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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual we can spend some time in meditation. For that purpose we sit in an upright but relaxed posture. The literal meaning of the Tibetan word for meditation is to familiarise one's mind with virtue i.e. good thoughts that influence good habits and so forth.

When we consider the various different states of mind that we possess, we find that the more we become familiar with certain states of mind the gentler, kinder and calmer we become. Whereas there are other states of mind which, as we become more familiar with them, lead to more agitation in the mind. The mind becomes harsher, more insensitive to others and so forth. We can see that there definitely is a distinction between different states of mind. As we become more familiar with some, which are called positive states of mind, it helps the mind to become calmer, more peaceful and more joyful. Whereas we can see that when other states of mind called negative states of mind arise, they make us feel uncomfortable. Indeed the more we familiarise ourselves with negative states of mind the more it will bring unease and discomfort into our life. This is something that we need to be able to notice when we look into ourselves. It is something that we really need to pay attention to.

The extent to which our state of mind, or the attitude in our mind, affects our wellbeing is something we would be able to begin to notice if we really look within ourselves. Rather than blaming external situations, if we could take the time to seriously look within ourselves we would begin to notice that, regardless of the external situation, it is our state of mind that determines whether we are feeling quite stable or agitated. There are certain instances where our external situation may not be favourable but because of our state of mind we may be able to maintain a more positive frame of mind and endure that difficult situation. That difficult external situation will not disturb our peace of mind.

There are also times where things may be going relatively well externally but one still feels agitated within. If we look into why that is so, rather than instinctively blaming an external situation, if we check within we would notice that it is actually related to the state of our mind. This sort of investigation is very worthwhile, very profound, and through this investigation we obtain a very profound guide to one's own mind and wellbeing. That is important.

Beyond the benefit of this type of self awareness and analysis in finding out the causes that oppose our wellbeing, we will begin to notice that there are positive states of mind that bring more joy and happiness to our mind. They bring peace of mind that is imbued with kindness, and genuine compassion and joy. As we begin to experience the positive effect of that state of mind for ourselves we will also begin to notice its positive effect upon others. It definitely has a positive effect upon those one associates with; one's partner, friends and other companions.

It is obvious that our wellbeing and happy state of mind contributes to other's happiness. We can see this in our own experience associating with someone else. If they are joyful and happy, it definitely has a positive effect upon us. We feel happy to be in their company. It is exactly the same from one's own side. If one is in a joyful happy state of mind it will definitely have a positive effect upon others we associate with. That is the mutual benefit.

As I mentioned earlier, the positive effect of generating a compassionate state of mind, a happy joyful state of mind, is that the more we contribute to that state of mind within ourselves the easier for us to get good companions. The companions that we already have become more stable and we will be able to get new friends. This is something that happens as a natural, positive effect of having a genuinely happy and joyful state of mind.

From our own experience we all know that we need companionship. We don't like to be alone. We like to have friends and companions. If there is something one instinctively wishes for it is good companions and friends. Therefore it is worthwhile looking into the real causes of companionship and friendship and how to make the friendships that we already have to become more stable. There is really no other way to do this than to generate a genuine and joyful happy state of mind within oneself along with a compassionate mind. When one has developed these positive states of mind, naturally, one will have good companions in one's life.

When one has a happy, joyful state of mind one begins to enjoy and appreciate everything that surrounds one. One will begin to enjoy whatever good conditions one may have now, clothing, food, shelter and so forth. In a joyful state of mind, good conditions will only contribute to one's sense of joy and happiness, rather than becoming an obstacle for oneself. Thus it is worth considering and investing the time and energy to develop these qualities. These will definitely help one to experience overall well being. Even if we only consider the benefits in this life, it is still something that is very worthwhile. It is something we all need take into consideration.

I regularly advise the younger generation that while it is necessary to invest time and energy in your studies so that you can work towards developing a good career in your life and be able to accumulate a certain amount of resources, wealth and so forth in your life; it is equally important to consider spending some time and energy developing the inner qualities within oneself. I advise them that this investment will be a great benefit, a great result, down the line. The result of having invested time and energy in one's study is that one will be able to get a suitable job to gain sufficient resources. While experiencing the comfort of that, because one has also spent time and energy developing inner qualities one will also be able to reap the benefits of a stable, clear and bright state of mind. A stable, clear and bright state of mind would definitely contribute to enjoying a sense of inner well being. This is what I share with the younger generation.

The overall positive result of having invested time and energy to acquire positive qualities in the earlier part of one's life, is that in the later part of life one will be able to really enjoy life in whatever circumstances one may find oneself in. Not only will associating with others be an enjoyable time, but even if one is alone at home, one would still be able to maintain a sense of joy and well being.

