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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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One of the aims of meditation is to gain control over our mind. As the great Sakya Pandita mentioned, having control over our mind is the cause for happiness. If our mind is controlled by negativities, then this is the cause for suffering. As this great master indicated, when we don't have control over our mind, and when we allow negativity to influence and control our mind, then that's when we feel disturbances and unhappiness in the mind. Whereas when we have real control and freedom within our mind, then that is the basis of being happy. Having control of the mind is the supreme method to gain supreme bliss in our mind.

If we find that we aren't able to keep our mind focused on anything in particular and it is always distracted, then this is a clear sign that we have not yet gained control over our mind; we have not subdued our mind. In the teachings it has been mentioned that having control and subduing our mind means that there will be a serviceability of mind, where we gain the natural ability to use our mind to accumulate virtue. If we lack either of these, then there is turmoil in our mind.

The disadvantage of an unfocused mind is something that we can all relate to. Most people often complain that their mind is never really focused and settled. When we realise that, then it is worthwhile to question what techniques are available to gain a focused mind. If we just complain about having an unfocused and scattered mind but don't do anything about it, then there is not much benefit.

What is the reason for a scattered and unfocused mind? A mind that is not inwardly focused, a mind that is allowed to be influenced by external distractions, is the cause for our mind to become completely scattered.

The example of a scattered mind given in the teaching is like a monkey. In the explanation of the twelve interdependent links, the third link is the consciousness or mind and is represented by a monkey. If we have a mind like a monkey, it means we have a very busy mind. A monkey jumps everywhere, and cannot settle even in one place for a short time, jumping from one branch to another. Thus a mind which is like a monkey is scattered all the time. If you look inward and find that your mind is scattered and is never really settled, then you need to think about how an unfocused and unsettled mind is the cause for all the problems in your life. Whatever we want to do in life, whether it is a worldly endeavour such as work, study or business or whether it is spiritual endeavour, such as practising meditation, a scattered mind creates obstacles that prevent us from achieving a good result. When we recognise that, we will develop a

strong, keen wish to develop a focused mind. We begin to realise that unless we develop a focused mind, our life will not be meaningful, and we won't achieve any good results.

At this point we develop an interest in finding a technique to help us develop a focused mind. This technique involves maintaining a focus within ourselves, not allowing the mind to be influenced by distractions, and keeping our mind focussed inwards. Understanding our mind and how it functions is the impetus for us to develop this inner focus. Unless we understand our own mind and how it functions, we do not really develop a keen interest in developing a firm inner focus. This is because we may think that our mind is fine, but there are so many things going on in our mind, sometimes frivolous and ridiculous thoughts. If we spoke aloud about whatever goes on in our mind, or if we told someone else, most people would think that we are crazy. But that is the state of our mind. Our mind is active with frivolous and meaningless thoughts. There is a lot of chatter going on in our mind, and if we were to verbalise all of that, people will definitely think we have gone crazy. This is the state of our mind when we honestly look into ourselves.

How does our state of mind influence our well-being? How does a positive state of mind influence us? How does it benefit us and others? On the other hand, when we have a negative state of mind, how does that influence us? How does that influence our actions, our thoughts and speech? What is the self? What is the self when I refer to 'me'? When we check out our state of mind, who do we consider ourselves to be? This type of investigation brings us closer to the reality of ourselves because we are going deeper than the surface of who we normally think we are, or others think we are. We are going further and looking deeper into ourselves. This becomes the impetus to develop a wish to have a focused mind.

By sincerely engaging in this regular self-analysis and self-investigation, the result is that we come to recognise for ourselves the distinction between the positive and the negative states of mind. This is something that others don't need to point out to us, but something that should be clear to us. We understand that a positive state of mind is useful to us as well as others, and a negative state of mind is destructive. When we begin to clearly see what is constructive and beneficial for ourselves and others, then we will naturally want to do anything possible to encourage a constructive state of mind. And we naturally want to minimise and avoid negative and destructive mental states. We will voluntarily want to do this when we see the benefits; others don't need to prompt us. Furthermore, we don't need to waste our time with finding fault in others, lecturing them and trying to correct them. Instead, we can take on the responsibility of transforming our own mind by developing it in a constructive way. The resulting positive state of mind will then inspire and benefit others as well.

