result in being more negative and harmful towards ourselves and others.

As we notice this through our own experience, we will come to rely on and take to heart the advice given in the teachings. This advice is that we must protect and nourish the positive, good attitudes we have in our mind and familiarise ourselves with them as much as we can to strengthen our positive frame of mind. We must also identify and overcome the negative attitudes within ourselves by not allowing them to influence us and not familiarising ourselves with those states of mind and attitudes. If we follow this process, it will become the key to gaining lasting satisfaction.

We can develop within ourselves the real protection we seek for our mind and wellbeing. By relating to our own experience and the advice we receive from the teachings, we come to develop the analytical wisdom that assists us in recognising which (negative) activities or attitudes are to be abandoned and which (positive) attitudes and tendencies are to be cultivated. Our own analytical wisdom enables us to know the difference between what is to be adopted and what is to be discarded.

Take the example of a negative state of mind, such as anger. Through our own experience and through listening to the explanations in the teachings, we will realise that anger is a state of mind that brings great disadvantage if we harbour it and familiarise ourselves with it. Whatever actions we engage with anger or hatred

in our mind will be harmful for oneself and others. If we were able to identify the negative state of mind of anger and see its disadvantages, we would be able to control the anger and not express it or be influenced by it whenever it arose in the mind.

On the other hand, we understand positive frames of mind such as a loving attitude, kindness and concern for others as being useful and beneficial for oneself and others. So when the mind of concern arises within us, we can further strengthen and cultivate that frame of mind and exert ourselves in engaging in activities that are influenced by genuine concern and love for others.

As mentioned earlier, when we identify positive states of mind such as genuine kindness and concern for others within ourselves, we should rely upon them and develop them further. The trust that we must place ourselves should be trust in the positive states of mind within us. We should trust and rely on the potential that we have within ourselves. When we engage in activities in relation to ourselves or others that are positive and beneficial, this becomes the key for us to gain genuine happiness and wellbeing – something we all wish to obtain.

When we look into the causes to obtain inner happiness, we can say that there are certain external conditions and factors that contribute towards us feeling happy but they are nowhere near as powerful as the inner causes that we have within us. The inner potential we have to generate happiness is a much more stable, firm and reliable source for us to be happy; external conditions, on the other hand, are temporary. When we really look into the difference between the external conditions versus the internal conditions that make us happy, we will find a huge difference. This is something we can investigate.

While we are encouraging ourselves to cultivate positive mental attitudes, we must also consider the great loss we would experience if we were to lose the positive state of mind, if it were to become weakened. We would start feeling miserable and unhappy. So we should definitely nourish our inner qualities, and try not to lose whatever positive qualities we have already cultivated because it would be a great loss to us. So we must guard ourselves from losing these positive states of mind.

To summarise, we could say that there are two main methods for bringing about our own wellbeing and happiness: external and internal conditions. The difference between the two is that having all the external conditions intact does not in itself guarantee that we will feel genuine happiness if we lack the internal conditions; however, if the internal conditions for happiness and general wellbeing are intact within us, then even if we were to lack the external conditions, we will have a general sense of wellbeing and happiness.

We can see certain people who face external hardships in relation to health or wealth, but who have developed themselves inwardly and can maintain a positive frame of mind and endure the very difficult external conditions. These conditions even become even a source of inspiration to develop themselves further; they seem to become more content. When we notice this in others or in ourselves, we will come to realise that of the two types of conditions that contribute to happiness and wellbeing,

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the internal is much more stable and important. We will realise the truth of this if we investigate it slowly, over time.

The key to developing a positive frame of mind is having a genuine sense of kindness and a kind attitude towards all beings. This sort of kind attitude is the main basis for us to experience real happiness. However, we find that there are many obstacles and factors that contribute to us losing this kindness and that contribute to the mind becoming agitated and being influenced negatively. The technique for cultivating a positive state of mind and maintaining our focus on it is the practice of meditation. What I have been discussing so far is a prelude to the necessity for us to engage in the practice of meditation.

The meditation technique we follow here is the basic technique of focusing on a chosen object such as the breath. This is one of the basic, most effective techniques to develop and focus the mind. The more we familiarise ourselves with this focused meditation, the more we are able to maintain that focus.

