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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual it would be good to spend a few minutes in meditation. All of us strive for physical and mental happiness, and meditation serves as a good aid to bring about that wished-for state. In order to engage in meditation it is good to sit in the appropriate relaxed upright position with a clear mind that is free from obstructions. It is also important to set one's motivation and generate a good attitude for the meditation.

There is no action that does not follow from an initial mental intention, therefore it is important that we check our mental attitude prior to engaging in any activity. If the mental attitude is a positive one, then naturally the actions that follow are most likely to be positive, and if the attitude is negative to begin with then it is quite natural that the action or activity that follows will also be negative. Thus it is important that we make sure we have a positive attitude before we engage in any activity. It is the same with meditation.

If we want to check if our actions are positive or not, we can look into whether the attitude that preceded that action was positive or not. Doing this is a good way to check out whether one's actions are positive or not.

If, when we stop to check our attitude, we notice that our attitude is tainted with negative thoughts, then we will know from our understanding that just noticing that the attitude is negative will help us to prevent any negative actions that might otherwise follow. If we engage in an action without checking our attitude, then we may later realise that we have done something negative. Thus the habit of checking our attitude can stop, or at least minimise, our negative actions.

Likewise with positive attitudes: when we look into our mind and notice that we have a positive attitude then the wish to engage in a positive, beneficial action will naturally follow, and this will encourage us to engage in that positive action, which can benefit oneself and others.

So if we make it a habit to check our attitude it will help us on a really practical level to engage in more worthwhile practices. It may seem that looking into one's own mind and checking whether it is positive or negative, and if so engaging in the resultant natural positive action, and if it is negative refraining from the action, is quite easy to follow and understand. But in fact it is actually quite a profound practice: if one can actually make it a habit and lead our lives in that way then overall our life will be much more meaningful and worthwhile.

It is also very important that when we look into our attitude, we make sure that we cultivate a kind attitude. Then it is most likely that the action that follows will be a kind, good gesture. Such kind attitude towards others

will not only naturally bring about a good effect for others but will, in turn, bring about a very good effect for oneself.

It is obvious that the more we have a kind and loving attitude towards someone, the more that loving attitude naturally minimises angry attitudes towards that person. Conversely we can see that if we don't have a kind attitude towards someone then it is very easy to become irritated and angry with that person. Likewise if we don't have a kind attitude towards another person then it is very easy for the mind of jealousy to arise, along with other sorts of mental attitudes such as competitiveness and so forth. A kind attitude towards others will naturally minimise irritation or agitation in relation to another person, and jealousy will be minimised. As a result our own mind becomes much more peaceful and calm.

We notice from our experience that from the moment we become upset and angry we don't feel peaceful and restful; our mind is agitated and we lose our calmness. A disturbed mind will in turn affect us on a physical level as well. The energy elements within our body become unbalanced and this will affect us physically. If we become habituated to an angry, agitated mind then that can definitely affect our health as well.

Conversely if we have a relatively calm and peaceful mind then that can in turn bring about good health for oneself. In fact the beneficiary of generating a kind and loving attitude towards others is oneself. One definitely benefits from such an attitude on a very practical level. These are very practical practices that we can engage in at this time, and it is on this level that we need to practise right now.

As we gain familiarity with these practices of developing a kind attitude, and minimising jealousy, agitation and irritation towards others on a daily basis, then this familiarity will make our mind more supple, and more receptive to more advanced practices later on. If we try to engage in high level practises at the very outset it is quite unrealistic for us to expect to be able to gain much, but if we can actually practise on this practical level then later on we will definitely be able to engage in higher level practices.

The main point being emphasised is the importance of generating a positive attitude prior to engaging in a practice such as meditation. In fact the very attempt to generate a positive attitude, more specifically a kind attitude, becomes a practice where we can see an immediate benefit. Take as an example a situation where we are feeling quite agitated and irritated, but nevertheless we have a wish to engage in the practice of meditation, we will initially have a feeling of restlessness and agitation, maybe in relation to someone else. Of course if we were to sit down and try to meditate right away that might not bring about a good result. But if we sit down and try to generate the kind attitude of wishing to benefit others, then we will notice that the agitation and irritation in our mind immediately subsides and is replaced with a calming, soothing feeling. We can definitely feel the effect immediately.

