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## The Condensed Lam Rim

# ལྷན་སྐྱེས་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་སྒོ།

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It has been a few weeks since we have seen each other. I'm very happy to meet everyone again and wish you all 'Tashi Delek'.

We may safely say that for you to see me there might be some joy, and from my side to see you there's also joy. Feeling joy from both sides is a sign that there is a good connection between us. Having a good connection with others is really useful.

There can also be situations where initially there is joy when meeting someone, but after having been together for some time, say a few months, then that joy starts to diminish. Furthermore, when these people are separated and meet again, there is angst rather than joy. This is an indication that the connection between these people is not very good.

The better the connection we have with others, the more it contributes to feeling joy in our mind. So, it is clear that the joy and happiness that we feel within ourselves is very much dependent upon the good connections we have with others. This is why I regularly stress the importance of having a good relationship with others.

It is good for us to be aware of our own being. When we think of ourselves there are three aspects that we relate to: the body, which is our physical aspect; the mind where we talk about 'my mind'; and what we call the self or 'I'.

When we are aware of ourselves, we begin to notice a strong sense of identity, the strong clinging to 'I' that we have, that sense of 'me' and the strong importance we put on an experience that relates to us. Our happiness or sadness is very much dependent on how strong our sense of 'I' or clinging to the 'I' or 'me' is.

How does that happen? We can investigate what follows that strong sense of 'I' and clinging to that 'I'. What follows from a strong sense of 'I' is that the welfare of that 'I' becomes strong - 'I want this' and 'I don't want that'. When there is a strong sense of longing or wanting something and not wanting other things, then the 'I' or the 'self' is not settled. Suddenly the 'I' becomes very busy.

The meditation to overcome that sort of self-clinging, that the strong sense of 'I', is a profound meditation. However, even the simple technique of letting go of the concerns of the 'I' or self for just a few moments is very effective. Just forgetting what 'I' wants or does not want, and just letting the mind settle down, letting the mind have a rest from all the demands of the 'I'; that, in itself, brings about a real sense of relief and calms the mind. So even a simple technique of just forgetting about what the

'I' wants or needs, and just remaining focussed on one particular object, can definitely bring ease to the mind.

However letting go of the concerns of the 'I', or even just forgetting about the self for a short period, is not itself an antidote for overcoming the entire concerns of the self. However, these techniques do give some temporary relief. It's similar to pouring cold water into a boiling pot, which immediately calms down the intense boiling. Just like that, when we engage in the technique of simply just letting go, of not being concerned with the self for a moment, we can definitely achieve some relief in the mind.

Meditation can help ease the turmoil we feel within ourselves, which comes from our strong sense of self-identity and strong wish to fulfil our needs, while pursuing our needs and avoiding things we don't like, keeps us constantly busy. Naturally in the situation where all our needs are not met, the result is turmoil and our mind becomes unsettled, anxious and frustrated. This is what we call a troubled mind. Meditation gives us relief from that turmoil, an opportunity to overcome that situation.

Meditation is a technique or tool to overcome the many discursive thoughts that we have in our mind. We can use meditation to withdraw from these discursive thoughts in order to settle down the mind. Even a simple meditation technique can bring immediate relief to a troubled mind.

Why is our mind so busy with so many different conceptual thoughts? Why does it get disturbed? If we have the motivation to seek true answers, then we can begin to notice what circumstances make our mind, and consequently ourselves, disturbed. When we begin to notice the cause of that disturbance, then we can apply the antidote to overcome that situation.

The reason why I emphasise questioning the causes of our mental disturbance, and then trying to identify those causes, is because without identifying the causes we would not be able to deal with the problem of being constantly in the state of anxiety, frustration and so forth. If we practise meditation, for example, by focusing on a particular object, then it may be possible to focus on a particular object without distractions for a short period of time. During the time we focus on the object, we are relieved from our anxieties and frustrations. But then as soon as we come out of that meditation and go back to our normal life, we may experience all of the shortcomings again.

