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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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We can spend some time for meditation as usual. Adopting an appropriate meditation posture is not enough; we need to make sure that we also contain our undisciplined mind, a mind that is always distracted. We need to contain that unruly mind. It is for our own well-being that we make an effort to contain our distracted mind, and withdraw from all distracting influences. Otherwise, if we allow our mind to be continuously distracted and agitated, that is what causes us distress and unhappiness. There may be times in our life when we feel content and happy, especially when we have good external conditions, such as plenty of food, good shelter and so forth. However, as soon as we go a little bit deeper, beyond that the surface, we will notice that we feel a little unsettled. In particular, there are times when we may feel a bit lonely or unhappy, as if something is missing in our life. When we look deeper, we find that our mind is not really content and happy; so what we are lacking is a joyful state of mind.

There are meditation techniques we can use to contain our mind, to bring our focus inwards, which will distance our mind from the distractions around us. However, it is also necessary for us to be realistic about our approach in meditation. There are no quick results. We need to have a realistic approach where we allow ourselves time for transformation to take place; we need to be patient with our practice. There will be no results merely with a few attempts as it is not that easy to overcome a distracted mind.

Results won't occur within a few days or few weeks or even few months, but if we engage in the meditation practice year after year, then we will begin to notice that some transformation definitely takes place. A steady transformation over a long period of time is sustainable and stable.

We need to integrate meditation into our life so that it becomes our life long commitment. The meditation practices involve techniques and methods to develop a clear state of mind, which in turn leads to a more joyful, happy mind, and ultimately a genuinely kind mind. These states of mind are extremely valuable – they are the best companions we can ever have in life. But in order to maintain these positive states of mind, it is not enough to think, 'Oh, I will engage in some meditation practice to be calm and peaceful for short while'. Likewise thinking that 'I will be kind for a short period of time', this is not the sort of attitude to adopt. Instead, we should see the practice as a companion for our entire life. This means that we need to constantly remind ourselves, and constantly encourage ourselves to keep practising to

achieve a firm positive state of mind. A good attitude and meditation practice brings about a clear, calm state of mind. I stress again, this positive state of mind is the most valuable thing that we can ever invest in. So, it is important that we cultivate and protect whatever positive mind we already have.

The value of following a meditation practice is something we may not take much notice of in our normal everyday life, especially when things are going relatively well. However, some people have confided in me that in times of difficulties in life such as a grave illness, when everything seems to fall apart, then this is when they see how valuable the practice is. The value of mediation in our tradition, or any other religion that offers such practices, become apparent during difficult times in ones life, such as when we face great problems. For example, for those who believe in a creator God such as in the Christian tradition, face a difficulty in life, such as a grave illness, their faith in God is further deepened and enhanced. At a time when nothing external works and everything seems to fall apart, this is the time when people find real solace in God. Apparently someone with a strong faith in God comes to a point of entrusting themselves entirely to God. They feel that whatever befalls them it is in God's will; they completely accept whatever God offers them. They trust that God will look after them in good and bad times. This reliance on God seems to help people at times of great difficulty. The practices and the teachings that are offered in every tradition come down to the point of benefiting others in times of difficulty and distress. So, if we engage in the practice now, then it will definitely help us especially at times of difficulties.

The main point that I am stressing in relation to the practice of meditation is that meditation comes down to familiarising our mind with positive attitudes and good behaviour. If we train correctly and protect these positive attitudes in our life, then this will be of great value to us.

Good attitudes are based on love and compassion. Developing a sense of love and compassion within ourselves and further cultivating and protecting that sense of love and compassion is the best attitude that we can develop. These attitudes become a great solace for us in life.

In cultivating and further developing a positive state of mind, such as love and compassion, we need to also recognise the negative states of mind that oppose the positive ones. While we all have the potential to develop the positive qualities within ourselves, there are also the obstructing negative states of mind that oppose those positive potentials within ourselves too. By recognising the negative states of mind, such as ignorance, we can try to overcome them, particularly distractions towards meaningless activities. We need to overcome these distractions. We do this through the practice of meditation, where we withdraw our mind from external distractions. We need to be completely committed to this by bringing our focus inwards. We need to train ourselves to be committed in maintaining our focus on the chosen object.

