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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual we can spend some time for meditation. For that purpose we adopt a comfortable and relax posture, physically and also mentally. Try to induce a clear, bright and relaxed state of mind as well. Within a relaxed physical and mental state one would definitely get a good result for whatever one engages in.

This is true for any given normal activity, but even more so for meditation. For what purpose do we engage in the activity of meditation? The primary purpose of meditation is to help us to get from a distracted mind to a more settled, focused mind. From a mind that is confused and so forth to become clearer.

As I regularly emphasise, the situation of our mind is very much dependent on our attitudes. If we actually look into what causes certain situations in our mind, we would find that when we adopt a certain kind of attitude, due to that attitude, it can lead to a restless and somewhat agitated state of mind. Whereas when one adopts another kind of attitude that can contribute to a more settled and calm state of mind. So it is definitely related to the attitudes we have in our mind.

To understand how it is dependent on our mind, we need to refer to situations when we are in a disturbed state of mind, and the kind of thinking that we do that actually leads to more disturbance, more discomfort within oneself. That becomes quite clear when we pay attention to the attitude of our mind. As I regularly emphasise, it is very important that we really pinpoint and recognise the attitudes that cause our mind to be in turmoil, to become agitated and unsettled. Having recognised the types of attitude that cause that, we need to change the way of thinking within oneself.

In relation to one's own situation, until and unless one recognises that the distress that one experiences is really caused primarily from an attitude within oneself, there is not much that external factors can do to change one's situation. Indeed when we try to help some people, we are not really able to provide much help for them, unless they change their way of thinking. There is not much others can do to help those individuals who are quite stubborn in holding onto views and opinions that actually cause them distress. Even their companions and friends cannot really help them much if the attitude in their mind is not changed. That is the main cause of one's problems and one must recognise and change that for the better.

When we are in a troubled state of mind, if we don't shift our way of thinking we remain in a vicious circle of constantly thinking about whatever is troubling us. To

that extent one will not find the real genuine sense of calmness and peace in one's mind, one will always be in a seemingly restless state. However if we notice that there is a technique, there is a means of diverting our attention, which would change our attitude, and we begin to notice that and actually spend two or three minutes, or even one minute, keeping our attention on that particular aspect which is contrary to a disturbed state of mind, then that actually gives us definite relief from the disturbed state of mind. Then we begin to feel a genuine sense of relaxation and a calm state in our mind. So this is something that we can definitely experience. It is really important for us to recognise what it is that helps us to divert ourselves from disturbed states of mind.

Why is it essential to recognise the positive state of mind? It is because the positive attitude that we focus on and familiarise ourselves with, will release us from the disturbed and confused state of mind. While that is essential and important for us to recognise and engage in, at the same time it is important that we recognise the issues which cause us distress and mental turmoil. If we fail to recognise and do something about changing our attitude then we may end up with a perpetually weighed down state of mind, always feeling a little bit restless, always on edge, always ready to be disturbed even with the slightest situation. We will feel disturbed because our mind is preoccupied with, and familiar with that kind of attitude. So it is as if we are sort of possessed by negative attitudes that cause us distress. To a certain extent we seem to willingly and stubbornly hold on to certain attitudes which even we can see are actually harmful for us. Somehow we don't seem to want to let go and that is what causes us distress. So we must, by recognising the disturbing attitudes within our selves, slowly begin to let go and familiarise ourselves with the positive attitudes.

We can all relate to distinguishing between the positive and negative states of mind on an external level with friends. As we are growing up our parents would naturally wish us to be in good company. With friends or associates who may have a good influence upon us, we can learn from them and become well-behaved. So in that way when our parents, who are responsible for us, see us with good friends, they would be pleased. They would be happy and encourage us to befriend such individuals. Whereas our parents would be little bit wary of seeing us with individuals who have a negative influence upon us, whose behaviour and habits are not so good. The reason why our parents would be wary is because our parents would not want us to be influenced in a negative way, adopting the bad habits of others.

