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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual it would be good to spend some time for meditation. So, we sit in a relaxed upright posture, and most importantly generate a good attitude or motivation in our mind. The literal meaning of the Tibetan word *gom*, normally translated as meditation, is to familiarise the mind with a virtuous object. So, familiarising our mind with virtue is what meditation really means.

If we were to be able to familiarise our mind single-pointedly on a virtuous object constantly, then we would be in a constant state of meditation. But we seem to be mostly influenced by the non-virtuous or distracted states of mind. We are influenced by our mind and the mind in turn is influenced by the delusions. This means that as we are under the influence of the delusions our activities also become influenced by the negative states of mind, thus our activities are mostly harmful.

It is ironic when we think about how we are under the influence of our mind. In fact we are the possessor of our own mind, just as we are the possessor of our body. So, it would seem that we should be in control of our body and mind, however usually the mind takes control of us instead; and because the mind is under the influence of the delusions, we are affected in a negative way. It is clear that we do possess our mind. When we refer to the mind, we say 'my mind' just as we refer to our body as 'my body'. This indicates that the person, or self, is the possessor, the one who owns the mind and the body. But this is contrary to how it appears to be.

When we look into the reality of the situation we begin to notice how we are influenced by all the thoughts that occur within our mind. Our streams of thoughts are influenced by our delusions, and we suffer as a consequence of that.

When the mind is influenced by the delusions, it makes us engage in negative behaviour. To reverse that situation we must make an attempt to control our mind so that we are in control, and not the mind. If we are in control of the mind, then we can influence the mind to be in a virtuous state and in a positive frame of mind.

We do this by resolutely focussing our mind, not allowing the mind to be influenced by distractions. When we choose to focus our mind on a virtuous object, we are naturally withdrawing our mind from all distractions. As a natural result of the mind being removed from the distractions, we become calmer and more subdued. That is how we take control of our own mind and use it in a positive way.

When the mind is influenced by delusions, we are allowing ourselves to be affected by whatever occurs in

the mind, such as anger and desire, and as a consequence we end up becoming miserable. When the mind is affected by anger and we allow ourselves to be influenced by that, we end up suffering from that state of mind. We can all notice that as soon as anger arises, we begin to feel uncomfortable, unsettled and disturbed.

Likewise when the mind is influenced by desire, because the mind becomes excited, it gets disturbed and agitated and as a consequence we suffer from that. Because of our familiarity with the delusions our mind is prone to be easily influenced by delusions.

We can reverse that situation if we start to take control of our own mind and not allow it to be influenced by delusions such as anger and desire. We can withdraw the mind from objects of anger and desire and familiarise it with virtuous objects by maintaining our focus on them. In the process, the mind becomes more settled, more calm and we begin to have control over our own mind. As we control our mind, we are not influenced by delusions such as anger and desire, and then we are able to maintain a certain level of calmness and peace within ourselves. Even if anger and desire were to still arise in the mind, it will be easier to withdraw ourselves from it and that we will be a benefit.

If we practise on a continuous basis like this, then we will come to a point where the delusions are minimised, and they will not arise as rapidly within one's mind. As a result of practising the teachings, one becomes calmer and more subdued. By merely hearing the teachings again and again, and familiarising oneself with them, there will be the positive effect of becoming calm and subdued. By meditating on the teachings the delusions themselves will be minimised in one's mind, and through the practice of meditation the meaning of the teachings becomes clearer in one's mind.

When we spend some time in meditation, we need to develop a determination to benefit from the practice, so we need to keep our mind focused on the object that we choose to focus on, which for now is the breath. Initially we make the determination to keep our mind focused on the breath and we use our mindfulness and awareness to withdraw our mind from the objects of distraction. This basically means keeping our mind one hundred percent on the breath.

As we attempt to practise meditation, when we notice the mind getting distracted and we feel uncomfortable and disturbed, this should remind us to be more determined to train ourselves in keeping the mind concentrated and focused.