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The great master Shantideva mentioned that a mind that is engulfed in the darkness of ignorance is a mind that does not have any strength or stamina to really engage in any meaningful activity. If we want to engage in a meaningful activity, then we must overcome the darkness or the ignorance in our mind. This is when we gain the strong potential and positive energy within our mind.

The analogy is that if the body is sick, then it becomes weak and cannot function properly. Similarly, when the mind is affected by the darkness of ignorance, it cannot function properly.

When we consider the practice of meditation in this life, then we begin to see the benefits. It is important for us to acknowledge the negative state of mind that is engulfed by ignorance and distractions. Particularly considering that such a mind is very fragile; when we allow our mind to be influenced by distractions it leads us into engaging in so many kinds of meaningless activities and will cause conflict and distress within ourselves. Thus, it is important to withdraw our mind from distractions and develop a more attentive and focused mind. If there was any benefit from a distracted mind, then we could rightly let ourselves remain in a distracted state of mind and carry on in life. But when we begin to acknowledge the destructions of a distracted mind, then it becomes appropriate to pay attention to developing a more attentive and focused mind.

As I emphasise regularly, we need to pay attention to reversing our focus on objects that cause us distress. First, we identify the objects or situations that cause us distress; then we avoid the focus by not paying attention to the object. We may think that we have to get rid of the object, but there is no end to the objects that distract us, and there is no end to situations that cause us distress. So it is not the actual situation or object that we ought to destroy, but rather we need to use the meditation methods and techniques to help us not focus on an object or situation that causes us distress. This is something that we can manage. We need to meditate if we want to successfully distance ourselves from distressing objects and situations.

So having explained the importance and the necessity for practising meditation, we will now spend some time in meditation. Let us readjust our physical posture and also have a good motivation for doing the practice. As mentioned earlier, we must make a strong commitment to completely withdraw our attention from objects that cause us distress. We might have a particular object or situation that as soon as we think about causes us mental distress. So we must completely withdraw our attention from the distressing object and resolve that until unless we reverse our focus, we will never be settled and content in our mind. If we regularly meditate by completely withdrawing our attention from whatever causes us distress, then due to that familiarity we will eventually be able to shift our focus from the object that causes us distress. This is how we will be free from the condition that causes distress.

We will try to develop a full attention; a one hundred per cent focus within ourselves. Initially, just make an attempt to bring your focus inwards by developing state of mind where you are not focused on any particular

object or situation; completely bringing your focus inwards. Even for this short time we can feel a sense joy within our mind. We feel a sense of relief in our mind because the mind is being freed from the grip of focusing on a distressing object. However, since it is difficult for beginners to remain in a state of not focusing on anything for too long, we need to choose an appropriate object to focus on when we meditate, which in this case is our own breath. So, try to maintain your focus on the breath for the next couple of minutes.

*[meditation]*

When we are feeling totally depressed then we might feel like everything is lost for a while; we might find nothing is really working. This is when we might try to meditate. But we also need to meditate when things are going well and we are happy, because we are already in a good state of mind and we are more productive so we can meditate better.

We may have been prompted to engage in the practice of meditation when things were not going so well for us. But when things start to get better, and we give up the practice because we are under the illusion that everything is fine now, then that is when the real danger begins.

If we can continue with the practice of meditation when we are feeling content and happy, then the practice becomes stronger. We will find that we progress steadily. Whereas if we attempt to meditate when we are feeling too distressed, the mind can become dull. The consequence of meditating when we are feeling too depressed or distressed is that, as we expect a quick result, we might start to think that the practice doesn't really help us; that it does not bring any positive result.

When we are in happy state of mind, we need to protect that happy state of mind. And it is meditation that can help protect a happy state of mind. The teachings explain how enlightenment is obtained in the state of meditative equipoise, and that a Buddha is in a perpetual state of meditative equipoise. This implies that in the state of meditation, a perpetual state of happiness can be maintained.

