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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual it would be good to do some meditation. For that purpose, we will assume a comfortable, relaxed posture. Then try to cultivate a fresh, clear mind and from within that clear state of mind, generate a positive motivation.

It's also useful to have a fresh, clear mind in everyday life, outside our meditation sessions. If we have a fresh, clear mind combined with a kind attitude, this will definitely bring great energy and strength to whatever we do. Any meeting or interaction we have with others, or any activity we engage in will become much more meaningful and likely to produce a good result.

If we summarise the reason for doing the practice of meditation, it is that meditation serves as a means of training one's mind. If we then ask what sort of training we need to embark on in relation to our mind, we would agree that we all wish to have a peaceful and joyous state of mind. So we are attempting to achieve a peaceful and joyous state of mind. That can definitely be achieved through applying the proper techniques. When someone has a happy and joyous mind, even their appearance would look that way.

The main point here is that we need to try and maintain a joyous and happy mind, as opposed to a mind that is easily influenced by external situations. From our own experience, we may find that even during the course of one day, we will sometimes have a joyous, happy, elated state of mind, but at other times feel a little bit down and low. So we don't seem to have a very stable state of mind.

So, although our external situation may be the same, internally we may go through different states of being either elated or depressed at different times. We need to train our mind not to fluctuate so drastically and try to maintain an internal positive situation at all times.

In summary, we need to investigate why internally we have the experience of feeling up one moment and down the next, even though our external conditions are the same. When we look at our life, we definitely notice that, regardless of the external situation, even within one day we can go through many changes in attitude. For example, in the morning we may feel quite OK, then towards the afternoon we may feel a bit down and depressed. While the external situation has not changed drastically, we have gone through internal changes – that is something we need to investigate.

If our morning starts off being quite joyful and happy, it would be worthwhile to find ways of prolonging that joy and happiness and extending it further into the day. So we can look into what is causing that change within our

mind, from the morning to the afternoon. Then we see that we have not been able to maintain a positive attitude in our mind: this is what contributes to feeling a bit down and depressed towards the afternoon.

Meditation is introduced here as a technique that allows us to maintain a sense of calmness throughout the day, helping to protect the mind from the influence of negative attitudes, which bring turmoil and frustration to the mind. When one becomes familiar with meditation through consistent practice, it will help promote a sense of calmness, clarity and joy in the mind for longer periods of time.

When one becomes familiar with the practice of meditation, it will protect the mind from being influenced by negative attitudes. Even though negative attitudes may still occur in the mind, our familiarity with the practice of meditation will help the mind not be completely dominated by those negative attitudes. We'll be able to recognise them and prevent the mind from being completely influenced by those attitudes. In the practice of meditation, we focus the mind single-pointedly on a meditation object by withdrawing it from all distractions: that is the technique of meditation. During the time when we focus our mind on the object, the mind is not influenced by distractions and negative states of mind.

This familiarity then helps the mind not to be influenced by negative attitudes in daily life. Although initially we may be unable to prevent negative attitudes from arising – of course, they will still arise – the difference however is that we would be able to recognise those states of mind as negative. This recognition itself will help us not to be completely influenced by negative states of mind. One will be able to detect them and say to oneself, "This is a negative state of mind that is occurring. If I allow myself to be completely dominated by this state mind, it will only bring more turmoil, more troubles in my mind, disturbing my mental peace. Thus I am not going to allow myself to be influenced by it." By reminding oneself of the dangers of that negative state of mind, one will not allow oneself to be dominated by it.

When we combat that negative state of mind by not allowing ourselves to be dominated by it, the negative state of mind itself will lose its intensity and strength. It will either be less intense, or it will not remain for long. This is the practical benefit we derive from meditation practice.

Having explained the benefits of meditation, it is worthwhile to engage in the practice, which we can do now for a few minutes. To remind ourselves of the technique: first, we make the commitment to ourselves, "For the next few minutes, I will not allow my mind to follow distractions." One makes a conscious decision to not allow the mind to be influenced by thoughts, or external and internal distractions, whatever form they take. Rather, one makes the commitment to keep one's focus and attention entirely on the object, which here is the breath. We adopt the breath as an object to focus on in our meditation. That means we make the commitment to putting our entire attention and focus on the breath.

