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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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Wouldn't it be good to spend a little time in meditation again? We should sit in a comfortable upright position and remind ourselves of the main purpose of meditation – to withdraw our mind inward and to look into our mind. That is the first step in subduing the negative tendencies or thoughts that arise in our mind. As we subdue our mind, it naturally subdues our speech and physical actions.

The natural consequences of a subdued mind followed by subdued speech and physical actions will result in a person naturally inclined to refrain from negative deeds or negative karma, and engage in positive karma. Now if we were to try to interpret that in lay terms, it means basically that someone who has a subdued body and mind, will be a person of good manners. Such a person will naturally shun negative tendencies, and as a consequence will lead a much more meaningful and worthwhile life. Regardless of whether one considers oneself Buddhist or not, spiritual or not, if we make an attempt to subdue our mind, our life will be much more meaningful.

The benefits that we derive from meditation – subduing the mind - are obvious. We do not need to try to understand this from a complicated point of view; rather from a very practical daily life point of view, we are able to notice that someone who is naturally subdued is well-behaved and has good manners. They will be a person liked by everyone, and naturally people are drawn to them. Looking into this from a personal point of view, do we feel attracted to someone who is naturally kind, well-behaved and has good manners or not? If the answer is yes, then the reason we are attracted to them is because of their calm persona and the calm atmosphere that you feel around that person. If we are attracted to that, then wouldn't we like to have those same qualities ourselves? Wouldn't that be a nice quality to have, to naturally attract people in a good way, communicate well with others, and have a good relationship with others? If the answer to that is yes, then that is something we can definitely cultivate.

Engaging in meditation can help us on a very practical level in our daily lives. We may notice that when we wake up in the morning, if our mind is clear and alert and as we engage in meditation to generate a focussed mind, then we naturally have a more positive outlook for that day. As a result of having a clear, positive and focussed mind from the morning, we can see how that affects us, in that we have a good day throughout the day. Conversely, if one wakes up with a disturbed and agitated mind, and we don't try to soothe our mind, we will notice that the rest of the day is in turmoil. Things don't seem to go well,

including communication with others. As a consequence our mind becomes unhappier because things haven't gone well.

If we have a choice, how would we choose our day to be like? Would we want a day full of anxiety, turmoil and being upset, or would we want to choose a calm and peaceful day? Of course, because we have a certain amount of wisdom and intelligence we would, in our right mind, choose to have a calm and peaceful day.

Our day depends on the attitude or state of mind we have in the morning. When we notice this, we realise that changes in our outlook throughout the day are very dependent on our attitude. If we started off with a negative attitude and we fill that negative attitude with more negative attitudes, then our outlook and therefore our day is bound to be restless because of our restless mind. If we notice that our mind is in a negative state from the beginning, then we can change our attitude. Even in a negative state of mind our attitude is something we can overcome.

When we investigate, we realise that the mind is really dependent on our attitude. However, we have control over our own attitudes. That is what we are training in. It may not initially be easy to change our minds from a negative attitude to a positive one right away, but that is why there are techniques such as meditation which can help us. If we can slowly put some time and energy into a regular practice of keeping a focussed mind, trying to maintain a clear mind and thus generating a positive attitude, then our lives can definitely change for the better.

A very important factor to note is that meditation doesn't necessarily mean sitting down in an upright posture and closing your eyes. That is not the only way to meditate; in fact it is doubtful whether that can become a real meditation or not. What meditation really means is to change our mind from a negative attitude to a positive one: first neutral, and then a positive state of mind. If we give it some thought we notice that we do have the potential to always change our attitude. Whatever we are engaged in, there are these two types of states of mind or attitudes that are prevalent, either a positive one or a negative one. This applies to everything we do, for example, when we are engaged in work, when we are communicating with others, when we are serving others in any way, any kind of interaction with others or even on our own, whatever our job.

When we engage in an activity, there are always these two states of minds that can be prevalent, either positive or negative. And depending on what state of mind we are in, the actions that we engage in will naturally turn out to be either positive or negative as well, and will have positive or negative consequences. The main meditation, is to maintain an awareness of our state of mind constantly and when we notice a negative state of mind, try to overcome that and generate a more positive attitude.