**4.2.2.1.2. The actual way to take the essence**

**4.2.2.1.2.3. The way to train the mind in the stages of the path of beings of the great scope**

**4.2.2.1.2.3.1. The link**

**4.2.2.1.2.3.1.1. It is illogical to disregard the welfare of others [even when seeking to] accomplish all of our own aims and thus from the very beginning one must enter the Mahayana path.**

Now to cover some points from the topic in the text; in our previous session, we completed the explanation on the practice of the medium scope being. Now we come to the practices of the great scope being.

The practices that are prescribed for the great scope being are the stages of the path for person of great capacity. The being with a great capacity refers to individual beings who have the great intention to benefit all other living beings. So for someone who has the inclination to develop a state of mind wishing to benefit all sentient beings, this person is called a 'person of great scope'.

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The description of a practitioner of a great scope, also known as the practitioner of the Mahayana path or Great Vehicle, is a person who has the altruistic intention of bodhichitta and who engages in the practice of the six perfections, such as the perfection of generosity and so forth. This is in line with the definition of someone who enters the great vehicle or the Mahayana path, i.e. a person who develops bodhichitta in their mind, is someone who has entered the great vehicle path.

The very outline that presents the great scope, shows how to train the mind. The stages of the path for a being of the great scope is subdivided into two - the link and the actual path. The link is subdivided into four subdivisions. The first of these four divisions of the link is: It is illogical to disregard the welfare of others [even when seeking to] accomplish all of our own aims and thus from the very beginning one must enter the Mahayana path. We can see from the outline itself that it is presented in a logical, systematic way. As described in this outline, in order to accomplish our own aims we must not discard the welfare of others. From this presentation there is a great point to be understood.

The point to be understood is that if we work for the welfare of others, then our own goals, our own wishes will be fulfilled naturally. When we think about it, the welfare of others is important because others are important. They are important because they help to fulfil our own wishes. A mundane example is that if we had a wish to become wealthy, then we have to rely on someone else who has wealth so that we can earn from them. Likewise, if we want a good career or a good job, then we need to have the knowledge and need to have studied to gain that knowledge. So, we depend on someone else who has the knowledge to teach us. It is only by relying on others that we can actually gain any knowledge. Whatever we wish for is all dependent on others; others who have the means or qualities that can fulfil our wishes. There is no way to gain anything for ourselves without relying on others.

However, we need to understand that bodhisattvas are great noble beings who have the welfare of others as their main interest. They are completely devoted to working for the happiness of other sentient beings. This can also be understood from the term 'the great vehicle', which means someone who has the capacity to take upon the responsibility of the welfare of other beings.

In contrast to the great vehicle, people who engage in the practice of what we call 'the lower vehicle' or 'the lesser vehicle' are concerned more for their own welfare and are aiming for self-liberation rather than liberating all beings. But these lower vehicle practices are still incredible practices. People who have the intention to engage in practises primarily to benefit themselves are lesser in capacity. Even in the worldly context, someone who is concerned for other's welfare is considered to be a righteous and a good person compared to someone who is always thinking about themselves. So, even from the worldly perspective we favour a more generous and selfless person.

Again from the worldly perspective, when someone goes out of their way to help others, they are held in high

esteem. And there is a reason why they are held in high esteem, that is because they are seen as being more valuable to society than a selfish person.

Even when we are seeking to accomplish our own aims, it is illogical, even in a worldly sense, to disregard the welfare of others. When the text says, 'when seeking to accomplish one's own aims, one must not disregard the welfare of others' it is in relation to not giving up the sense of love and compassion towards others. According to this tradition, in order to fulfil our own aims, which is to achieve the state of enlightenment, we need to develop love and compassion towards others. This point needs to be understood.

In our next session we can go through the actual explanation that is given under this outline.

Before we conclude the session for the evening, we can again spend a few minutes in contemplation. The object to focus on in our meditation will be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. Try to maintain full attention and focus on the sound of the mantra. When the recitation stops, we just try to maintain that focus in our mind on the sound of the mantra. Just withdrawing our mind from all distractions again, we focus on the mantra.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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