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## The Condensed Lam Rim

# ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་སྒྲིག་།

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As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation. Also, as usually explained, it is good to sit in a relaxed and appropriate posture. When the physical posture is relaxed it seems to help the mind to also become relaxed. Meditation is definitely a technique that helps the mind to focus internally, inwardly. The significance of focusing inwardly, as opposed to focusing outwardly on external phenomena, is that it can bring a great benefit for oneself. As we begin to focus inwardly we start to understand more clearly how our mind works, means that we will be able to detect the tools within oneself that will help our mind to be calmer, more peaceful and subdued.

The opposite of a mind that is focused inwardly is a mind that is focused outwardly. That is something that we are naturally already acquainted with. Our present state of mind seems to be naturally habituated in focusing on all external phenomena. When we refer to external phenomena we mean all other objects besides looking at our own mind and seeing how it works. Focusing outwardly is something that we are already familiar with and our mind is constantly busy with many different external objects, the objects of the five senses. As the mind is completely absorbed or distracted by the five senses, we don't get in touch with the reality of ourselves because we fail to notice the working of our mind. The mind being completely preoccupied by external distractions is the factor that leads to a disturbed, confused mind that is filled with worries and anxiety and so forth. That's what leads to all the problems in our life.

When we begin to recognise the workings of our mind we will be able to clearly distinguish between the positive and negative states of mind within oneself. Once we begin to identify and recognise this, we will begin to notice that when a negative state of mind arises it leads to a lot of disturbance, unsettling states of mind, anxiety and so forth. Whereas when positive states of mind arise, it leads to a happier mind.

This investigation, or checking inwardly, and detecting positive and negative states of mind is something that we should try to do periodically in our daily life. It is something that we need to start the habit of doing. In the morning, as we wake up, it is very significant if we can check the state of our mind prior to engaging in any activity. Is one in a positive or a negative frame of mind? If it is a negative frame of mind, then see how that state of mind will consequently lead to many other disturbances. The mind may be agitated, and that agitation may lead on to more and more negative attitudes. One can see that an initial negative state of mind can lead, as a consequence,

to having more negative states of mind. If one is in a positive state of mind one can see how that leads to a positive outlook within oneself and the world around us. So, acquiring the habit of checking one's mind periodically is something that we need to slowly get more and more familiar with.

Whatever activity we engage in, physical or mentally, if we were to actually ask ourselves why we are doing this and what are we trying to achieve, the answer would be quite obvious. We are really seeking to achieve joy and happiness in our life. Isn't that that true for you?

This is, in fact, true for all beings, for everyone. Each and every individual is seeking happiness. Whether they are able to identify it or not, it is a happy state of mind which they seek. If that is what we wish to achieve, then it seems reasonable to seek the right means to obtain happiness. Likewise when one has obtained some level of happiness, then one must protect it. As I regularly stress, it is very important that we protect whatever happiness we have already obtained. This is done through the practice of meditation. The practice of meditation can be explained as a means to not only gain happiness, but also to protect whatever happiness we already have.

When we look into what opposes the happiness within oneself, we can clearly see that it is a distracted mind, a mind that is constantly focused outward and influenced by the five senses. The mind is distracted when it is completely preoccupied with the five sense objects, i.e. beautiful sights, tastes, sounds, smells and tactile objects. When the mind is constantly bombarded with sensual pleasures and influenced by that, it is constantly focusing outward and not paying any attention inwardly. This is the factor that leads to disturbances in the mind. That is what obstructs or hinders the happiness within oneself. If we allow the mind to be constantly distracted in this way we are not protecting the happiness within oneself. Protection of happiness means, by focusing inwardly, one identifies the internal causes for happiness and then enhances them.

If focusing outwardly and being completely influenced by the objects of sensual pleasure, was in fact a cause for happiness, then one would have to conclude that the more one is familiar with external circumstances and the more one acquires external objects of sensual pleasure the happier one would have to become. But we all have a certain amount of experience ourselves and we can look at others and see that the reality is that having the best external conditions with the most sensual pleasure objects does not lead to a person being very happy. It can, in fact, actually hinder their happiness. In this way we can clearly identify that having external resources, wealth, is not a cause for happiness. It does not cause the mind to become settled and peaceful. This again points to the fact that the main causes for happiness lie within oneself. Thus in order to identify and tap into the resources of happiness within ourselves, we need to focus inwardly and investigate our mind.

As we focus inwardly and identify the causes of happiness within oneself and promote them, and refrain from the adverse circumstances within one, we will help to protect the happiness within oneself. I stress again and

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again that it is essential that we protect our happiness. This is particularly important for the younger generation. Particularly when someone is growing up, there is a tremendous source of happiness within them. But that can slowly get lost if they get out of touch with that reality within themselves. Once one loses touch with the reality of having the resources within oneself, it is very difficult to gain it back again. That is why I stress the importance of protecting our happiness because it is actually true for everyone. Once one loses the sources of happiness within oneself, or loses touch with the source of happiness, it is very difficult to restore it again. It is very important that we pay attention to this.

