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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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24 February 2010

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As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation. The literal meaning of the Tibetan word for meditation, *gom*, is familiarity. It relates to familiarising one's mind with a virtuous object and keeping one's focus or attention on the object that one chooses to focus on.

The real implication of familiarising one's mind with an object is ultimately familiarising one's mind with positive attitudes and positive intention. The whole process of meditation is inclined to bring us towards imbuing our mind with positive thoughts. It is a way or a means to try to alter the situation whereby our minds are mostly influenced by distracting and disturbing thoughts. So we are trying to transform or change that situation.

To take it further we can explain a specific meditation that serves as an antidote for overcoming a negative state of mind, such as attachment. For someone who is obsessed with strong attachment the appropriate meditation focus is said to be focussing on the unattractive nature or the faults of the object. When we understand the faults of the object the attachment to that object will naturally reduce.

First we need to understand what attachment actually is. Attachment is, by its very nature, the state of mind that exaggerates the qualities of any particular object. One sees the exaggerated attributes, the beauty, of the object and then has a sense of longing to possess the object. It is only the exaggerated qualities that gives rise to the mind of attachment, which comes with a strong sense of longing to possess the object, and with the belief that it would provide one with happiness and pleasure. The mind that is obsessed with attachment naturally seems to want the object because of the belief that it will give some satisfaction.

To free one's mind from the obsession of strong attachment, the appropriate meditation is to meditate upon an object that serves as a direct antidote, a direct opposite, to that mind of attachment. A mind of attachment is a mind that sees only the good qualities, the attractive qualities, of an object and longs for that object. The opposite of that state of mind would be one where one familiarises one's mind with seeing the faults of the object, the unattractive attributes of the object, and it is the direct opposite of that state of mind of longing and desiring.

The more we familiarise the mind with seeing the unattractive attributes of the object the more the mind that desires to possess the object will naturally reduce. That's how attachment is naturally reduced. We

familiarise ourselves with the opposite mind, which is non-attachment, by focussing particularly on the unattractive attributes or faults of the object. This is a mind that is an opposite of attachment. It is the mind or attitude of non-attachment. The more we familiarise ourselves with the mind of non-attachment the more naturally the mind of attachment is reduced.

This is how it works in relation to overcoming attachment. There are many antidotes for overcoming particular negative states of mind in this way. When we understand how meditation works to directly oppose negative states of mind we can definitely see the value of meditation, as well as the mechanism of how meditation actually works. One also sees that meditation is basically another term for Dharma practice. There is a connection between what we call spiritual or Dharma practice and meditation.

When we begin to understand how meditation works to overcome negative states of mind we will begin to acknowledge to ourselves how important it is to meditate regularly in our daily lives, and the meditation itself becomes subtler and subtler as we deal with complex issues.

We can give a little simpler explanation of how to overcome the state of mind of excessive attachment. As long as we allow our mind to be obsessed with an object of attachment, the more we focus on it, the more it naturally increases the attachment in our mind. So an immediate remedy would be to distance our focus from the object that causes attachment, and focus on an object that does not cause attachment to arise in our mind. During the time that we focus on an object of non-attachment, i.e. an object that does not cause attachment to arise in our mind, attachment will definitely be reduced as well. That is how we can understand the practice.

Attachment is a negative state of mind, what we call a delusion. When we recognise attachment as delusion we will begin to recognise that it is something that we need to overcome. We need to try to remove that state of mind. Thus the attempt to put into practice what can help to overcome attachment will be naturally applied from one's own side.

In order to identify the state of mind of attachment as a delusion, a negative state of mind, one would have to understand the nature of attachment. Why is it considered a negative state of mind? It comes down to a simple explanation. As far as something harms oneself and others, to that extent, it is negative. Because it causes harm it is referred to as being negative.

We have come to point of investigating how attachment harms one. This is a point that will initially be a little hard for us to recognise. The great Indian masters in their treatises explained that attachment is, in fact, really quite difficult for us to initially recognise as a harmful or as negative state of mind. The reason that it is hard to recognise attachment as a harmful or negative is because it seems to give some temporary pleasure. There seems to be some temporary benefit from the feelings of attachment. It also seems to bring people together and then, when you are together with others, you have a

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sense of enjoyment, company, socialising and so forth. In that sense it does contribute to a certain amount of temporary joy. However the point here is that it is temporary, fleeting joy. It is not really a durable and stable sense of joy; nor is it genuine happiness.