Similarly as we grow up, and gain some intelligence, we would begin to make choices ourselves about who to befriend. When we notice that certain individuals have good qualities, have good behaviour, and are learned, we want to associate with them, and befriend them, knowing that we benefit from them. Likewise when we see others who are not such a good influence, we try to protect ourselves from befriend them, knowing that we might be prone to engaging in the same kinds of bad habits that they have. Therefore we protect ourselves to the best of our knowledge.

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Just as that is true on an external level with friends it is exactly the same with our internal attitudes and states of mind. And in fact it is much more important for us to pay attention to adopting positive states of mind within ourselves and trying to shun or trying to avoid the negative states of mind, and negative attitudes within ourselves. We associate with both positive and the negative states of mind at all times, wherever we go, and in fact they are the main source and cause for our well-being and happiness or confusion respectively. Therefore we use our wisdom and intelligence to distinguish between the positive and negative states and thus adopt the positive state of mind. That is something which we must pay great attention to. When we reach the level of being able to use our intelligence and wisdom in that way, then we reach a level or state where we are able to really protect ourselves and support ourselves in a good way.

The technique of meditation is a technique which meticulously guides us to familiarise ourselves with the positive state of mind within oneself, such as kindness and genuine concern for others. Such positive attitudes are something that we need to develop within ourselves. So the practice of meditation is a technique that identifies the positive state of mind within ourselves causing us to focus on that, and to familiarise with that further.

As mentioned previously the positive state of mind is definitely our best friend, our inner friend which will never let us down, it will always help us to make the right choices. Having a calm and happy joyous state of mind is the positive state of mind within ourselves that allows that to happen. To that extent it is our best companion who will not let us down. Whereas the negative state of mind is like a really a negative friend, an enemy even, and to that extent it harms us. As soon as we are influenced with a negative state of mind, we immediately feel distress, we feel agitated and uneasy. So to that extent negative attitudes are what causes us to suffer. Thus they are like a non-virtuous or negative friend.

The degree to which we are benefitted by the positive state of mind, and the degree to which the negative state of mind harms us, can be related to the external friend or enemy and to what degree they can harm or help us. An individual may have, for whatever reason a breakup with a companion or friend or partner. When that breakup takes place and the external companion starts to desert them, while they lack an external companion, then such an individual will experience great agony, and great loss, and everything will seem to fall apart. Such a person will be really at a loss, and unable to function properly, because as the external companion is leaving. The lack of inner support will result in a nervous breakdown. Whereas for an individual who has worked in developing an inner companion or a good inner positive state of mind, and attitude then although the external companion may desert them, because of the inner support they have, they will be able to maintain their dignity and not completely fall apart. Even though they may still feel hurt and lost from the external companion's behaviour it doesn't completely ruin their life, they are still be able to maintain whatever they are doing. So even though they

may be disturbed for a while, for two or three weeks, or even months, they will be able to quickly pick themselves up. So this is the extent of the difference in having a good internal support for oneself, and an unfailing real friend within oneself.

Thus an individual who has inner support is the result of someone who has done meditation, so what I am actually advertising here is the benefits of meditation. Here I can say with confidence that I have personally experience of the inner friend being unfailing at the times of difficulties when all external things have failed. This is something you might already be aware of, I may have related to you what kind of situations I have been in. From a conventional point of view, one would have to accept that it was a great hardship that I experienced when I left home. I was seventeen, completely leaving my parents and all my childhood friends behind, to go and study in the main capital of Tibet, Lhasa. From the age of seventeen when I left my home until now, and I'm about 75 now, I had to support and had to maintain myself, and really work at developing myself. There was no other support from the family, so this is something which I can say with experience.

The initial experience of the separation from my family at the age of seventeen, and then coming to Lhasa as a youngster was hard enough. But what was really most disturbing and most painful was when, after having spent nine years in the Sera monastery in Lhasa, the Communist Chinese invaded Tibet. Then I had to leave behind everything that I knew and was familiar with. There was not much in terms of possessions, but I had to leave behind my texts, the most prized possession for studying. I had to leave all of that behind and everything else I was familiar with, my room and everything had to be completely left behind in order to escape to India. But even though all the external conditions were clearly most distressing, it did not disturb my inner sense of well-being and joy.