*(Pause for meditation)*

### 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 strains 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

###### 4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1.2.2. Explaining the sufferings of cyclic existence in particular

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Having explained the suffering of humans in general, the third type of suffering of cyclic existence of the demi-gods is explained. The particular type of suffering experienced by the demi-gods is being tortured by their unbearable envy of the worldly gods' wealth. Because of this they fight with the worldly gods and endure many sufferings, such as having their bodies cut and split apart. Within cyclic existence there are the higher realms of the human, the demi-god and worldly god realms. The worldly gods are much wealthier than the demi-gods, so the demi-gods develop jealousy or envy. This becomes a source of torment for their mind and they are not able to bear the fact that the worldly gods have much more wealth. They start to combat and fight the worldly gods, and their bodies get harmed in battle.

Even though we cannot relate to the worldly gods and demi-gods as it is beyond our perception and scope right now, we can relate the experience of the demi-gods to the suffering that we experience as human beings out of jealousy. We know that out of jealousy when others have more wealth, we might actually engage in trying to harm others and taking wealth from them. In that way we, as human beings, may suffer. The experience of the demi-gods is indicating to us that jealousy or envy is really a source of our torment.

We experience various types of suffering when we feel envy or jealousy about others' wellbeing. Jealousy can arise in relation to others having wealth, better physical appearance such as looking more beautiful or handsome, or because they have more friends or better friends, feeling jealous because they are more intelligent, and basically whenever one sees others better off than oneself in any circumstances. Jealousy arises when one is not able to bear that, when one is unable to bear others' success and wellbeing. This brings a pang to one's mind, and it hurts. One may even try to destroy others' wellbeing. Not being able to bear others doing well immediately brings sorrow to one's mind, and it disturbs one's peace of mind, and we are the ones that lose. In order to protect one's mind from jealousy, the best practice as indicated in the teaching is to generate joy and rejoice in others' wellbeing. When others are doing well, one can feel happy for them. If one can appreciate that others are doing well, then that will bring joy to one's mind. For the same situation, we can definitely see that we can have different attitudes which lead to different feelings and experiences.

If we cannot bear it when others are doing well, then we will suffer. If, however, we can feel joy and be happy for them because they are doing well, then we develop joy in our minds, rather than feeling unhappy. This clearly shows that how we feel is entirely dependent on our attitude. The teachings mention that the best remedy for overcoming jealousy is to rejoice in others' wellbeing.

Normally if we hear the phrase that the remedy for jealousy is rejoicing it may not ring true for us if we do not reflect upon it. We might not be able to relate to that, but if we actually look into it and if we try to relate it to our own experience, we will see that it does ring true. For example, as soon as we feel jealousy we should try to replace that and try to feel happy for them. We will begin

to notice this technique definitely works to bring joy to our mind.

For someone who initially felt jealous towards someone else, and if later they begin to try to reverse that and try to rejoice and feel happy about others' wellbeing, then they will begin to experience more joy. We can experience that in this very lifetime. We can benefit from that practice in this very lifetime right now. As we experience the immediate positive effects of practising in this way, we can relate to the truth of how practising Dharma is the means to remove suffering.

As the text further indicates, the state of a demi-god is that 'they are intelligent but they have mental obscurations of past karma which makes it impossible for them to see the truth within their lifetime.' This indicates that demi-gods do have an intelligent mind, but because of their obscurations and the fruit of their past karma, they are not a suitable vessel to gain the realisations of the truth, which is the realisation of emptiness. In the demi-god realm one cannot attain the path of seeing in that lifetime. For human beings it is possible, we have the right conditions to realise emptiness directly in one lifetime.

The fourth suffering in cyclic existence is the suffering of the worldly gods, which is divided into two: the suffering of the gods of the desire realm, and the suffering of the two highest realms, the form and formless realms.

Humans are within the desire realms and there are certain gods that belong to the desire realm, and then other worldly gods that are in a higher state that is called the form and formless realms. There are six types of desire god realms. The suffering of the gods in the desire realm is subdivided into three types of suffering: the suffering of dying and falling, the suffering of anxiety, and the suffering of being cut and killed and banished.

The *first type of suffering* that is experienced by the desire god realms is *dying and falling*. This suffering of dying and falling relates to the immense suffering that the gods experience particularly at the time of death. The reason why that suffering is much more intense for the gods of desire realm, is because their life is filled with luxury and enjoyment, so they experience much more intense suffering in fear of losing all that. Even though they experience the great pleasure of the five senses, they will lose all their pleasures at the time of death.