Rather than contributing to any sense of true happiness, attachment actually destroys happiness in the long run. If we were to completely follow attachment the ultimate outcome is that it harms us. The harm of attachment creeps up on us, very cunningly and subtly.

So, on a very subtle level, it is hard for us to recognise that attachment is a non-virtue or a negative state of mind. However if we investigate intense attachment, when we are obsessed with something and this is a state we could experience ourselves, we can see it is something that disturbs one. Anyone who has experienced very intense attachment, a very intense desire for something, has experienced the frustration and turmoil in the mind that comes with that.

We can also examine anger. Anger is something that almost everyone can easily accept and agree is a negative state of mind, because the harm caused by anger is much more obvious. Thus it is easier to recognise the ill-effects of anger. However, as mentioned earlier, when attachment is very intense we can also experience the ill-effects of attachment. If you are obsessed with strong attachment, to the extent that it disturbs us it makes our mind unhappy. It destroys the calmness and peace in your mind because it replaces it with agitation and disturbance. Thus, if we can adopt a practice that allows the mind to settle down to be free from the intense attachment then it is definitely worth applying that technique. The goal of meditation, as mentioned earlier, is to distance our mind from the object that causes strong attachment to arise in our mind and maintain our focus on a neutral virtuous object. By the virtue of doing that, we will be released from intense attachment. The mind will start to feel calmer and more relaxed. So there is definitely a positive effect for one. In that way we can see the benefits of meditation.

I don't need to really elaborate on the ill-effects and the disturbances of intense attachment that people experience. Those around me, students and so forth, actually confide in me how the effects of strong attachment are very intense. It really disturbs the mind. Some have confided in me that when they are in a relationship of intense attachment there is definitely some initial pleasure, some joy, from being together with the other, and they experience some good times. During that time it might be really hard to admit or recognise that it is not enjoyable and that there is some fault in having that intense attachment towards each other. It may be hard to recognise the fault. However, as some have confided in me, after a break-up pain, sorrow and frustration become very, very strong in your mind. That is when one really experiences the ill effects of strong desire.

Someone confided in me that even going to a place, such as a park, where they used to enjoy being together and having fun together brings back memories which is accompanied with pangs of nostalgia. When you go to the same place after the separation takes place the feeling

of intense angst becomes very strong in the mind. Some say it is almost like the sensation of burning in one's mind. They relate to me how it is a very intense and uncomfortable feeling. Relating these experiences to me and confiding in this way is recognising for yourself the ill-effects of attachment. Relating that unease and discomfort to the initial cause, which is attachment, is actually a very good observation to have made. After one has come to understand the techniques to slowly overcome attachment it is really noteworthy to acknowledge that and have that observation. These are things that I relate as experiences that some of you have had yourself as an example of the ill-effects of attachment.

One of the points that I try to emphasise in explaining this is to try, by every means, to maintain a good relationship. If you are already in a relationship with a partner, try to maintain a good relationship, a healthy relationship, that is not based merely on desire, attachment and infatuation, but is a true relationship with a partner. If, as explained earlier, this relationship was based mainly on strong desire and attachment for each other then if separation takes place, deep hurt, pain and sorrow will be experienced. In order to avoid separation in the first place, or all the pain and frustration that comes if it does happen, it is much wiser to try to develop a good relationship. When you are in a relationship try to look into the positive aspect of the relationship and try to maintain a good relationship. That is what is really important. If separation takes place and the relationship was not based merely on attachment, then there won't be as much hurt and sorrow. But if the relationship has been based on intense attachment then one experiences all those ill-effects.

With ordinary relationships it would be hard to claim that there is no attachment at all involved. There is attachment with ordinary relationships. Because there is attachment it is good to work towards perfecting the relationship, to go a little bit beyond this infatuation and desire towards each other.

We can be a little bit more specific about who is experiencing the pain and hurt when a break up takes place. If one is having quite a good relationship with someone else they may not experience the hurt and the pain of the break-up because they are already involved with someone. Right? For that partner we could say, 'Well, because it is replaced by another attachment, another infatuation, they don't feel the sorrow and pain of that break-up'. But the other partner who may have placed all their trust in the other and doesn't have someone else to be with would definitely experience much pain and hurt. In fact, again as someone confided in me, the pain is so great that it really feels like being lost and being unable to do anything for days on end and even being in tears. The pain is so intense that one succumbs to tears and crying, day and night. That's what some have related to me so I suppose that is the actual situation that occurs.