Sitting in an upright crossed leg posture and trying to meditate with a focussed mind is of course a technique if we do it in a proper way. But if we don't have the right attitude and if we are not doing it correctly, it may lead to

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more dullness in the mind instead of clarity. Instead of positive frame of mind, the mind might become more negative. There are those who claim that in attempting to meditate their mind seems to become more disturbed and duller instead of clearer. This is clearly an indication that the technique has not been correct. Without the proper attitude, even meditation can become a worldly activity. If we meditate with a worldly concern, then whatever time we spend will just become a worldly activity.

The main point is to cultivate awareness, particularly analytical wisdom, which is the intelligence we have of being able to discern from what is right and what is wrong. We can further develop and cultivate a stronger awareness or intelligence in our mind. This intelligence, or analytical wisdom is something that we need to use constantly in discerning whether an action that we are about to engage in is positive or negative. If it is a negative action, then try to avoid engaging in those negativities. If it is positive, by all means encourage yourself and engage in the activities. As a consequence of looking into our mind and discerning and making sure that we are following the positive and avoiding the negative, we will naturally gain well-behaved manners and a good persona.

Others appreciate and like people like this. With a good persona and a good attitude you can benefit others by influencing them in a positive way as well. We like to be around people who have this good atmosphere around them. So, we can also consider how others would appreciate it if we developed a good persona for ourselves.

Some people claim that they feel that everyone is against them, that people seem to look badly at them and criticise them. In reality, if we look into the situation it may very well be the case that it is the wrong projection. Because their own negative state of mind projects their own negativity upon others, it appears others are against them. Take a particular example: when we are in a very angry state of mind, and even if our best friend who normally is always nice to us and helps us says something nice, then in our moment of anger, because of our own negative state of mind, it may appear that they are saying something to hurt us. This is clearly an indication that there's no fault from the other side. The other person has good intentions; they are trying to help us, but because of our negative state of mind and in particular an angry state of mind, we interpret or project their good intentions as being negative. We are actually really projecting our own faults or negative states of mind upon others.

The main point I'm emphasising here is that from these examples we come to understand that we have to clear our own mind and make it pure, and then everything around us will also appear pure and positive. If we don't from our own side pay attention to our own mind and instead completely leave it in a negative state, then everything around us will also appear to be negative.

Having explained the purpose of meditation, now we can actually spend a few minutes in meditation where we bring our mind inwards. Reset our physical posture for meditation and think about the great advantages of

meditation. With that attitude we now engage in full attention and keep our mind focussed on our breath.

Bringing our mind inward means distancing our mind from any other thoughts or any other sound; any external distractions are completely left aside for the time being. We don't pay any attention to them, but we try to bring our full attention and focus upon the breath. And as we breathe in naturally we mentally follow our breath coming in and going out. We imagine that the mind and breath become like one and are inseparable. It is as if our mind becomes the breath, and that's how our mind can be completely focussed on the breath. It is as if there's no distinction between the mind and the breath. The more we are able to do that then distractions, such as other thoughts, will not be able to disturb our focus.

As a natural consequence of keeping the mind focussed in that breath, other thoughts, emotions and feelings will subside and the mind will gain temporary relief from all other distractions that normally go on in the mind; they will naturally subside. As the mind becomes settled, we immediately feel calm. *(Pause for meditation)*

As we practise the meditation this evening, keeping our mind focussed is really the most essential thing, even it's for a few minutes. The quality is much more important than the quantity. It is good to train our mind from the very onset to have a completely focussed mind and then maintain that for even one or two minutes. This will form a good habit in the mind.

#### **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**

Within the eight types of suffering, we come now to the suffering of old age. This topic is divided into two subdivisions: extensive explanation and summarising the essentials.

#### **(i) The extensive explanation**

There are five types of suffering of ageing.