I know a couple who have a strong relationship; however one of them often told me that their partner was short tempered and gets angry and upset easily. One day I asked him directly, 'how about you, do you get angry at

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all, do you get upset at all?' He reflected a bit and said, 'well, actually I do get upset and angry'. This was helpful for the person to start looking within themselves rather than always blaming the other person. We often find people talking about their companion or partner as being short-tempered and getting angry easily. However if we are also short tempered and get angry, then constantly accusing the other of being short tempered is not fair or honest, because it is as if we are denying our own angry state of mind. To think that it is okay for us but not okay for others is hypocritical and not fair. If we are completely calm and peaceful and say that the other person is constantly upset and angry, then that might be fair. The point here is to look within ourselves before pointing the finger at other people. We need to look at our own state of mind and work on transforming our own mind first.

When we notice anger and a short temper in someone else, in a partner or companion, and if we see that as unpleasant, then we can also examine our own behaviour and realise that we are also unpleasant when we are upset and angry. Again, to accuse others of being angry and unpleasant when we are the same is not fair. We can use the unpleasantness we observe in others by realising that we too are sometimes like that and this can inspire us to take the initiative to transform our own mind. When we can maintain inner stability, then we have made a difference; real inner transformation can begin to take place.

Self=analysis and self=investigation also help us to understand others better as well. For example, when we reach the point of acknowledging that the state of mind of anger is unpleasant and that it is also a negative state of mind that is destructive, particularly in relation to ourselves, we may yet find that we don't have much control when we are in angry state of mind. Anger is a powerful force that influences us to do and say things that are unpleasant and destructive, which leads to negative consequences. When strong anger arises, it completely influences us to say or do things that are inappropriate. Even though we acknowledge and understand anger is not useful, we are still influenced by anger. We say and do things that are inappropriate when we are in a strong angry state of mind. But if we notice that within ourselves, then we can use that as a basis to understand the behaviour of others when they are angry.

So when they say something inappropriate or unpleasant, we understand that they are influenced by anger. It is not the person themselves who is entirely bad and negative, but it is their state of mind that is influencing them to do and say things that are inappropriate and unpleasant. Understanding others is an important tool in our life for maintaining sanity and equilibrium in our mind. It also helps us to have understanding of others; this is crucial to maintaining a good relationship with others. The good relationship comes when we can practice patience with others when they are upset and angry. So when others are upset and angry and say things which are inappropriate or unpleasant, rather than getting upset and angry, because of our own experience we understand and acknowledge that they are saying those things out of negative state of mind of anger, that they are influenced

by anger; they don't have control over what they say and do, and they are actually feeling unhappy themselves. So rather than getting angry and feeling upset, we can develop compassion for them. The great compassionate teacher Buddha Shakyamuni mentioned that it is the delusions which are at fault, not the person. When we can practice patience with a sense of genuine understanding, concern and love for others, then our relationship with them—partner, companions or friends—will be maintained. This is one of the main techniques and tools for maintaining a happy life.

All our faults and mistakes that we make in our life come from a distracted mind. Meditation is an appropriate technique to help make our mind focus inwards and maintain our focus inwards. Our mind becomes firm and stable and controlled to a point where it will not easily be influenced by the distractions and delusions; what we call the negative states of mind. Thus, the meditation technique is one of the most essential tools in our life.

Furthermore, as we develop and apply meditation techniques into our life, we begin to develop a firm inner focus that will stabilise our mental state to the extent that even when we go into the outside world where there are a lot of distractions, our mind will not become distracted and influenced by them.

Of course, this will not come about immediately or even easily. We need to apply constant effort to maintain an inner focus in our meditation. During meditation, if we have a strong sense of commitment, our mind will not be influenced by distractions and we maintain a sense of equilibrium and a focused state of mind.

But for us beginners, as soon as we come out of the meditation and then go out again to interact with the outside world, our mind immediately becomes influenced by the distractions that we see and hear outside. The point is, that if we apply the meditation technique regularly, and when it starts to become part of our everyday life to integrate with our being, then we can reach a point of maintaining a firm and stable mind without being influenced by external distractions. We may perceive the distractions, we might hear and see or smell, or interact with those distractions, but they will not affect or disturb us—that's the main point.

But again I warn you that that does not come about immediately. So if meditation does not work immediately, this is not a reason to give up the meditation technique, thinking that it doesn't work. Instead, we should be encouraged to gain experience during short meditation sessions. The point is to apply the technique gradually in our everyday life.

