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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation. We need to find an appropriate posture - sitting relaxed but with an attentive manner, with a straight back and the chest forward. This seems to allow the wind or energy in our body, to flow well, and this helps the mind to be more focused and clear.

It is good to remind ourselves that the main purpose of meditation is to secure a peaceful state of mind. A peaceful state of mind is really the key to a happy mind, and it needs to be cultivated within ourselves. It is not something that can be found externally.

It is good to recognise that a peaceful mind is one of the most valuable inner qualities that we can have. Once we recognise that, it is in our own interest that we pay strict attention not to lose it. A peaceful mind contributes to a happy mind, thus the happy mind is the most essential thing that we can wish for. A happy mind is what we really need and what is most valuable to us.

A happy mind also contributes to our physical wellbeing. It is something that we can all recognise as being worthwhile; we don't need to go into much logical explanation to assert that a happy mind is something of value. We all know through our own experience that a happy mind is something that we want. As there is no question to how much it benefits ourselves, the question arises as to whether our happy mind can benefit others. There is no doubt that our own happy state of mind can definitely contribute towards others' happiness.

This can be understood through our own experiences. When we associate with someone who is naturally calm and peaceful and happy, that brings about a happy feeling within ourselves; they bring us joy. Even if we were unhappy or depressed, being with someone who is joyful and happy has an effect on us and we begin to cheer up. This definitely proves that someone else's happy state of mind can have a positive effect upon us.

Conversely, if we were with someone who is in a frustrated, chaotic state of mind, we then begin to notice that we also become agitated ourselves. In associating closely with others, their state of mind definitely has an effect upon us and likewise upon others. Similarly, if we were to cultivate a positive state of mind, such as a peaceful, happy state of mind, then that can definitely bring about a similar effect on others. Understanding this will help us to maintain good relationships with others, as by generating positive states of mind ourselves we can contribute to with the well-being of others. Whether that relationship is a casual friendship or whether it is a partner, a boyfriend or girlfriend, whoever we are associating with, if we can genuinely develop a calm and peaceful mind then we can definitely contribute to a harmonious good relationship with others. So we can all benefit from developing a positive state of mind.

Our behaviour is affected by the attitude we have in our mind, so when we notice that others' good attitude and good behaviour has a positive effect on us, then we cultivate similar positive attitudes and behaviour. In a relationship we notice how a positive attitude and positive good behaviour do contribute to others' wellbeing. We can use that as a tool to benefit others when they are in a distressed state, are not so happy, or when a friend or partner is feeling sad because something happened in their life. If we can remind ourselves that if we show a negative attitude towards them in their difficult situation, then it would only contribute to more sadness and depression. So we need to make an extra effort to try to develop a positive attitude in our mind with concern for the other person who is sad. We can try to make sure that our speech is nice, and that our physical behaviour is appealing to them. If we follow that, then we will notice that it really cheers up the other person and can lift them out of their depressed state of mind. In this way we can see that having a positive state of mind is really beneficial and thus worthwhile to cultivate.

If we wish to develop good companionship and a good relationship with others and in particular with our partner, boyfriend or girlfriend, whoever one associates with and lives with, then the key factor is to develop our positive attitudes, using them to develop ourselves for the benefit of others. Sometimes when others are feeling a bit sad or depressed, and if we extend our positive attitude with soothing words and affectionate gestures, then that will be deeply appreciated. This develops a deep trust within the other person, knowing that they can rely on us, even when they are in a negative state of mind themselves and depressed; they know that we still care for them. Even at times when things don't go well, that trust will remain, because they know that in difficult times they felt gratitude towards us.

When a relationship is based on that sort of understanding and trust, then the relationship can survive and can last for a long time in a happy, harmonious way. If a relationship is not based on deep trust, then the joy of the companionship may be for, at most, a few weeks. For twenty days or so there might be a good feeling but then after that it might fade away. A good relationship is based on the trust that comes about from the positive attitudes that we show to others.

The main point being stressed here is the value of a peaceful and calm mind and how that can contribute to a general wellbeing of having positive attitudes, speech, gestures and manners. That is something that we can all understand through our own experience. We do not need much logical reasoning to prove that a peaceful, happy mind is something worthwhile, that we can appreciate. It is something that is common and natural; instinctively we all know and experience that a peaceful, happy mind is something that we wish for. Just as it benefits us, it can also benefit others; it is mutually beneficial.

We may ask a question based on a doubt that may arise in our mind: if even if I agree with what is being said here by the teacher, that having a peaceful and calm mind is beneficial and good and worthwhile, it doesn't seem to come about naturally and it is so hard to have a peaceful and happy mind. Is there any possibility of developing a calm and peaceful mind? How can we develop it? This is an appropriate question or doubt that we should look into.