A lady came to me once and related to me how her husband had left her. She came to me with some sorrow and was crying. In an attempt to console her, I said to her,

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'Yes, it may very well be a good thing that your husband has left you. In fact you haven't lost anything. Rather you have gained something, you have gained real freedom. What you have lost is nothing more than losing rubbish (*laughter*). If there's no faithfulness, then it's like rubbish. So that is what you have lost?' In mentioning she would gain something, her freedom, she was taken aback. She turned around admitting, 'Well, that might be true. I have gained more freedom for myself. But maybe it's a little too harsh to say that I have lost rubbish'. (*laughter*) The main point of this sort of encounter was that it released her from her sorrow and she started to smile and lighten up. It actually helped her to come out of that state of sorrow.

Then, of course, I had to explain why I referred to her partner or her husband as rubbish. I explained to her that the other person, who was an immigrant, apparently married her just for the sake of getting citizenship. After he had obtained what he needed he deserted her. When we really think about it, the motive of this person was not really fair, not really a genuine, good motive.

In another incident where someone was again confiding in me that their partner had left them I said the same thing under the same circumstances. If they have left you there is no need for you to feel sorrowful. If they have left you, there's no need to chase after them. If they have decided that they don't want to live you, there's no point in chasing after them. There is no point in trying to follow that person and turning your back on others who may be waiting for you. There may be others who are ready to be friends and are waiting for you. If you turn around you might see them. She said, 'Is that true? Could there be others waiting?' (*Laughter*). She was taken aback and said, 'Oh, well maybe that was a good thing then.' (*Laughter*)

The point I was making is that when someone has decided to turn their back on you there's no real point in trying to chase after them, because they are trying to keep a distance from you. If you try to follow them or pursue them, they would just try to get further away. Rather than trying to chase someone who is trying to get away from you, it is better to turn around and be ready for new friendships and to get along with others you can get along with. Of course I am not relating to all situations. There are times when someone is upset and may walk off. That is an immediate situation that may occur. I am talking about situations where someone has already decided that they don't want to be with you anymore.

Just to emphasise again, I am not discussing immediate causes of separation like wanting to be alone for a few days or whatever. That occurs and is natural in relationships. Sometimes you just want to have your space and so forth. I am relating to instances where people want to leave you, or desert you.

There is another incident I can relate about a Tibetan friend. This was many years ago when I was teaching in St Kilda. One evening he came to one of the teaching sessions. He told me he had been expelled by his girlfriend. He was kicked out. He came just before I was to engage in the teachings. He related to me his predicament of being thrown out by his wife. They even

had a child together. When he told me I said to him, 'Well, I am about to go and teach so if you don't mind making some supper for us we can talk afterwards. We can have supper together and talk about it'. Then, before we could engage in our conversation to try to console him, while we were having tea with the students and before I could to go up for dinner, he came to me and said, 'I think I have to go back home now because I got a message from her. She was crying, begging me to come back'. So I didn't have to console him in that case. (*laughter*)

The point to take note of here is that this instance may have occurred in a moment of rage by his wife. She may have been really upset and in a moment of rage had told him to leave the house. After he left she would have collected herself and realised that it was not a wise thing to do at all and then made attempt for him to come back. As mentioned earlier, incidents like this do occur but that is not why separation takes place.

Another point that I mention regularly is that we must be very wary and cautious about making decisions in a moment of rage or strong attachment or strong anger. When we are influenced by strong negative states of mind or emotions such as anger and attachment it is better not to make major decisions. Decisions made in that state of mind can be quite devastating, quite disastrous.

We have sidetracked from the point where we were about to do some meditation. Perhaps we should come back to the meditation now. It may have seemed to be a bit of a side track from our main topic this evening but, in fact, it is all related. These are incidents that occur in our everyday lives that are related to negative states of mind and so forth. So, it is actually good for us to relate the truth of the teachings about the ill-effects of the negative states of mind to practical situations in daily life. So there is purpose.

In relation to the actual teaching, which is the purpose of meditation, it is said that the Buddha in his various teachings explained antidotes for each and every negative state of mind. The particular negative state of mind or delusion we are referring to now is attachment. How to try to combat it and how to work with feeling strong attachment in the mind. That is also worthwhile.