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We will engage in meditation practice now, where we will withdraw our mind from external distractions for the time being, and for the next few minutes we will not allow our mind to be influenced by any distractions. Rather we will make a determination to keep our mind focused on the object of our meditation, which is the breath. Keep bringing our mind inwards and our full attention focused one hundred percent on the breath, and in that way for the next few minutes we will just observe the natural inflow and outflow of our breath, and keep our mind on that. (*Pause for meditation*)

In our last session we covered points from the text giving advice on how to be free from the two main hindrances to a focused meditation, which are excitement and laxity. Using the aides of mindfulness and introspection one should try to overcome these obstacles to meditation. As the teaching advised, it is important to overcome these obstacles, because if we engage in any practice with a distracted mind we will not derive much benefit from that practice. That is why we should attempt to overcome distractions.

There is a quote from a sutra called the *Mahayana Prasada-prabhavana Sutra*, which is translated as the *Cultivating Faith in the Mahayana sutra*. The teaching quotes from this sutra, "Oh child of a good family from this enumeration you should know that faith in the Mahayana of the bodhisattvas, and all that emerges out of the Mahayana, comes from properly contemplating the meaning and the teaching, with a mind that is not distracted." As indicated in this sutra, all the results of the practice as prescribed in the Mahayana teachings, which includes the practices of a bodhisattva, come from a mind that is free from distractions. As Lama Tsong Khapa further explains, having a mind that is not distracted, means that the mind that does not wander to objects that are other than the virtuous objects of meditation.

Furthermore, "the meaning and the teaching in the sutra" refers to the meaning and the words of advice. What "properly contemplating" means is analysing and reflecting with discernment, which means that being completely focused on the object and not being distracted, and then, while being one hundred percent focused on the object, being able to analyse it with analytical wisdom. That combination of analysing an object while being completely focused on it is the way of ultimately being able to understand it, or being completely absorbed in the object. That is how one comes to understand the object.

Properly contemplating is prescribed for meditation but in fact in also refers to whatever activity we engage in. We need to apply this combination of being focused and having the wisdom of analysing to whatever we do. Using writing as an example, we have to be focused when we write so that we write properly, and as we focus we must also be able to analyse what we are writing so that we can discern whether we are making mistakes or not. Being able to check whether we are making mistakes or not is the analytical wisdom we have within ourselves. Thus the combination of a focused mind with an analytical mind makes for a faultless activity.

It is at this juncture that we can see how advice on practices can be related to our normal daily activities, and this makes clear the truth that the Buddha's teachings are easily understood, because they can all be related to mundane worldly activities. Although the main point on properly contemplating refers specifically to the practice of meditation, when we relate it to normal activity we can see that it is also true for any activity that we engage in. The point is that the combination of being focused while using the wisdom of analysing is crucial for any activity to be successful.

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

##### 4.2.2.1.2.2. Training the mind in the stages of the path held in common with beings of the medium scope

##### 4.2.2.1.2.2.1. The actual training in the reflections: the way to develop the mind that strives for liberation

##### 4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1. Reflection on the truth of suffering - the faults of cyclic existence

##### 4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1.2. The actual meditation on suffering

##### 4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1.2.1. Reflecting on the general sufferings of cyclic existence

##### 4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1.2.1.1. Reflecting on eight types of sufferings

We come now to the third subdivision, which is the way in which the qualities of the three vehicles are accomplished by meditating in that way. Under this heading Lama Tsong Khapa explained: "Therefore the Buddha says that any achievement of a virtuous quality in the three vehicles requires a state of mind that is both (1) an actual calm abiding or a similitude of it, which rests one-pointedly on its virtuous object of meditation without wandering from it; and (2) an actual insight, or a similitude of it, which carefully analyses a virtuous object of meditation and distinguishes both the real nature and diversity of phenomena".