When the initial signs of death occur to them, their bodies turn an unattractive colour. Their bodies used to be radiant and luminous, however when death approaches their body colour is not attractive. They also start to feel very uncomfortable where they are sitting. The gods have flower garlands which normally have a very sweet fragrance and are very beautiful; however when death is approaching their garlands begin to wilt. Their clothes also have a natural sweet smelling fragrance during their lifetime, but when death approaches the sweet fragrance of their clothing begins to fade away and starts to smell foul. They start to perspire and sweat comes from their body, and that again brings foul smells as well. As a result of all this, their companions start to slowly distance themselves from them and this brings a lot of suffering and feelings of loneliness.

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Another type of suffering dying gods experience is that when the clear signs of death are approaching, they begin to see where they will take rebirth in the next lifetime, which will be a lower realm. Seeing this brings an immense suffering in their mind. The reason why they see themselves falling into the lower realms after their death is because all their virtuous good karma has been used up in the god realm. There is no good karma left to bring them into a fortunate rebirth in their next lifetime. Their negative karma ripening will bring them to a lower rebirth.

The *second type of suffering* is the suffering of *anxiety* that they experience. As the text explains, 'the desire gods with large stores of merit gain the most desirable objects upon seeing the gods of lesser merit become anxious and experience great anguish and pain on this account'. When their large store of good merit is used up then they start to experience themselves being weaker than and not as grand as other gods. This brings them anxiety and fear.

When we relate this particular explanation to our own personal practice, we can see that the desire gods' used up merit causes them to go to a lower rebirth. Similarly with us living our existence now as human beings, if we enjoy the pleasures and do not create more merit then likewise we would be using up our positive merit while enjoying the comforts and pleasures in our life. Thus we would not have much merit left to take a good rebirth in our next lifetime. In order to protect ourselves from going to unfortunate rebirths, it is essential for us to create and accumulate more merit so that we have some stock of merit to take good rebirth in our next lifetime.

The *third type of suffering*, is the one of being *cut and killed and banished* when deities and the desire gods fight with the demi-gods and undergo the pain of having their limbs and so forth cut off and having their bodies split apart and being killed. They experience a great amount of suffering.

Another suffering in relation to that is banishment. When there is a battle between the demi-gods and the gods, the more powerful gods expel the weaker gods from their homes. This also occurs in the god realms and it is also something that we experience in human existence. There are many instances where mightier humans, who will abuse their greater strength to overpower others and then banish them from their own place. I have experienced this; many like myself have been banished from our home place and been expelled to different countries. This is now happening in Burma as we see through the news how the more powerful regime there is overpowering the weaker people, torturing, killing and banishing them.

The practical benefit of reflecting on these sufferings is that on a personal level we can relate the suffering to ourselves. This can instil a strong sense of disgust and disenchantment for the suffering and pleasure of cyclic existence and thus induce a strong sense of renunciation within oneself. By reflecting on the suffering over and over again and thinking about the suffering of how others have to undergo suffering, one can generate strong compassion towards others by reflecting on their suffering, and generating a positive attitude within oneself in relation to others.

For example, when one engages in a negative state of mind or jealousy as explained earlier, one experiences the ill effect for as long as our mind is influenced by jealousy. As we reflect upon that, we can generate a state of mind wanting to overcome jealousy because it torments one's own mind. It has an ill effect upon one, so one generates a strong wish or keen interest to overcome jealousy. When one sees others being affected by jealousy, one would then be able to understand through one's own experience, and by thinking about the disadvantages of jealousy, how they are experiencing torment and suffering within their own mind. So then we would wish others to be able to overcome the state of mind of jealousy. Similarly, we can reflect in that way with suffering in general.

When we reflect upon a few instances like that, and verify it through our own experience, then we can accept the broader teachings. The small practices that we do can induce a state of mind of accepting other parts of the Buddha's teachings.

As one reflects upon how to train one's mind in relation to one particular delusion, then one begins to also learn how to also overcome many other delusions. Practising to overcome one delusion can help us then overcome many other delusions within ourselves.

Before we conclude the session for the evening, let us again take a few moments for meditation, focusing our mind this time on the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As the mantra is being recited we focus on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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