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It is very important that we make that conscious decision and commitment and try to maintain it for the next few minutes, keeping one-hundred-per-cent focused on the breath itself. In this way, even over a short period of time, we will definitely experience the positive effect of a mind that is focused single-pointedly. After readjusting our posture and our mindset, we will now spend the next few minutes in meditation. [Pause for meditation] That will be sufficient for now.

So if everyone could spend some time regularly practising meditation like this, it would be really worthwhile.

The reason I emphasise the practice of meditation in daily life as being important and worthwhile is this: when most of us experience problems and difficulties, it is because we are not really paying adequate attention to the inner development of our mind, focusing inward. We seem to spend most of our time and energy focusing outward, on worldly concerns and distractions. The more preoccupied we are with external worldly distractions, the more this seems to cause a troubled and worried mind. If we look into our lives, we might notice that we don't pay that much attention to the inner state of our mind, to withdrawing our mind from external distractions. Rather, we seem preoccupied with the external circumstances of our life.

Because meditation involves withdrawing the mind from distractions and focusing on a particular object, by simply applying the technique we have to focus inwardly. As a result, we experience some relief, some joy. So far, I have heard no one claim that meditation brings more trouble and worries to their mind. Of course, if they are not applying the appropriate technique, it may seem that meditation is causing more anxiety or problems in the mind. But that isn't because of the meditation itself. I haven't heard anyone who has applied the proper technique of meditation say that it has caused more worries and trouble in the mind.

As it is true for any activity we engage in, even worldly ones, while we are focused and paying attention, the activity seems to go well; we seem to be able to achieve a good result. But as soon as we get distracted from whatever we are doing, that's when things seem to go wrong. That is exactly the case with the practice of meditation. While we are able to maintain our focus on the chosen object, we experience that sense of joy and relief in our mind. But as soon as the mind gets distracted, as soon as our focus strays from the object, that is when we may start feeling agitated and uncomfortable in our meditation practice.

To give an example of this point, I have heard artists claim that while they are focused on doing their art – painting for example – they feel a sense of joy in their mind. That focused attention while doing their art brings a joyous feeling in their mind and they enjoy doing it – time goes by very easily. Whereas if they are not that focused, that's when they don't seem to enjoy the drawing or painting. Likewise, with any activity we engage in, if we are focused on whatever we are doing for the duration of that activity, it does seem to bring a sense of joy in one's mind. Even though physically there might

be some hardship, because of the joy one feels in one's mind doing that activity, one is able to endure even physical hardships and difficulties. That is because of the joy one feels in doing that activity. Some even claim that, "I may not be on a holiday physically, but I am still happy and joyous about what I am doing."

Thus one need not consider only the spiritual benefits of the practice of meditation, to see it only in the sense of being a Dharma practice. One can also enjoy the positive effects of meditation practice in one's worldly life. Through familiarising the mind with being focused and paying complete attention in one's meditation, we can apply that same positive habit of our mind when we engage in other activities. For any activity we engage in, the contributing factor that makes that activity fruitful is how much attention we are able to bring to it. We will notice that the moment our focus and attention lapses, whatever the activity may be it will not really go well. That is how we can relate that the practice of meditation as not just being a spiritual activity or Dharma practice, but something we also need in our everyday life.

To give an example of the benefits of meditation in an ordinary context, we could be focusing on a drawing or watching cartoons on TV. The effects are the same: one experiences the mind as feeling a little calmer because one is focused. That is why I advise individuals to just look at a painting for a while, for example, rather than being preoccupied with worries and troubles and continually thinking about them, which causes more worries and problems in the mind and makes one feel more depressed. Just observe how the painting has been done. For example, look at a drawing and try to copy it, trace over it. During that time, because the mind is focused on what one is doing, one experiences some relief. That relief one experiences is really no different to that experienced during meditation. Of course, this is a very ordinary context. Nevertheless one does experience relief from worries, troubles and problems.

So paying attention, focusing one's mind on an activity such as drawing or even watching cartoons on TV, can bring relief. Personally, when I observe cartoons and how they have been formulated, I am quite amazed at how someone has thought up those different drawings, which all relate to each other. The drawings and expressions of the characters are very detailed. I really feel that the people who made these drawings are very intelligent. I am amazed that someone has been able to pay attention to such detail in making this all work. Thus I feel that definitely there is a virtue, there is a benefit, in just keeping one's mind focused, even if it's in a worldly context, on something like a drawing, for a period of time. It will definitely help the mind.