Wherever I happened to arrive, things slowly began to work out; even though externally the situation was bad. When situations are difficult externally they do affect one to a certain degree but, as I mentioned earlier, being able to maintain the self dignity and a sense of joy within one's mind, is the real unfailing companion. To make things work out wherever I found myself when escaping to India and then later on wherever I happened to be, the inner companion of well-being, joy and self dignity is what has sustained me. This is what I am relating from with my own experience. So I can confidently say that it would be the same for any individual, any person who is able to maintain the inner strength and sense of joy within themselves, that would help them withstand any other difficult situations that may occur. It is important to protect that sense of inner joy and well-being at any cost.

When the inner sense of well-being and joy is lost, then as we all know, even if one were to have plenty of external resources, and possessions etc. they don't seem to contribute to real sense of joy and happiness. That is something we can all relate to.

There are individuals who do not have much in the way of external resources—in fact they have very meagre

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resources, but they are actually able to maintain a sense of joy and happiness. For example some of the people, who come across the border from Tibet into Nepal live near the border, are very poor. They try to survive by begging and getting their food from others, they might have very few resources, just some tsampa or barley flour. They have a very, very meagre tent that is their dwelling, yet when you see them in their tent with their family, they seem to be very joyous and singing, with smiles on their faces. And when tourists or westerners go up to that area, and they see these people, they are quite astonished to see that with so little and in such bad conditions they seem to be able to maintain a sense of joy and happiness, then the tourists really look and watch in amazement.

Of course here in this country we don't lack external conditions, we all have good external conditions, so we need to complement that with an inner condition of joy, happiness and well-being, enhancing the positive attitudes within ourselves. That is what we need to try to develop and cultivate further.

To relate one particular instance with a particular woman Yang Chen Lhamo, who came out of Tibet. Some students may know about her, as she became quite a famous singer. Yang Chen Lhamo has made quite a few CDs, with her chanting and singing. She related to me, when she was here in Australia that soon after coming to Australia, 'I was really astonished at the plentiful wealth, and the abundance of things'. She told me that when she went into one of the shops and was looking at what to buy, she saw some canned food and asked what it was. And then the person with her said that it was dog food. She said her response was that in Tibet even humans, let alone dogs, don't get food as good as this (*laughter*). So apparently she started out with very basic conditions in Australia. She started to sing, and make some CDs and actually sometimes she would be singing and playing her CDs with the sign 'Free Tibet'. So it was a very meagre beginning for her, but later as she became more noticed, she even got an award in Australia for her tracks, and now she has settled down in America.

So the main point that I am emphasising is that how the practice of meditation is actually helpful to maintain a sense of real joy and well-being within oneself. So even though I initially started with explaining the purpose of meditation it seems that I got a little bit side-tracked and told you other stories instead. It might have been a bit amusing for you and might have been good to hear.

Actually, it seems to be helpful for us to relate to stories of hardships. when others have gone through hardships and come out of it quite well, it is good for us to actually relate to that and understand how they came through those circumstances.

Bringing it back home there are instances of how, even in Australia, of hardship. You may noticed, an elderly person with beard who was actually shown on TV sometime ago. Apparently, his dwelling was a very, very meagre caravan, and his lounge room was under a tree. He is very joyfully and happily living like this but there was a time when he was expelled from the land, because it was owned by someone else. Nevertheless he doesn't

seem to have many worries, and seemed to be so joyful and happy. So these are stories from right here at home where we find people living very simple lives, with meagre dwellings but who are quite joyful and happy. So we do have examples of such individuals here as well.

So recapping the main points again it is said that if we spend some time in meditation, it is definitely worthwhile as it is a means or as a technique to develop that sort genuine positive attitude within oneself, as an inner unfailing friend, that is always within oneself. Meditation is a good method to support and to really cultivate that further. In practising meditation, even though external conditions may not be so severe and will not harm one, they will not disturb one's inner joy and happiness. That indicates the value of the practice.