#### **1. The handsome body deteriorates.**

That is one of the most obvious signs of old age. It is a fact that we are born with a contaminated body. Initially there is an attractive, beautiful appearance, but as we age that begins to diminish. We must remember why the sufferings are explained in great detail. The purpose of explaining suffering is so that we can contemplate and meditate upon the natural and obvious sufferings we go through. This is done to overcome faulty states of mind such as pride and so on. In having a handsome body, we may develop pride and strong attachment to the body as well as a feeling of haughtiness. These deluded states of mind can arise by focusing on a beautiful body.

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Contemplate on the reality of the body as it ages and slowly deteriorates, for example, compare the youthful body of someone who is in their twenties, with a body which has reached an age of seventy. Then look at ourselves, remembering how we looked when we were about twenty and then how we might look like when we are about seventy. We can see the huge difference in the body even with mere appearance. Thinking in this way can reduce strong attachment to the body, and we realise the nature of a contaminated body born in samsara. Meditating on the various sufferings in this way can help overcome such delusions of the mind. There are five particular delusions that were mentioned earlier such as pride, attachment and haughtiness and so forth.

In terms of pride, we can see that how when a particular suffering such as illness is experienced by someone, then their sense of pride or ego is completely deflated. We can obviously see that when someone who is tormented by certain illness, there is no room for them to feel proud about it. There is no sense of pride there. If you go and ask someone or chat with someone who is very ill, you can obviously see they don't feel a sense of dignity or pride at that moment. This can also help to induce compassion in our mind, when we contemplate on suffering. Reflecting on our own suffering and then relating that to how other beings are also suffering in the same way, and sometimes even in more severe ways, can help induce a feeling of compassion towards them. As we reflect on the sufferings, we of course reflect on them as being unwanted sufferings; we wouldn't want to experience them.

Because we have a strong feeling of not wishing to experience those sufferings, we reflect on what the causes of these sufferings are. The teachings explain the causes of suffering as non-virtue, that is, engaging in non-virtuous activities or non-virtuous karma out of delusion. Non-virtuous actions are the cause of suffering. So if we do not want to experience suffering, we need to be determined to refrain from engaging in non-virtuous deeds or karma. Also, as we experience the suffering we naturally would want to be free from suffering and be happy, and in a state of well-being. As we wish for happiness and well-being, we can then reflect upon what the causes are. The causes as explained in the teachings are engaging in virtuous karma, so this should encourage us to do that.

The particular characteristic or feature of the suffering of the handsome body deteriorating is that the back bends down like a bow. This is of course obvious for someone who reaches a certain mature age; the back naturally starts to bend. The suffering of old age and the suffering of sickness, which is described next, are sufferings which are very obvious and we can immediately relate to them. It is as obvious as a dog screaming in pain when it is hit with a rock. This is a very obvious suffering. Among the sufferings it is said that the middle sufferings are all obvious and easier to relate to, whereas the first suffering, which is of birth and the last suffering, the five contaminated aggregates, are more subtle. Thus it is harder for us to understand those sufferings as being a suffering.

The next feature of old age is that hair turns white. We also start to develop wrinkles on our forehead. As these features are obviously experienced, we can see that our youthful body, which is straight in youth, starts to bend, and we can see a youthful face, which is free from wrinkles, start to develop wrinkles, and the hair starts to turn white or grey. These obvious signs of ageing: losing youthful appearances fade away and are replaced with unattractive features. One way to prepare ourselves for old age is to reflect on these changes.

Another practical benefit of hearing about these changes now and reflecting upon them is that this can prepare us for that time when we do age. By reflecting or meditating on these types of sufferings, it becomes easier to handle when they are actually faced with aging later on. Whereas it will be harder to accept the different sufferings of old age when they occur for someone who has not had prior studies or who hasn't contemplated these experiences.