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We can definitely see the disastrous consequences for those who lack inner wellbeing and the inner resources of feeling settled and well. They will not really feel content even with adequate external conditions. There might be plenty to drink and eat but there are some people who still feel that they are missing something. They are not completely settled. When one doesn't feel settled within, that is when one starts to feel a little depressed and may resort to alcohol, drugs and so forth. And that we all know that is detrimental to one's health and wellbeing.

What prevents this is having developed the inner resources for experiencing inner wellbeing. This is the insight that I share with others regularly. This is not only relevant for the younger generation but all of us need to consider acquiring positive qualities to gain a positive outcome. We all have the potential to develop this, so why not exert ourselves to put some time and energy into acquiring these inner resources.

The reason I emphasise the importance of investing some time and energy into developing the inner resources for one's wellbeing in an earlier part of one's life is because of the comments that I hear from others that, at a later time in their life it is very difficult to make the attempt to try to settle and transform the mind from a distracted state of mind; to bring the focus inward and meditate. Even having made many attempts to meditate, they say the mind is still distracted, that it is so difficult to maintain focus. Some even go as far as explaining that when they were growing up they had so much pressure from their parents to try to do this, try to do that, and it was all related to external distractions. The mind becomes completely distracted with trying to achieve and excel in all things and because of the lack of familiarity with focussing inwardly and bringing the mind inward they find it difficult now to make an attempt to bring the mind inward. I don't blame them. That could definitely be one of the reasons.

Having acknowledged the positive outcome of withdrawing our mind from distractions and try to familiarise our mind with the positive attributes that lead to a clear and bright state of mind, which contributes to generating a kinder, and more compassionate mind, the question is, 'How do we achieve that? What is the technique or method to achieve that?'

It is at this point where you would be led to meditation. Meditation is a technique of training one's mind to withdraw from all external distractions, particularly distancing or withdrawing the state of mind from being influenced by the delusions, which cause the distractions. Withdrawing the mind from the influence of the delusions and bringing the attention of the mind inward and focusing on an internal object is the meditation technique. We can see that this definitely relates to achieving what was mentioned earlier.

We adopt a meditation posture that is an upright but relaxed. Then we actually make the attempt to distance our mind from all distractions. That means consciously not allowing our mind to follow whatever distractions, thoughts and so forth that arise in the mind. We try to distance ourselves from all distractions, all forms of thought, and bring our focus inward. As we make the attempt to bring our focus inward we find that restful and we feel safe within ourselves. We try to maintain that inward focus within oneself.

Now it is rather difficult for us beginners to maintain that inward focus without actually focussing on a particular object. Therefore we choose an object to focus on. In the

meditation here we choose our own breath. After trying to maintain the inner focus for a short while we then focus on the breath. We keep our whole full attention and focus on the breath itself; the natural inflow and outflow of our breath. If we were to maintain our full attention and focus on our breath for just a minute or two then that truly becomes the onset of our familiarity in maintaining our attention and focus. If one does this slowly and regularly it definitely will improve our meditation session. So this is the practice that we will engage in for the next few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*).

What we have attempted in our short session now is basically how we adopt the meditation technique. As a technique we would find that it is not that complicated at all. It is a matter of having chosen the object to focus on we then try to maintain our focus on that object. The main point is that having adopted a particular object to focus on such as our breath, we maintain our focus on that object for whatever duration we can. That is really the main part of the technique.

Our difficulty in practising meditation does not lie in lacking the knowledge of how to meditate. We have the knowledge. We know how to meditate and we have the technique. That is not what we lack. The difficulty lies in not being able to maintain our focus on the object. As we attempt to focus on the object we will find that we are swayed by the distractions. That is something we would find difficult.

Naturally we would find this difficult but we will contribute to that difficulty if we don't catch our mind wandering. If we lack the determination to keep our mind focussed then we will find that while seemingly in a meditative state our mind is actually wondering back and forth between different thoughts. If we can achieve a few moments, whatever duration, of really keeping our full attention on the object, if we make the attempt wholeheartedly, then that familiarity will become a means for us to slowly progress on adopting the right technique. But if, from the very outset, we allow our mind to be distracted and we become habituated with that it causes the mind to be in a constantly busy state and never really settled.

#### **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**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.2.4. Resolving the nature of the path that leads to liberation**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.2.4.2. The actual resolution of the nature of the path**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.2.4.2.2. The type of path one cultivates to overturn cyclic existence**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.2.4.2.2.1. Making the link now that we have identified the path**

The specific outline we are covering is the path one cultivates to overcome cyclic existence. That outline is subdivided into three. We touched on the first subdivision that is 'making the link'. We have identified that the path that is the link specifically relates to the three higher of trainings. We identified that and explained a bit about the three higher trainings in our last sessions.