To engage in meditation we sit in an upright and relaxed posture. As explained in the text, the traditional sitting posture is that one sits in a full cross legged posture. That is said to be a good meditational posture, not a half crossed leg. When one is familiar with a full crossed legged posture it is apparently a comfortable posture, especially for a meditation of long duration. If one meditates for a long time it seems to be a steady and comfortable posture.

The particular advice for our hands is to place the right hand above the left with the thumbs touching to form a triangle and centred on the navel.. The specific instruction is for tip of our thumb to be four inches below our navel. The explanation behind this posture or hand gesture is said to be very significant. If we take our meditation practise a little bit further we begin to see the significance of this. The teachings explain that the tip of the thumbs

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hold the nerve endings. We don't call it the nerve. It is called the energy channel endings, or what is called the bodhichitta energy channels. The bodhichitta energy channel endings are said to be at the thumbs. So when the thumbs touch together and are placed in the navel centre it is said to help instil head energy at the navel centre. Then, when that head energy is activated it causes the positive energy of love and compassion to increase within oneself. With some practise it seems there is some sort of feeling one can experience in that particular area. There definitely seems to be some significance.

There is also particular significance in sitting in an upright but relaxed posture, which means that one's body is not tense in anyway but is, nevertheless, upright. It is said that when one has a straight spine it allows the energy channels within our body to straighten out and thus allows the positive energy within physical body to flow freely. That then helps the mind become fresh. As a result when the mind becomes fresh it helps to freshen the body itself. So it can prevent the gross obstacles to meditation that are sleep and lethargy. On a subtler level, it also prevents dullness in the mind. That is the significance of sitting upright. With this in mind, we can make an attempt to sit in an upright and relaxed posture.

First we distance our mind from distractions. We bring our mind inward. When we distance our mind from the distractions our focus and attention is naturally drawn inward within ourselves. As we bring our attention and focus inward, it is hard for that attention and focus to remain for long without focusing on something. Thus, we need to choose an object to anchor the mind in that inner space. The object that we chose for our meditation here is our breath. Having withdrawn our mind from all distractions and brought it within oneself we place our focus and attention on the breath, the natural inflow and outflow of our breath. We can spend the next few minutes just focussing and placing our full attention on the breath itself. (*Pause for meditation*)

I'm sorry but I have to bring you out of your deep meditation now!! If we can apply this meditation technique in our daily lives it contributes to a more holistic, positive life because the very act of meditating, when we apply the appropriate technique, serves not only as a means to be able to concentrate and focus it actually begins to calm the mind and contributes to a gentler, kinder mind. That can definitely bring about a positive effect. One is not the only recipient of this positive effect. It also benefits those surrounding one, one's immediate relationships such as one's partner or other friends and colleagues around oneself. In this way there can be definitely a positive effect in one's immediate surroundings.

As we experience the positive effects of meditation ourselves others can also feel these positive effects. We need to live with others. We need to relate to others. We cannot always live in isolation. The very nature of our existence is one that is dependent on others. Thus we have to relate to others. As we need to relate with others it is in our best interest, and the best interest of others, that we have a good kind relationship with others. Daily meditation can contribute towards being a little bit

kinder, more genuinely considerate with others. The positive effects of the actual application of meditation can be felt in a regular practice.

If one is living with a partner who does not fully understand the benefit of meditation they may not support meditation immediately because they don't understand it. One could actually be the best advocate of the positive benefits of meditation by becoming a little gentler, kinder and considerate when one goes back home. Then one's partner will naturally see the positive effect of coming back from meditation, being a little bit more joyful, a little bit more considerate and kinder. They will then naturally want to support you and encourage you to go to meditation.

I relate this because apparently there are situations where some partners make an issue over going off for one hour to do meditation. In the scheme of things it is actually not really a big sacrifice at all. It's a very small thing. Yet I have heard that some have a complained that going to meditation deprives them of having time to watch a very nice episode of television together - "I want company". Rather than allowing them to go to meditation, they want them to stay home. That can cause tension and arguments over what is actually a very small matter.

We can conclude here for the evening. Before doing so we will again spend a few moments in meditation. This time we will focus on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. As we hear the mantra we just try to keep our focus attention on that sound.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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