One of the main points of reflecting on these sufferings on a personal level, as well as reflecting upon others' sufferings, is that through these obvious signs we begin to understand that suffering is the nature of being born in samsara, the nature of cyclic existence. We naturally experience suffering. Reflecting on this will remove the shock. There's nothing amazing or shocking about suffering. If someone has that sort of understanding, then when they see an old person with white hair and bent back and wrinkles on their face, they will not be repulsed by it, they will feel that it is the natural consequence of cyclic existence. Because of our understanding and prior familiarity with these factors, that will not be something that we see as repulsive in others or to be avoided. Otherwise there may be situations where you are constantly trying to make yourself youthful, such as going to the extent of dyeing your hair when it starts to turn grey. You might dye it black or whatever, and apparently it's quite expensive to do that and it doesn't last longer than a month.

## 2. The deterioration of vitality and strength

The second suffering is that physical strength and vigour deteriorates. The teachings describe the features of this particular suffering as an example: when you sit down you drop down like a sack of dirt cut from a rope. If the sack is tied up and you cut a rope, it will just fall down to the ground. Similarly an old person tries to sit down and if they have no real control of their body, then they will just drop down onto the seat.

Another feature is that when you rise up it is like uprooting a tree. When an old person tries to stand up, it is so difficult. It is like uprooting a tree or a plant. They have to use their hands and feet to try to push themselves up. During a recent teaching with His Holiness I was sitting with an old Dharma friend, he's actually a little bit younger in age than me, and seemed that aging process caught up with him. It seems that he has to use all his hands as well to try to stand up. When he noticed me standing up without having to use my hands he seemed surprised and asked, 'Don't you have to use your hands to push yourself up?' And I said, 'Actually I don't, not yet' (*laughter*). The next time I saw him I actually started

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to use my hands to push myself up out of sympathy (*more laughter*). Actually this Geshe is a Dharma friend and we consider each other as very good Dharma friends. During the teaching there are times when we sat outside and we said that it is good that we've met again after many years; it is a good time when we are meeting during these teachings. And it is good that we are making prayers together and making prayers for our wishes to be fulfilled. Doing this means we have very good connection at that time.

### 3. The deterioration of the senses

The third type of suffering in relation to the aging process is that our senses deteriorate. As the teaching describes, our eyes cannot see forms clearly, and the power of memory and other faculties, there is forgetfulness and so on. This is again a vivid explanation of how as we age, it becomes harder to see things clearly, and hearing becomes more difficult and then our memories begin to fail. It is sort of like a half joke we share among our older friends, that when we greet each other and say that one should have a long life, the response is that well yes, one should have a long life but there are many unwanted things that come along with that as well.

### 4. The deterioration of [the ability] to enjoy sensory objects

The fourth suffering in relation to the aging process is that the enjoyment of sense objects fades. The teachings describe this particular suffering as having difficulty digesting food and drink and we cannot enjoy desirable objects. It is true that as we reach a certain age, certain food can easily affect us and we are unable to digest foods we may have liked previously. We are also unable to enjoy other sense objects such as sights, sounds and tactile feelings.

### 5. The suffering of the complete deterioration of life

The fifth suffering is that the deterioration of life is painful. As your life nears exhaustion rapidly towards death, then being aware that our life is slowly waning brings about suffering within our mind. As the teachings say, we must think about this again and again.

#### (ii) Summarising the essential [reflections]

The next division from the early category is summarising the essentials. In order to explain this, the teaching quotes Geshe Chengawa, "The pain of death is horrible but brief; how horrible is aging!" The actual suffering of death is quite short. The aging process is unlike death, as it is a very long ongoing process where we have to experience suffering for a very long time. Lama Tsong Khapa also quotes from another great master called Gamapa, "It is well that aging happens little by little; if it happened all at once, it would be intolerable". Reflecting and meditating upon these factors will help us on a personal level to overcome strong attachment and other delusions such as pride and so forth. And also on a practical level, if we happen to be in a youthful stage, then it helps us to understand the reality of the nature of being in cyclic existence. When we see old people we will not be tempted to ridicule or scorn them; we will not make fun of them. This can help us to prevent a negative attitude

towards elderly people, and it can also help us to appreciate and understand the aging process.

Before we conclude for the evening, let us again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time, as we sit in an appropriate relaxed posture with our back straight, we bring our mind inward; focusing inward we distance our mind from distractions. This time we focus upon the sound of the mantra to be recited which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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