The answer to why it is difficult to achieve that state of calmness and happiness, is that we have not yet found the

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correct way to search for that happiness. Those who have not understood where the happiness comes from and how it is developed use their attention to focus outwardly, seeking happiness from external means. I feel this is a key reason that some people fail to find real happiness. Now that is not say that we cannot gain any happiness from external means, because, of course, external factors can contribute to a certain level of happiness. But we are talking about a real sense of well-being, real calmness within our mind, an authentic happiness within our mind. That is something that can be cultivated only within ourselves; we cannot find internal happiness through external means. If we fail to understand that, then we have missed the point.

Just as we cannot find the ultimate causes for happiness externally, likewise the ultimate causes for unhappiness or distress within our mind also does not come externally but from within ourselves. The cause for our own unhappiness lies within our own mind, within our own attitude. Depending on our attitude, it can contribute to our depression or unhappiness. The main cause as explained in the Dharma is the disturbing conceptions within our mind, which are the main causes for disturbing the peace and happiness within our mind. The technique to minimise and eventually overcome these disturbing attitudes and conceptions within our mind is meditation, which is the tool or the technique for achieving real happiness within ourselves. When our mind is full of different kinds of disturbing conceptions, it is as if our mind is possessed by the devil, by evil. But basically that evil or devil is none other than our own disturbing attitudes, our own disturbing mind. To overcome that evil within us, we need to use the technique of meditation.

A specific example of the evil which harms us (and which is none other than the disturbing conceptions within our own mind) is anger. As soon as anger arises in our mind it completely disturbs our mind and robs us of any of the calmness or peace we had earlier. When anger arises, it is the evil that harms us by disturbing our peace of mind. In the moment that anger arises, we all notice that our mind becomes completely agitated and disturbed. We are not happy as long as anger remains in our mind. In order to combat that evil state of mind there are the techniques such as meditating on compassion. When we meditate on love or compassion, we find that as soon as we begin to replace our angry attitude with a loving attitude towards the object or the person we are angry towards, our mind begins to slowly calm down again. When we begin to meditate with a loving attitude, then the mind becomes more relaxed and our evil attitude of anger is replaced by love and the mind becomes more peaceful and happy again.

Similarly when strong desire arises in the mind, it becomes disturbed. The evil of desire is harming us at that time. To overcome strong desire in our mind, a useful technique is to contemplate on the faults and unattractive features of the object that we feel desire towards. This will reduce our desire towards the object. For those who are hindered by disturbing thoughts in their mind, with a lot of thoughts which continuously arise in the mind, the antidote is to meditate on the breath. When focusing on the breath, all discursive thoughts naturally subside and the mind becomes relatively calm and peaceful.

When we use these techniques we notice an immediate effect, even though we have not yet completely overcome the disturbing attitudes such as anger, desire and confusion in our mind. It is not possible to immediately overcome

them completely, however, as the manifest level of these disturbing thoughts are replaced with positive states of mind, the manifest level of that disturbing attitude subsides and we experience a relatively peaceful and happy mind. With this technique and other techniques, we can eventually overcome the delusions completely.

When we use techniques such as meditating on love and generate a loving attitude, then that protects the mind from the evil of anger. As we all notice from our experience, as soon as anger arises it draws us in and disturbs our peace of mind. The meditation technique that protects our mind from anger is love; these meditation techniques become the real protector or saviour of our mind. There is no real saviour other than the positive attitudes generated within ourselves. We can see the immediate effect of how positive attitudes save us from an agitated state of mind, and from feeling uncomfortable. The negative states of mind that disturbs us is overcome and thus saved by positive attitudes such as love.

Having mentioned the benefits of meditation, it would be appropriate now to spend a few minutes in meditation. The meditation technique we use here is to develop a concentrated, focused mind based on the breath. As we resolutely focus on our breath, we remind ourselves that to get a positive effect from the meditation of focusing on our breath, we must do it wholeheartedly and with our full attention, otherwise we will not get the benefits. The technique requires that we withdraw our mind from all discursive thoughts. Basically, that means that when thoughts arise in the mind we don't allow ourselves to be influenced by them; we don't pay attention to those thoughts, but we bring our whole attention and focus on our breath instead. This is done by mentally observing our breath; so as we breathe in through our nostrils we mentally follow the breath going in, and then as we breathe out we mentally follow the breath coming out. In this way, we keep our attention span or focus completely on the breath. (*Meditation*)

*Question: I start to feel uncomfortable during meditation and get distracted by the pains in my legs and knees, so I am wondering if it is absolutely necessary to sit in an upright posture during meditation?*

*Answer:* The upright sitting posture is of course a classic, general explanation of a good posture to meditate in, but when it comes down to individuals, it seems that each person has their own appropriate meditation posture that they feel comfortable with. The main thing is that the posture helps the mind to be focused, so it really comes down to each individual to find their posture, whether they are sitting cross legged or on a chair, whatever posture it may be, to find an appropriate posture where their mind can still be focused and they are strain free. Of course, in a group meditation, out of concern for others we may adopt a position which is inappropriate; for example lying down or stretching out on the floor would not be appropriate in a gathering where others also occupy the space for meditation.