To further stress the importance of protecting the resources of happiness within oneself we can reflect on a comparison. Isn't it true that we really protect external factors that we consider as being resources of happiness, though it is questionable whether they really contribute to happiness or not? For example we do the most we can to protect whatever money we have. We might put it into the safest bank and get the best interest for it so that it increases. We pay a lot of attention to protecting our money in that way, don't we? While we put so much effort and concern into finding many ways and techniques to protect our money, we might be neglecting the real resources of our happiness that are within ourselves. That is something that we may not really pay attention to.

My opinion is that if one had to choose between losing external resources such as money and the internal resources of happiness within oneself, it would be far wiser to give up the external resources rather than the internal resources that cause inner happiness. External resources are something that I would readily give up. I don't know what your decision would be. However, if one had to choose between the two, I would have to conclude that the internal resources would be a much wiser choice. The internal source of happiness is something that one can keep, and take with oneself wherever one goes, and which is at our disposal at any time. So it is far more valuable than a material object such as money. When one has the internal resources of happiness intact within oneself then even if one had money and then lost by any means, it will not affect one's wellbeing and happiness because one still has the internal resources of happiness. In this way it becomes clear it is far more important to pay attention to the internal resources of happiness that are developed within oneself.

External resources such as money are meant to contribute to one's happiness but this is doubtful. They are actually a very minimal resource of happiness. Happiness from money is something very fleeting and temporary. This is something that one must be able to detect and notice. When one begins to identify and see the internal resources of happiness as really valuable for one's life, something that one should maintain wherever one is and a resource one can tap into at any time, then one would naturally feel very joyful and happy about these internal resources and would pay attention to protecting them. One would then also put effort into strengthening the resource within oneself, which comes back to the significance of practising meditation. Through a regular

practice of meditation, we will be able to protect and maintain that internal resource of happiness.

Of course, at this point, one might think, 'Well, it all sounds very good, but how can one possibly do that? It seems very complicated. How can one possibly protect the internal resource of happiness? It doesn't seem to be an easy matter.'

When we talk about the techniques for protecting the internal resources of our happiness, which is through internal focus and analysis, which connotes the practice of meditation, one might think it is quite complicated and it takes a lot of effort and time and is something that is not really manageable. Another doubt that may arise in one's mind is, 'If I were to focus inwardly and not to relate to external factors I might be very deprived. I might feel that I am losing out by not being able to relate to the external world'. That is a total misinterpretation of focusing inward.

What one must understand from the explanations of the advantages of the practice of meditation is that someone who is skilled in the practice of meditation, which means that they are skilled in subduing the mind and maintaining a peaceful and positive attitude, is not disturbed when they relate to the outside world. There is a different outlook or attitude between someone who is not skilled in the practice of meditation relating to the external world and someone who is skilled in the practice of meditation relating to the external world. For the first, who is not skilled in the practice of meditation and not able to protect or maintain the happiness of the mind, going out and interacting with the outside world can become a cause for a slight circumstance to make the mind disturbed and agitated. There are many things that one might encounter that could become a condition for the mind to become disturbed. There are certain individuals who can't bear going out into the world and interacting with many people because they feel that it disturbs their mind too much. They can't handle that. Thus we hear comments about people who can't bear going out and being in crowds.

Someone who is skilled in the practice of meditation on the other hand will have a completely different interaction with the outside world and material things. Interaction with external phenomena or factors will actually contribute to, rather than obstruct, the happiness in their mind. It will actually become a cause to induce even more joy and happiness in their mind.

So there is a huge difference in the two. If we see that, then one can understand that practising meditation does not mean avoiding interaction with the outside world, but instead interacting with much more skill that can help transform external objects and situations to induce real happiness and joy in one's mind. These are important factors that one should bear in mind so one does not misinterpret what it means to focus inwardly.

This is something that many of you have found true for yourselves and have confided in me; that there is a difference, for example if one has spent some time doing some meditation prior to going to work. There's a significant difference if one has spent some time in meditation before one goes out and interacts with others

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in the outside world in one's daily job. One notices that one has a better attitude and feels much calmer.

To summarise the main points, I am stressing the importance of a positive attitude in one's mind, how to generate such a positive attitude and how to maintain, protect and increase that positive outlook within oneself. This is something that can be done, as mentioned previously, through the techniques of meditation or, in simpler terms, through self-analysis. In the practice of self-analysis one is detecting and differentiating between positive attitudes, which are beneficial and helpful for oneself and help to maintain a positive outlook, and negative states of mind.

It is very important that we identify and detect the negative states of mind when they arise and that one immediately notices negative state of mind such as agitation or anger. As soon they arise one should recognise them and be able to tell oneself, 'I know you are a negative state of mind. You are a state of mind that disturbs me. I don't trust you.' Even though it may seem quite natural that it arises in the mind, if one doesn't trust that state of mind and recognises it as being a faulty state of mind then one is giving it less power. The power of that negative state of mind starts to diminish. When the power of the negative state of mind diminishes it doesn't overpower you and doesn't control your mind. As we slowly become more familiar with this practice it will eventually become easier and easier. First of all recognise the opposing or negative states of mind and then slowly defusing them within oneself. Even just recognising it, identifying it, is a very big step. That begins to defuse the power of the negative state of mind. That would be really practical and useful in one's life and that is what I am trying to share with you.