With students and friends that I have come across in my time in Australia, there are some who have the tendency to complain about situations here in Australia When I actually try to point out to them that they are actually very lucky, that they have such good conditions, they don't seem to really to see that point. So I suggest that they go to India. Some have actually taken that advice and gone to India (*laughter*). After visiting India, they realised how resourceful and plentiful Australia is as a nation, and how incredible the conditions really are. They have confided that as soon as they landed at Melbourne airport and came out of the plane they felt very relieved, being back in a proper civilization (*laughter*). So to put things into perspective it seems to help to go to places like India.

I think we had better get into our meditation now. Thus to engage in meditation now, we readjust or reassess our physical posture to be upright and relaxed, and likewise with our mental state which is of most importance. So with our mental state we need to generate a feeling of a fresh and clear state of mind to try to overcome the state of dullness. Within the fresh and attentive state of mind, we intentionally withdraw all our attention and focus from external and internal distractions of thoughts and so forth. We bring our full attention and focus inward within oneself, and then having brought our attention and focus inwards, then we place it upon the object of focus on in our meditation, which is our own breath. So by bringing a mental image of the breath to mind we keep our focus on the breath itself and maintain our attention completely on the breath for the next few minutes. So in this way we will spend the next few minutes in meditation. (*Pause for meditation*)

So that will be sufficient for now? Any questions from anyone? Raise your hand?

*Question:* Can chanting be a form of meditation?

*Response:* There is a common saying in our tradition, which is: 'while reciting profound words, think about the profound meaning'. That is the appropriate practice. What is being explained is that whatever form it may be, maybe verses or formulae which have great meaning in themselves, when we actually engaged in the practice of chanting them, then that becomes a very good means for us to further develop our focus. If one actually can chant some verses from a certain text by heart, then that actually more effective as one need not be distracted by

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trying to read from a book. So if one does have them by heart, then as one chants them one can actually pay full attention and focus on the meaning of those words that one is chanting. And that becomes a really profound way to actually meditate upon the text. So even though we can still read it from the text and keep a certain amount of focus, we traditionally memorize it, because then it is easier for us to not have to relate to the external factor of reading. By chanting from memory, you can think about the meaning at the same time.

If one has a good voice or a good melody it can actually inspire others as well, and bring joy to them. I encourage those who have a good chanting voice to actually engage in that practice, because with a good motivation and a good intention, it can really inspire and bring joy to others. I personally feel that it is actually a good practice. On certain occasions when I have gone into a church I have heard the chanting and even though I don't understand the meaning of the words, I like listening to the chanting as it seems to bring some sort of good state of mind within myself. I really appreciate and enjoy that melody and chanting, as it does do something to me.

As a practice of meditation we can use a good melody or chant that captivates us, as an object of focus. We can use this melody to temporarily and intentionally fade out all other distractions and so keep just our mind on the sound or melody of the chant. In that way it is actually an appropriate practice of meditation, as it is focusing, single-pointedly on an object.

*Question:* Along the lines of the previous question, in terms of chanting on a different level, more on that level of the sound, I am wondering if that has a physical benefit as well?

*Response:* A clear sign of how it does relate to us on a sensory level is that when we listen to certain kinds of melodies or chants, it may even cause our hairs to stand on end, and it may bring tears to our eyes. So this is an external sign. So anything which actually inspires the mind will also naturally have a profound effect on our physical body as well, because of the relationship between the mind and body. So, by all means we can definitely experience and feel that as well.

Any further questions? Following the questions what we actually do at the end of our session is a bit of chanting which is the chanting of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra, the name mantra. So while that is being chanted, we again go into meditative state of mind. However, this time the object to focus on is actually the sound itself. So temporarily we try to cut off all other thoughts and all other preoccupations, and just keep our full attention and focus just on the sound of the mantra itself. And then try to maintain that focus for a while and then in that way we engage in the practice.

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