However the mind can be still focused if one lies down and meditates, so if one is by oneself and lying down helps the mind to be more focused, then that is also OK.

When we lived in the monastery, a few monks had to share the rooms together. When we recited our prayers, normally we would have to sit up to do them. But there were a few who would occasionally say, "OK, please excuse me while

you do your prayers, I am just going to lie down and meditate on some compassion.”

Actually for meditation on love and compassion, it is not necessary that we sit in an upright position. In fact love and compassion are positive and kind attitudes within ourselves, that we need to generate at all times throughout our lives. So, as explained in the teachings, when you lie down with a loving and compassionate attitude, then that becomes a practice. If you are walking, and you walk with a loving and kind attitude, then the act of walking itself becomes the practice. Likewise, while eating or communicating, in all circumstances if we can maintain the positive attitude of loving kindness, then whatever we engage in can become a practice. So that is the main point, to maintain the positive attitude.

There may be some who claim, “Whatever I do is out of love. Even when I sleep or lie down or relax, I am doing it out of love. When I walk, I am doing it out of love”. If that is true, then of course it is very meaningful. But one must be careful not to use that just as an excuse to be lazy.

A loving attitude is one of the best inner companions and friends we can have. When we refer to a spiritual teacher, there are actually external spiritual teachers, as well as the internal spiritual teacher. The external spiritual teachers are the ones who show us the right way, and the internal spiritual teachers are the positive attitudes of love, compassion and wisdom. Wisdom and compassion are said to be the unfailing guides and teachers that we cultivate within ourselves. Once developed, the internal teacher can be with us at all times, wherever we are.

In the material world we need to have a certain amount of intelligence, wisdom, a certain amount of kindness, and a kind attitude in order to take us through life. In normal activities if we fail to have intelligence we cannot really achieve anything; and we gain that intelligence from learning. Once we have learnt something, we internalise and carry our knowledge with us wherever we go. Likewise in the practice of Dharma, it is the wisdom, a higher form of intelligence and compassion that we carry within us. So, wisdom and compassion become the main tools for guiding us wherever we are and whatever we do. Once we have those two tools of compassion and wisdom, we can basically achieve anything, and that is worthwhile.

Cultivating the internal spiritual guide is of most importance because it is not even possible for us to always be together physically with an external spiritual guide and teacher. There are times when we have to live apart and we cannot always be with them, so having an internal spiritual teacher helps us to continue on our path after having the companionship of the external teacher; this is what helps us to further our development on the spiritual path.

*Question: It seems that it is possible that by doing good for some one, there can be a negative result. There could be a harmful outcome from our trying to help them. How do we deal with that?*

A. Of course, anything is possible; it might seem unthinkable or unimaginable that children would consider their parents as enemies, but this is something which is possible. We know it is possible, because it happens. If we are talking about general possibilities, then for example when someone is hungry and you give food to them, which they need and want, it is possible that the food might cause a stomach ache, but there is no fault in the intention and the actual action. Somehow circumstances led them to feel stomach pain, but just because they have stomach pain you can not devalue the

act of giving and the attitude of kindness. The actual outcome is very hard for someone to discern right away, so we say the main thing is our motivation. For example, a doctor with real genuine concern of wanting to help a patient would maybe treat the patient, but even with the best of intentions and the best concerns, in the process of treatment the patient might get side effects and not be cured. As far as the intentions go, the best intentions were there, so we cannot say that the attitude and intention of wanting to do good and be good to others was at fault.

For example, in the past who s in India we noticed that the medication taken for overcoming tuberculosis is a very powerful medication. But even though it seems to try to combat the actual virus and disease to cure tuberculosis, a side effect is liver harm. Some suffer due to the medication and they get a weak liver, and they can also get side effects from that.

If a doctor doesn't know the side effects of a medicine, then they could severely harm a patient. A doctor with more knowledge is able to administer medicine and possibly prevent any side effects by administering it in a certain way, or recommending a completely different medicine.

It is generally asserted among those who believe in herbal medications that they at the very least will not bring about side effects. It will help cure the disease but it will not bring about side effects. That is generally what is said, and I am not really skilled in that myself. However, it also seems to be the case that herbal medication takes much longer to cure the disease too; whereas the normal Western medication seems to have a more direct effect.

Before we conclude for this evening we will do another few minutes of meditation this time focusing on the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. We keep our mind focused on the sound of the mantra that we hear. Chant and try to keep our mind focused on the mantra; this will be the meditation.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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