The text then quotes a passage from Nagarjuna's work called, *The Friendly Letter*:

Were your head or clothing suddenly to catch fire  
You should still set aside extinguishing these fires  
And strive to eradicate birth –  
There is no purpose higher than this.

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Through ethical discipline, concentration, and wisdom,  
Achieve nirvana, an undefiled state of peace and  
restraint:

Ageless, deathless, inexhaustible;

Free from earth, water, fire wind, sun and moon.

The first part of this quote gives an analogy. If one's head or one's clothing were to suddenly catch fire one would definitely exert oneself to put out that fire because there would be a danger to one's life. One would definitely take every measure to extinguish the fire. What the analogy is illustrating is that in this event 'you should still set aside to distinguish the fire, and strive to eradicate birth'. What this means is that while normally one would immediately extinguish a fire on one's head or clothing, it is more important to exert oneself and acquire the means and methods of practice that would stop one's rebirth in future life times. Exerting oneself to acquire those means and engaging in these practises is far more important than extinguishing the fire that may consume one's life now.

What is being explained are the priorities in our situation. Normally one's clothes and so forth being on fire would be considered an extreme danger, nevertheless the danger of falling into an unfortunate rebirth in the cyclic existence is far more severe. That is the main point that is being related here. Thus, to set everything else aside and give one's full time and energy to practices that would eradicate the causes for rebirth in cyclic existence is really the priority. As the last line from the first verse reads, 'there is no purpose higher than doing that'.

The next part introduces the practices. The practices are: ethical discipline, concentration, and wisdom. Through the practices of acquiring ethical discipline, concentration and wisdom one achieves the state of nirvana or liberation that has the characteristics of an undefiled state of peace. 'State of peace' refers to having overcome the contaminated aggregates within us. Having completely transformed the contaminated aggregates one will experience total, complete peace as a result. 'Undefiled' means undefiled by the delusions and completely free from all forms of delusion. One has an undefiled state. This also refers to a state of being completely subdued and because of the restraint all the delusions will naturally come about in that state.

Furthermore one reaches the state of: agelessness, deathless and inexhaustible. Agelessness and so forth refers to the ceasing of sufferings in the cyclic existence, aging birth and death. The sufferings of birth, ageing and death are completely reversed and not experienced again. Thus the state of agelessness and deathless are inexhaustible. This is what that refers to.

The last line of the verse reads, 'free from earth, water, fire, wind, sun and moon'. This refers to the positive results of achieving nirvana or liberation through practising the three higher trainings. What is being referred to here is that one would achieve a genuine state of liberation endowed with those characteristics that are described earlier, rather than achieving a state of liberation, as some claim to be a state of water, fire, wind, sun or the moon. Apparently there are some philosophies or systems that would consider feeling a state of union with water or fire or being like the moon or the sun is the state of liberation. However the liberation that is described here is free from all of that and is a genuine state of peace, endowed with the qualities mentioned earlier; an undefiled state of peace and restraint, ageless, deathless and inexhaustible. These are the actual qualities of true liberation.

When one reaches the state of nirvana one would be completely free from rebirth and cyclic existence, never to experience any type of cyclic existence again. That is the real, desirable state to be achieved. That is the ultimate state.

The quote from Nagarjuna's work was explaining the link in the first subdivision of this outline. We now come to the second subdivision in the outline that is 'teaching the other precepts that will be explained later'. This refers to the higher trainings of concentration and wisdom.

If the ultimate goal of the teaching here were to lead an individual being merely to achieve liberation, then it would be fitting to explain the three higher trainings in details here. However, because the intention of explaining the Medium Scope is not to lead individual beings just to the state of liberation, but to the ultimate goal of enlightenment, the presentation is done as a way of teaching the Medium Scope in conjunction with the goals of the Great Scope. Thus the extensive explanations of the two trainings are not explained specifically here but rather later in the text when the Great Scope is explained.

Thus the higher training of wisdom is explained extensively later on the chapter of the Great Scope in the context of explaining the path of special insight. Concentration is explained extensively and in great detail in the chapter relating to calm abiding. Those explanations are given in more detail later. So, within the three higher trainings, it is more relevant to explain the higher training of ethics or morality here. Thus that is what is being introduced in this section. We can leave the explanation for our next session.

Before we conclude for the evening we can again now spend a few minutes in meditation, this time focussing on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra to be recited. We spend some time just focusing on the sound of the mantra. When the recitation ends we can just remain in the meditative state of focussing on the mantra and hold our attention on it for a short while. This is quite significant as a practise.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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