We know from our own experience the difference between a focused mind and a completely distracted mind. If we can see this difference through our own experience, we will feel more encouraged to have a focused mind. When the mind is completely distracted and focusing on external objects of desire or indulgence, there is no real anchoring point within us. We seem to be completely at the mercy of the external objects. We do not feel settled and feel completely overwhelmed by what is going on around us, because we are completely immersed in it.

Instead of allowing ourselves to become completely distracted, if we were to start to focus inwardly and maintain that inner focus, we would notice the mind becoming much more settled and content, and we begin to feel much more at ease. We may experience this even during a short meditation.

In particular, those who have engaged in daily meditation practice for a number of years will experience a significant change of attitude. Having maintained a daily practice of meditation, their mind becomes more subtle and they feel a general sense of wellbeing and contentment, even when external things don't go well. Somehow they are able to maintain inner contentment and peace, which does not seem to be affected by external conditions. Especially for those who have consistently done meditation for a long period – even if the session is only of a short duration – the real effect of meditation can be felt and understood. This should encourage us.

Again we should be careful. When we come to meditation, we may initially be really determined, try to do our best at it and gain an immediate feeling of peace and tranquillity in our mind. This will encourage us to meditate. But because we are not familiar with meditation and are attempting to meditate for the first time or have been trying for a short time, if we don't consistently continue, we might reach a point where we feel a bit weary or lazy. If we don't pay particular attention to the mind during meditation and maintain that focus even for a short time, our mind may get into the habit of wandering off and not paying attention. Then

we will reach a point where we seem to lose that initial tranquillity and peace, and any attempt at meditation seems like an effort. We seem to not gain much from meditation because we have not been maintaining and persisting with our initial strong determination. We have to watch out for this.

Having explained the benefits, we will spend a few moments in meditation. The object we choose to focus on in this meditation is our own breath. Having readjusted ourselves in the appropriate physical posture, we develop a strong determination and encourage ourselves to use our time now for meditation. This means to try to maintain our focus on the breath. In the beginning, we have to make a strong determination not to allow the mind to be distracted; even though the tendency to be distracted is there, we make the strong determination: 'I will not allow my mind to become distracted with whatever distractions may arise. Rather I will maintain my focus on the breath'. With this thought we make it clear to ourselves that what we are doing now is focusing on the natural inflow and outflow of our breath and maintaining our focus on that. (*Pause for meditation*)

It should be appropriate to continue with the text as we haven't been able to for a while now. However if people have particular questions they would like to ask, we can also deal with those. As there seem to be no particular questions, we will continue with the text.

#### **4.2.2.1.2. The actual way to take the essence**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.1. Training the mind in the stages of the path of the small capable being**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.1.2. The measure of having produced such thoughts**

To carry on from where we left off earlier, having gone through the main topics of what are said to be the practices of a being of small scope, the text then explains the measure or signs of having developed the attitude of a being of small scope within oneself.

Now we come to the topic of overcoming misconceptions, which is subdivided into refuting the misconception that someone else has, then laying down one's own premises and explaining what one's own standard is.

The misconception is in relation to the passage in the teachings where it says that one must give up attachment to and desire for all worldly excellence. Along with that passage, the misconception of doubt arises.

The particular doubt is in relation to this misconception as it reads here in the text. It says that you must turn your mind away from all the excellent things of cyclic existence. Someone could misinterpret this and think that it is improper to develop an interest in any of the excellent things in cyclic existence.

As a response to this doubt or misconception, the text explains that there are two kinds of objects of interest to be achieved: those with temporary and those with ultimate benefits. Even for those who are seeking the ultimate benefit – to achieve liberation and enlightenment – need to focus on obtaining the temporary benefits of a high status or a good state in cyclic existence.