Here similitude refers to a mind that is similar to calm abiding, which rests single-pointedly on its virtuous object of meditation, but which is not yet actual calm abiding. Engaging in the practice of meditation in any of the three vehicles refers to the hearer, the solitary realiser and bodhisattva vehicles. Likewise an actual insight means actual development of insight, and a similitude to it means that the mind is able to carefully analyse the object that one is meditating upon but has not yet actually achieved insight. That is how one should engage in the practice of either contemplative meditation or analytical meditation.

In order to back up this explanation, Lama Tsong Khapa quotes from the sutra called the *Sutra on Revealing the Intended Meaning* which says, "Maitreya, you should know that all the virtuous qualities mundane or supramundane, of the shravakas, the bodhisattvas or the tathagatas result from meditative serenity and insight". Even though here it implicitly mentions meditative serenity (calm abiding) and insight, Lama Tsong Khapa derives the meaning from the sutra to indicate that all the practices of these three vehicles come as a result from either actual calm abiding and special insight itself, or the similitude to it.

Lama Tsong Khapa added similitude to the definition because of the fact that although a practitioner on the

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beginner's level may not have developed calm abiding or special insight yet, they nevertheless would have developed a single-pointed concentration, which although not yet calm abiding is a prelude to calm abiding, and which is still a very concentrated meditation. Likewise beginners would not have developed special insight yet but their ability to analyse the object with analytical wisdom while they remain focused is a similitude to special insight. Thus at the beginner's level even though they have not developed calm abiding and special insight, they do have a similitude to it. That is how Lama Tsong Khapa explains the meaning of this sutra.

Now we come to the fourth subdivision from the earlier category which explains the eight types of suffering, which are:

1. Suffering of birth or rebirth
2. Suffering of ageing
3. Suffering of illness
4. Suffering of death
5. Suffering of encountering unpleasant things
6. Suffering of being separated from pleasant things
7. Suffering of not finding what we seek
8. Five contaminated aggregates, which are in the nature of suffering.

This list of the eight types of sufferings summarises the types of suffering that are experienced in cyclic existence, that are faced by all who are born in cyclic existence.

Before we conclude for the evening are there any questions?

*Question: Is it true that it is one's karma if someone suddenly attacks and stabs you while you are walking down a street?*

*Answer:* In fact it is explained that experiencing such an attack is a result of having committed similar actions in the past. So in that sense it would be considered as a karmic result. Of course from a normal ordinary perspective one may think that the person walking down the street hasn't done anything wrong, and the person himself might think, "I haven't done anything wrong, I was just walking down the street and I was attacked, and I am innocent".

Even though at face value it may appear that there is no cause for the attack, in fact the causes lie beyond this lifetime. They may have been created way back in the past, so the attack is in fact a direct result of something done in the past.

Now if the person who is attacked on the street happens to be someone who has a really good understanding of karma, and who also practises applying that understanding, then they would not be upset or angry about the attack. They would be able to immediately reflect on how what they are experiencing now is actually a result of the causes that they have created in the past. By reflecting on that fact, they would be able to understand that, 'What I am experiencing now is the result of my own negative deeds and the actions I have done in the past, so the fault does not lie in the person

who attacked me. Rather it is my own fault'. So they will be able to accept the attack as the natural consequence of their own negative actions, and thus they would not be upset or angry with the person who attacked them.

Furthermore a person with such a sound understanding and an attitude of intention to practise karma would then be able to further reflect that because this unwanted and unpleasant experience they are experiencing now is a result of karma that they have created in the past, they will determine not to engage in any further negativity to bring about similar unpleasant experiences in the future. Thus such a person would be able to further strengthen their conviction and determination not to engage in further negative actions or negative deeds.