As one is able to recognise and identify a negative state of mind one also will begin to identify and recognise how that negative state of mind works, its mechanism. For example, a negative state of mind such as aversion or anger is actually related to an object that one is upset with. The more one preoccupies oneself with and focuses on the object that causes that state of mind to arise the more it strengthens that negative state of mind. The technique here involves temporarily and intentionally not paying attention to the object by not focusing on it and diverting one's focus. One does not put more fuel into that negative state of mind to allow it to become stronger. One actually diverts one's focus and temporarily forgets about that object. The technique involves diverting the mind and as one changes one's focus one will begin to notice that the particular state of mind one has in relation to the particular object starts to reduce and fade away. That is an important point to also keep in mind.

This is where the significance of the practice of meditation comes in. In the practice of meditation we initially train ourselves to completely, intentionally, withdraw our mind from all objects of distraction and focus on a particular object that does not cause disturbance in the mind. That familiarity of focusing on an object, intentionally not focusing on other objects even though our mind has a tendency to do so, disciplining our mind and withdrawing from all other objects and

maintaining focus on a particular object which is neutral or which causes positive states of mind when one familiarises with it, that meditation practice is the training of our mind of diverting our focus from an object which disturbs us. So one can then see the significance of the practice of meditation.

Now we can spend some time in formal practice of meditation, which in our case, is to focus on the breath. We choose the breath, which is a neutral object, as the focal point. Then we intentionally discipline our mind to focus only on the breath by withdrawing our attention or focus on any other objects, thoughts or ideas, whatever they may be. We completely withdraw our attention from that and purposely keep our focus and attention on our breath, the natural rhythm of our breathing, the inflow and outflow of our breath, and for the next few minutes we will not to be concerned with anything else but just maintaining a focused and clear mind on the breath. That is what we will do for the next few minutes. (*Pause for meditation.*)

That will be sufficient time of meditation for now. If anyone has a question, you are welcome to ask it now.

*Question: What is the significance of the Mandala offering?*

The mandala offering is symbolically offering the universe. According to the Buddhist, cosmological explanation of how the universe is formed there is a huge mountain in the centre, called Mount Meru, which is surrounded by the four continents, with Earth being one of the continents. The specific prayer that we do here before the teachings is called the 'Seven heap offering of the universe'. There are also other versions of the mandala offering prayer, which consists the 9 heaps, 23 heaps, 25 heaps or 37 heaps. The verse that we recite here before the teaching is the one that consists of the seven heaps.

The seven heaps are Mount Meru, which is in the centre, the four continents at four directional corners and the sun and moon above. Of the four continents the Earth is something we can relate to, as it's our planet Earth. The other continents are something we imagine, as we cannot directly relate to them. We also offer the sun and moon, which of course is something that we relate to. When you make the offering you want to envision the whole universe adorned with many beautiful objects, such as flowers and perfumes and all sorts of different objects that are contained within the universe. In fact, one envisions offering the whole universe, which is a practice of making offerings. The offering of the universe is then presented to the teacher to make the request, 'Please grant the teachings for the benefit of all living beings'.

*Question: In the verse it mentions offering one friends and enemies, how is that done?*

When one makes an offering, there are certain things that one envisions and certain things that one can imagine offering, such as one's virtues. These are the virtues that one has accumulated from one's own efforts that we call 'merits'. When one makes the gesture of the offering, we also sometimes symbolically hold a brass base, which is shiny and represents a mirror to reflect everything

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around us. One imagines the images of one's friends or enemies and so forth, and the whole universe upon that base and then offer that as an image.

As part of the offering prayer it also mentions offering that which belongs to ourselves, as well as those things that belong to others. Technically speaking, one could not offer things that belong to others, so one does that with the reflection on the base. If one were to actually try to offer something that belongs to someone else and they find out about that they might dispute this and argue about how we could offer something that belongs to them. *[laughter]* If one makes the offering in the form of a reflection there can be no dispute. No one could argue with you offering his or her reflection.

One gets the benefit, the merit, of making the offering from making the offering symbolically in one's mind with the imagination. As to the base signifying a mirror, that is how I practise when I make mandala offerings. I'm not entirely sure if that's technically correct as it is explained in the teachings. However that is how I do it, whether it really complies with the actual explanation or not.

*Question: How can we offer our enemies though?*

According to the verse, it's not offering the enemy as such, but rather the belongings: the physical body and the belongings and so forth. As mentioned previously, one offers the resources of enemies and foes and also oneself and one's friends. One offers all the good resources such as the body, wealth and so forth. The most significant way to do that is by offering the reflection of them, which does not leave room to inconsiderately offer something that does not belong to you.

Before we conclude for the evening, we'll spend a few minutes in contemplation, this time focusing on the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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