Just engaging in a short meditation without recognising the actual cause may give some immediate relief, but it is not the actual cause for a more settled mind within our daily life. If we recognise and identify the main cause for our turmoil, then we can maintain some diligence or awareness to not follow destructive patterns in our life. Recognising and identifying the causes for our troubles will allow us to be careful not to fully engage in those causes. This helps maintain a more stable life in the long run.

Identifying the actual cause that serves as a basis for our turmoil requires a certain level of intelligence that we

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need to develop within ourselves. The Buddhist term for this intelligence is analytical wisdom. Analytical wisdom is a particular type of intelligence where we look into and investigate situations to see where the causes lie. We already have the ability to investigate, but we need to increase it. This becomes the main tool for us to maintain awareness.

The point I have been making about developing awareness with intelligence or analytical wisdom is really important. For example, if we know that a certain place is dangerous, then we would avoid going there. A more specific example is going to a place where we know there is an immediate danger to our life. We would make every attempt to avoid going there. If we are oblivious or ignorant of the fact that there is danger to our life, then there is not much we could do to avoid going there, because of not knowing the consequence.

Similarly, by using our intelligence to investigate and identify the particular causes of our turmoil and frustrations, then it is beneficial for us to avoid following those particular causes that lead us to negative states of mind.

I'm not trying to imply in any way that this is easy. For us, of course, it is not an easy task because of our familiarity with negative attitudes and negative states of mind. It is not easy for us to completely stop these attitudes from arising or avoid them immediately. Nevertheless, we can make every attempt to maintain a zealous state of mind that is always diligent and aware that negative attitudes have to be avoided. We have to prevent those negative states of mind from arising. With time and continuous effort, this is definitely possible.

Meditation can help us achieve this mental awareness. A formal meditation first of all requires sitting in an appropriate meditation posture, which is to sit straight. I mention regularly the significance of keeping the body straight, as keeping the spine straight will straighten out the subtle channels within our body, consequently allowing the wind energy to flow well within our body and thus causing the mind to be fresh.

Along with the advice in the teachings regarding the physical posture, there is the advice that is based on the seven-point posture of Buddha Vairochana. However the text also mentions that we must sit in a comfortable posture. This can mean whatever sitting posture we are most used to. It is good to adopt a meditation posture that is comfortable.

Having adopted an appropriate physical posture for meditation, it is equally important to develop the appropriate mental state, which is generating good motivation. The best motivation we can develop is based on generating an attitude of love and compassion within our mind or heart - to be able to benefit others by bringing peace and happiness to all other living creatures. In order for us to be able to do that, we need to first engage in the practice of meditation, which will generate calmness and peace within ourselves.

As we reflect upon our own current mental state, we notice that when we are not meditating our mind is constantly busy and completely distracted with sensual

objects. Consequently it is never settled. Our mind is constantly busy jumping from one object to another. That is how our mind normally is. This is similar to a gush of water flowing down into a river - it can go in many different directions. Our mind is like that, going out in every direction. When water disperses in many directions, all the streams of water do not have much strength. But if the water is combined into one stream, then that one stream of water has all the power and energy.

As long as our mind is dispersed in every direction, and attached to so many different sensual objects, it loses its clarity and real abilities. If we focus our mind on one particular object, and bring our full attention and focus on that, then our mind can regain its clarity and strength. For meditation to be most effective, we make the mental determination and commitment to withdraw our mind from any distractions and focus entirely upon our breath. We just focus on the natural inflow and outflow of our breathing. (*Pause for meditation*).

We can achieve a peaceful mind by following similar techniques of meditation. In fact, through familiarity and regular meditation practise, we can gain a certain consistent level of concentration. Achieving that concentration seems to induce a sense of calmness and well being, a sense of blissful and joyous feeling within our mind.

Eventually, when we are able to focus on an object with single-pointed concentration, we achieve a state that is known as calm abiding or mental quiescence. That is a state where we have full concentration without any distraction for as long as we wish. When we reach the state of calm abiding, apparently because the mind itself is completely immersed in concentration, the regular needs and wants in relation to the self also seem to reduce. The teachings say that reaching a state of calm-abiding means that it is unlikely that strong attachment or anger will occur at that level.