*Question: But shouldn't one stop the attacker in order to prevent them from creating negative karma?*

If you are able to stop the person then that is great, as this is not implying that you should willingly let people stab you. The previous answer was in relation to someone who has already been stabbed. If you are walking along and you don't see someone about to stab you in the back then you couldn't prevent that. The answer to the previous question relates to the circumstance of not being able to prevent someone from stabbing you in the back, and how to contemplate and think about that situation after the incident has already taken place. If you had actually seen the attacker then maybe you would have attacked them before they could attack you.

*Question: Do Buddhists believe there is free will in relation to karma?*

*Answer:* A misunderstanding can arise from the definition of karma. If one were to misunderstand karma as being predetermined and unrelated to one's will, then you might see that there is a contradiction between karma and free will.

However what karma really means is intention; karma is something that you create with your mind, or your thought, so that whatever action follows has initially come from your mind. If you define will as your intention, or your mind thinking something, then definitely karma can be defined as free will, because you reap the effect of what you think. The person with the intention is oneself. Of course karma is not something that comes from nowhere; rather it is a specific cause which brings about a specific result. Whatever one experiences is only a result of what one intended in the past.

Every moment we have the freedom to change what we think and what we have done in the past, and thus we have free will. Because karma is at work one can accomplish what one wishes. If karma didn't work then one could not accomplish what one wishes for. So if you define free will as accomplishing something that one wishes for, then definitely that is something that one can achieve through karma.

For example if one wishes to have a beautiful body in the next lifetime then that is something one should strive for and work for now. One can accomplish the causes right now. However if one does not engage in the causes to accomplish that beautiful body, then it will not be

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accomplished as one wishes. One has to acquire the causes to fulfil the will.

In our case maybe we completely misinterpret free will if we think that we can wish for something but don't have to do anything to make the wish come true. If we don't create the causes then we won't ever accomplish what we wish. These are good questions.

*Question: In the case of someone who wishes to be thin, but still likes to eat cake, how can they accomplish their goal of becoming thin?*

*Answer:* If you wish for something but don't accomplish the causes, then of course you will not obtain your wish. In the case of someone who wants to be thin, the causes for obtaining such a thin body are to refrain from eating cakes. But if you don't refrain from eating cakes then of course the causes are not met. So the will, which is to be thin, and the causes, the actions that are necessary, are contradictory. What one wishes for is to be thin, but actually what one is doing is making oneself fat.

Karma means engaging in the actions or activities that bring about a specific result. When karma works you have an intention, and you have the appropriate causes and conditions to fulfil that intention or wish. Thus it is a combination of an intention backed up by the causes and conditions to fulfil that intention. That is when the result of karma is definite. I would say that your attachment to the cakes is another karmic result from the past.

*Question: Can karma and mind be separated?*

*Answer:* What we call karma is actually a mental state, and you cannot separate something from itself. The definition of karma is intention and that is a mental state, so therefore karma is, loosely speaking, mind.

To define karma more specifically, as mentioned earlier, karma is defined as being mental intention, which means that it is a state of mind which moves you towards a mental, verbal or physical action. It is not the motivation itself, it is something prior to the motivation, and thus it is what is called mind that moves you towards an action. Just the motivation of wishing to kill someone, for example, does not create the whole karma of killing.

Even after one has stabbed someone, one has not necessarily accumulated the complete karma of killing if, after the act of stabbing, one immediately develops regret. So in other words the partial and full karma of any action is created by the mind itself. Whether the karma is partial or complete karma depends on how far the intention goes. So in fact the actual karma is that which comes prior to the motivation, and which moves the mind towards doing the action, thinking it or doing it. So it is not a completely silly question. It would be a silly question, however if a non-Buddhist asked that question of a Buddhist.

The topic of karma is quite complex, interesting and intriguing. It is good to reflect on the teachings on karma that I have given earlier, which include the definition, and the specific mechanisms of karma. So it is good to refer to those notes and revise and check on them. That would be useful!

Before we conclude for the evening we can take a few

moments to generate a focused mind. So we sit in an appropriate posture again and this time we focus on the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra to be recited and keep our mind focused on that.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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