First of all, we need to develop a strong sense of commitment to engage fully in meditation. We make a commitment to withdraw our mind from any kind of external distraction or internal thought, not allowing our mind to be influenced by any kind of thought. We bring the focus of our mind inwards; imagine just withdrawing within ourselves. We experience a sense of inner tranquillity and stability. However, as beginners we are not able to maintain an inner focus without focusing on a particular object. If we notice that our focus is beginning to wane and we are beginning to get distracted, then we

focus on the breath; we use the breath to anchor our attention and focus. We maintain our focus on our breath by just observing the breath coming in and going out naturally, keeping our mind constantly on the breath, reminding ourselves of the inflow and outflow of the breath again and again. Just bring our focus back again and again to the breath. The practice of being mindful of the breath is profound practice. It is the beginning of a practice where we can develop the calm abiding mind, a single pointed concentration. By being mindful of our breath and constantly bringing our mind back to the breath again and again, and keeping it there as much as possible, is a profound technique.

*[meditation]*

#### **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 when seeking to accomplish one's own aims and thus, from the very beginning one must enter the Mahayana path**

###### **4.2.2.1.2.3.1.2. Working for the welfare and benefit of others**

We are up to the second subdivision from an earlier category, which is the link of how to train the mind in the stages of the great scope – working for the welfare and benefit of others.

A great being, also known as a noble being or bodhisattva, is committed to taking responsibility for the welfare of all other beings. Someone who has this commitment is noble or great; a being of the great scope or great path. If we want to follow the path of a noble being, then we should be inspired by their joy, charisma and strength so we can shoulder the responsibility of others' welfare. Whatever joy we have within ourselves, or any charisma or strength that we may have, rather than using it for our own benefit, we can use our good qualities to benefit other sentient beings. As the text explains, it is befitting for a noble being to use these qualities towards the welfare of other sentient beings. Focusing only your own welfare is no different than what most animals do.

The fundamental orientation of a great person is to focus solely on achieving the happiness and benefit of others. Lama Tsongkapa quotes from another great master's text, called *Letter to a Student*,

*Domestic animals eat a mouthful of easily found grass,  
And when tormented by great thirst, they happily drink  
water they find.  
Here, those who make an effort at working for the  
welfare of others,  
Do so out of charisma, joy, and surpassing strength.*

Domestic animals such as cows and other kind of cattle can easily find enjoyment in a mouthful of grass somewhere. And when tormented by great thirst, they happily drink water they find. This quote from the text is pointing out the demarcation between a human and an animal, particularly with a human being who has taken up the responsibility of working for others' welfare, i.e. a

noble being or follower of the great path. Those who make an effort to work for the welfare of others, use their great charisma, joy and strength. While even animals can effectively sustain themselves and make themselves happy and joyful with a little food and drink, a great noble being will use whatever charisma, strength or joy they have solely for the benefit of other sentient beings, lacking any self-interest for themselves.

A noble being is considered to be a great being because they use whatever qualities they have, such as charisma, joy and strength, solely to bring about benefit for other sentient beings. This includes the temporary benefits of making others comfortable and joyful, but their main aim is to bring ultimate happiness to sentient beings. A noble being is someone who is committed to bringing about temporary happiness as well as ultimate happiness for living beings. Someone who has that altruistic state of mind and engages in activities towards that end is indeed someone who can be considered noble and great. The words noble and great have the connotation of having something extraordinary. Compared to ordinary beings, they are considered great and noble because of the noble intentions they have, as well as the noble deeds they perform. These are the qualities of a bodhisattva.

As His Holiness the Dalai Lama points out, an example of a noble being is Mother Theresa. And when we take note of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and how he conducts his teachings and the advice he gives, we notice that he always considers himself a lowly person, saying 'I am just a simple Buddhist monk and I don't have many qualities'. And in that same breath we hear him praise others who have done great deeds and who are great. This is how His Holiness the Dalai Lama behaves in his daily life.

Before we conclude the session for the evening, we can again spend a few minutes in meditation, this time the focus of our meditation is the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra. As we hear the sound of the mantra, we try to maintain a focus just on the sound that we hear. When the recitation stops, we try to maintain a focus the residue of that sound for awhile.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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