In this general context of how things can help uplift the mind, we can also read the biographies of certain individuals who, even in a worldly context, have faced so many hardships and difficulties in their life but were still able to continue leading their lives. They were able to overcome so many obstacles and hardships. We can definitely relate to situations like that, where the endurance they had was remarkable. When one considers the hardships and difficulties that other individuals have

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gone through and the endurance they had, it can encourage us. Rather than spending time worrying about problems and churning them around in our mind, we can focus on other activities that will help the mind.

This advice of reading inspiring biographies is also encouraged in our monasteries. When individual monks put much time and energy into study, sometimes it can be too much for them to handle mentally and it becomes a bit stressful. That is when they are advised to read biographies of the great masters of the past. When one starts reading biographies of certain great masters of the past and relating to the great hardships and difficulties they went through in their lives and how they overcame those difficulties and problems and engaged in great practices, that can then uplift one's mind again and one will feel encouraged. In a worldly context, there would be many individuals who would have had hardships and difficulties in their life, but yet were able to continue with their life, their relationships, and so forth.

Does anyone have a question? You may raise your hand if you do. If there are no questions we can use the remaining time to cover some points in the text.

#### **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 medium scope**

###### **4.2.2.1.2.1 The actual training in the reflections: the way to develop the mind that strives for liberation**

###### **4.2.2.1.2.1.2 Reflection on the causes of suffering – the faults of cyclic existence**

###### **4.2.2.1.2.1.2.3 The way in which one approaches death and is conceived (in the subsequent rebirth)**

###### **4.2.2.1.2.1.2.3.2 The mind of death**

In relation to the text, we have now covered the topic of identifying what the mind of death is. First, we covered the topic of the causes of death. Then having explained the particular causes of death, we explained the actual mind of death.

The text next goes into explaining how the warmth of the body is withdrawn at the time of death.

As the text explains, for an individual who had been inclined to accumulate more positive karma in their life, the heat or the warmth of the body withdraws from the feet upwards, into the centre of the heart. For someone who had been inclined to engage more in non-virtue, the heat withdraws from the crown of the head downwards, ending up in the heart.

It is said that the location from which the heat begins to withdraw is also a sign of whether the individual will have a good rebirth or not in the next lifetime. If the heat or warmth is withdrawn from the feet upwards, it is a sign that they will have a positive, fortunate rebirth in the next lifetime. Whereas if the heat is withdrawn from the top of the head downward, it is a sign that they will have an unfortunate rebirth. Of course, we are not certain if that is entirely feasible in all circumstances, but it is generally taken as a sign.

According to the explanations in the text, when all the signs of death have occurred, that is when the person can be pronounced dead in the true sense. When the heat has been completely withdrawn into the heart, the mind or

consciousness leaves from the heart. When the consciousness or mind separates from the body that is the clear sign of actual death. So, when that separation takes place it is the real death of the person.

The next topic the text goes into is how one reaches the intermediate state after death. Further on the text explains how some individuals may not have to go through the intermediate state after death. However, for those who do take the intermediate state body, the text explains now how one actually takes birth in that form. The moment the consciousness separates from one's heart is when the existence of the intermediate state being occurs. The text explains that at the time of conception, the point at where the consciousness enters is where the heart is formed. Also when a person dies, it is from the heart that the consciousness departs, and it is at that departing moment that the intermediate state being takes place.

The explanation of the heart being the actual place where the consciousness resides within our physical body may conflict with the normal scientific explanation of the mind residing within the brain. Until quite recently, it was widely accepted that the brain was where the consciousness or mind resides. However, after further investigations and particularly dialogues in Dharamsala between top neuroscientists and His Holiness the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan scholars, there seems to be an acceptance of the connection between the heart and the consciousness. There are definitely some signs of there being a connection with the heart as well.

We will conclude the teaching session for the evening. Before we end the session, we can again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time the object we focus on is the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. The manner in which we focus is similar to what was explained earlier. We sit in an appropriate, comfortable posture and withdraw our mind from external distractions while focusing on the sound of the mantra to be recited.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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