As the text explains, even those who seek the ultimate benefit of liberation and enlightenment must temporarily

seek excellent bodies and so forth in cyclic existence. They will ultimately attain a certain goodness of liberation and enlightenment through a succession of lives in a high status. This indicates that the ultimate goal of doing the practices as prescribed here is to achieve liberation and enlightenment. However achieving those states would not be possible for an ordinary person in one lifetime: accumulating all the causes to achieve liberation and enlightenment in one lifetime would be quite impossible. As an ordinary practitioner, one needs to have the foresight to realise the need to continue to practise over many lifetimes by obtaining all the perfect conditions, such as being born human. One needs to have all the conditions to practise in one lifetime after another in succession, leading up to achieving the ultimate state of liberation and enlightenment.

What are known as excellent resources – an excellent body, excellent retinue and resources – are not all necessarily included in cyclic existence. An example of an excellent body, resources and attendants not included within cyclic existence is that of the manifestation of the enjoyment body of the Buddha. The enjoyment body, called Samboghakaya in Sanskrit, occurs in the pure realms, like Tushita. The form of body called the Samboghakaya or enjoyment body is an aspect of the Buddha in a divine state of existence in one of the Pure Lands: the body is the perfect enjoyment body with all the signs and marks, and the retinue is surrounded by bodhisattvas, and the teachings that are given are only the Mahayana teachings. The resources are all divine resources.

This is an example of how everything is an excellent condition even within cyclic existence. These pure lands are within cyclic existence, but not included in cyclic existence, so even though it is within the abode of cyclic existence, in reality it is not actually part of cyclic existence.

Maitreya says in the *Ornament for the Mahayana sutras* that you achieve high status as a human or a divine god by means of the first four perfections.

The first four of the perfections within the six perfections (morality, generosity, patience, joyous effort, concentration and wisdom) are causes for obtaining an excellent body, resources, retinue and high status.

We will look at how the first three perfections serve as a means to obtain the various different types of excellence. The first perfection, the perfection of morality, serves as the main cause to attain a perfect body in a high status – being reborn as a human being or in the god realms. The main cause is said to be practising morality; engaging in the perfection of morality is the cause to achieve a perfect human rebirth.

The perfection of generosity is the main cause to obtain excellent resources; engaging in acts of generosity is the main cause to obtain all the favourable conditions in terms of resources, wealth, food and clothing and so forth.

The excellent retinue means being surrounded by excellent companions and people who are good to oneself. This is obtained as a result of practising patience;

for those who engage in the perfection of patience, the more they practise the perfection of patience, the more they establish the causes to obtain a perfect retinue.

This can be understood even from a worldly point of view. We notice that someone who is patient naturally attracts people who are faithful and good to them; the more patient they are, the more they attract. On the contrary, we see that not so many people gather round someone who is short-tempered and angry all the time; they would not have many people who want to be with them.

So even from this general example we can see how each of these practices contributes to the specific results to be obtained. It is said that engaging in the first three perfections over the long-term becomes the cause to obtain the form body of the Buddha. In the shorter term, these practices become the conditions to obtain a high rebirth such as a human being in a future life, which becomes the condition to further engage in the practices, which then leads to achieving the ultimate goal of enlightenment.

Having explained this in relation to one's own practice, it is good to apply the meaning in whatever way one can to one's own practice. The practice of morality is really based on the ethics of not harming others. With the basic commitment of not wishing to harm others, practising morality then becomes the basis to benefit others in a more extensive way. Based on morality, if you practise generosity and patience, then joyous effort will arise; based on morality, the rest of the practices become sound, stable and meaningful.

By reflecting on the great benefits of these practices, even in this life, we can see how practising morality, living an ethical life, becomes the basis for us to gain the trust of others. Whatever we engage in becomes more stable and worthwhile. So even for this life, we see that there is a definite benefit for us. Engaging in generosity, being generous with others, being patient, engaging in joyous effort – these practices in their own respective ways have great benefits for us, even temporarily, right now.

While keeping the farsighted benefits in mind, one must also encourage oneself to engage in these practices by seeing the immediate benefit of these practices now and how they help us to lead a more contented and happy life now. So we can try to use these practices in a practical way, in our present life.

Before we conclude for the evening, let us again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time as we distance ourselves from the distractions, we bring our mind inward, focusing on the sound of the mantra to be recited, the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni. We will try to maintain our focus on the sound of the mantra.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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