Desires and anger arise in relation to the needs of our 'self'. We call these the pleasurable or worldly needs. As long as there is a desire for worldly needs then of course when those needs are not met, then aversion or anger will arise as well. So when the mind is completely satisfied with that state of calm abiding, then our needs become less. Whatever we encounter, such as food and shelter, seems to satisfy us so we become naturally content. When we are content in our heart then the negative states of mind of anger and desire will definitely diminish. Thus it seems like a worthwhile state to achieve.

Contentment, tranquillity and calmness are experienced as a consequence of developing acute concentration. When we reach the level of what we call calm abiding, as the mind becomes familiar with focusing inwardly on a mental object, then due to that familiarity we become satisfied with focusing on that internal object. This produces some inner joy and bliss within us, and we naturally become unconcerned with external objects. When we become less concerned and obsessed with external objects, then the emotions of the negative states of mind of attachment and anger are definitely reduced and eventually overcome.

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These negative states are reduced because normally we are focussed on an outer object and cling to it as a source of enjoyment. For example, when we see beautiful object, we cling to it as a source of pleasure or enjoyment. Likewise when we meet an object that is disagreeable or unpleasant, then that becomes an object that generates aversion within us. Because we are so familiar with focusing on external objects for our pleasure and joy, we constantly obsess with external objects. And for as long as we are obsessed with external objects and believe them to bring us pleasure, then any unattractive objects will bring us sorrow. Consequently, we want to avoid unattractive objects and we develop aversion towards them. For as long as this continues to happen, our mind will definitely be in turmoil and we will never be satisfied, because external objects do not provide real joy or pleasure.

When we focus inwardly on an internal object, completely focussed on it with unwavering single-pointed concentration, then naturally the obsession with external objects will subside. This allows us to experience a sense of contentment and joy within our heart. This is a clear sign that as result of meditation our delusions will subside; our mind naturally becomes subdued, and we become less obsessed with external distractions. When that happens, it is also a clear sign that our meditation has become effective. So it is important to remember that even our meagre efforts now can become meaningful. We can be inspired to become engaged in a meditation practice because we can see that the results will eventually be achieved with persistence practise.

It is good for us to reflect in many different ways, from many different angles, on the benefits of meditation. We can analyse how, through familiarity with single-pointed concentration we can eventually reach a state where the mind becomes naturally tranquil and calm and peaceful, where it is not prone or vulnerable to external conditions. There is a natural inner bliss, happiness and joy, which brings satisfaction and contentment. When we reflect on this and then relate it to ourselves, we can see that if it we are so prone and so easily provoked by external conditions, then the slightest mishap or the slightest thing can upset us. This is a situation that brings us anxiety and turmoil, and where we lack a sense of joy.

Reflecting on the benefits of meditation, we can relate it to ourselves and we can see how wonderful it would be if we could do this meditation technique, because it will bring us a more settled and calm mind, and give us a sense of joy within. If we can reach a level where we are not that vulnerable to external conditions, then even if we are in situations where our friend or partner is upset, it will not cause us to lose our temper. If we can remain calm and joyful, even when our friends or relatives are upset, then that is a wonderful achievement. If we can remain undisturbed and undaunted by external conditions or circumstances, then that is a great achievement. If we can remain calm without losing our temper in a difficult situation, then that would also inspire others and give them a sense of joy too.

Meditation can bring us benefits in our life now, not to mention the benefits that it will bring us in our future lives. As meditating begins to have an effect on us, our

mind becomes less troubled and less prone to being extremely excited when we see beautiful things, or upset and angry when things don't work out well. If the mind can remain in that state, and we do not become upset, and we are a little kinder to others, then this is the great benefit of meditation that we can achieve. Thinking about the benefits of meditation should inspire us to continue to practise.

Before we conclude for the evening, we can again spend a few moments in contemplation. As we sit in an appropriate posture and bring our mind inward, we focus on Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. We can focus on the sound of the mantra as it is being recited.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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