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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual, we will spend sometime in meditation. For that purpose, we will sit in a relaxed and comfortable position. Likewise the mind needs to be in a relaxed state. It needs to be clear and fresh. Indeed it is essential that, as we adopt a comfortable relaxed physical posture, we pay attention to the state of our mind to make sure that we have a clear, fresh state of mind. We should also try to increase the intelligence of the mind along with a genuine, kind attitude towards others. This is something essential that we need to pay attention to.

The reason why we need to pay attention to the particular state of mind imbued with kindness is because a positive state of mind is the basis for us to have real joy and happiness in our life. A state of mind imbued with kindness means that we cultivate kindness in whatever we do, that is when we are sitting somewhere, when we are going somewhere, when we associate with others and when we go to bed. At every time throughout the day until the end of the day we try to maintain a sense of kindness and concern for others. If we pay attention to cultivating kindness within oneself at all times, our minds will naturally become imbued with kindness.

As I mention regularly, cultivating such a kind attitude in one's life becomes an unailing companion. When we make sure to generate a kind attitude within oneself, our state of mind will always be protected. In difficult times a kind attitude will come to our aid to lift up our spirit. At all other times, whenever a difficulty arises, it's this kind attitude that will come to our aid and help us. That is why I consider the kind attitude as a real treasure and an ultimate means of protection for oneself.

As we recognise the great value of a kind attitude then we will develop the inclination to cultivate and develop it further. The technique that allows us to do that is the practice of meditation. From this we can also see the importance of meditation, as it serves as a means to familiarise ourselves with the kind attitude thus developing and strengthening kindness further

We can further define the kind attitude as a state of mind of love and compassion. Familiarising ourselves with love and compassion becomes the means not only to protect our sense of joy and happiness as we lead our daily lives now, but it becomes the ultimate aid and protection at the very end of our lives when we all eventually have to experience the death process. That is something we all have to experience. We need to try to secure the practice that we do during our lives for it to become the ultimate means of protection and aid for us at the time of death. That is also a goal. Thus, love and compassion is something that will assist us at a most

crucial time of our existence as we transcend to the next life.

In our everyday life we will find that whenever we engage in the practice of meditation we get immediate relief from the disturbances and distractions in our mind. Particularly when it is related to a kind attitude, i.e. love and compassion, we will find that meditation gives us immediate relief, a tranquil and peaceful mind. Gauging from that experience it is natural that we will want to familiarise ourselves with this technique of meditation to further develop and cultivate love and compassion. This is the familiarity that I mentioned earlier. Familiarity comes with constantly trying to be aware of love and compassion. We can do this when we are sitting by ourselves, when we are walking and going about doing our everyday work, and when we go to sleep. We can sleep with love and compassion. If we familiarise ourselves with love and compassion in this way at all times then, due to that familiarity, it will be completely natural that at the time of death we will be able to die with a sense of love and compassion in our hearts. That will then naturally bring about a sense of real ease and peace in our mind.

This is why I regularly emphasise to my friends, my associates and those people that I have a connection with during the teachings and classes, that developing and familiarising oneself with love and compassion is essential. It may be that some people may feel, 'I have practised meditation in my life, but I wonder what I need to do when I face death. I wonder what I have to do. How I should prepare myself for that?' We need not have any doubt about how to prepare ourselves for death if we have constantly cultivated love and compassion in our daily lives.

Another point to consider as a benefit of meditation is that in our everyday life it seems that most of us are affected by a very disturbed, busy mind. Because of the constant 'busyness' in our lives there are times when things become chaotic and that leads to a sense of disturbance in our mind where it becomes very agitated. Most of us are affected in that way and we wonder how we can possibly do something to appease the state of our mind.

When we adopt a meditation technique where we focus single-pointedly on a chosen object and we keep our entire focus on that object; this meditation technique causes all of the distractions, chaotic states of mind and disturbances to subside. We experience immediate relief and it is as if the mind gets a good rest from all the disturbances and the busy states of mind. As you would notice through your meditation, that is definitely something that you experience.

When one gains and experiences a relaxed state of mind through the meditation technique, naturally that would have a positive effect on our physical body as well. Our physical body will naturally be in a relaxed state. If we allow our mind to remain in that chaotic, busy and disturbed state we will find that we are unable to relax physically. Some people are not able to sleep well. When night comes and it is an appropriate time to go to bed

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there are people who are not able to sleep. This is because their mind is very disturbed and full of anxiety.

The main point is, if we put the meditation technique into practice then as it brings about a relaxed state of mind it definitely has a positive effect on our physical well-being as well. When we are both mentally and physically relaxed we are really in a relaxed state. There are those who confide in me that the practice of meditation has really benefited them. Initially when I taught the techniques of meditation to people I would have to constantly mention the benefits of meditation to encourage people to meditate. But as people have actually put it into practice, there are some students now who tell me about the benefits themselves. Some students tell me that when their mind is very disturbed and they engage in few minutes of meditation regularly in the morning, it really helps them to settle down. Some mention it in such a way as if to remind me to meditate as well!

In adopting the practice of meditation, one may initially choose to focus on whatever object one feels comfortable with. The main point is to try to develop single-pointed concentration. That is the main point. Whatever technique one may adopt for developing single-pointed concentration, it needs to come with ease and a relaxed manner. One should not have a tense concentration but rather a concentration that contributes to a genuinely relaxed state of mind. The main point that I am emphasising is that what we need to try to gain for ourselves is a relaxed state of mind that will contribute to a relaxed state of physical being. A relaxed state of mind that comes from a genuine sense of love and compassion within one's heart combined with a positive kind attitude within oneself leads to a relaxed body. That combination is most beneficial for us.

Thus it is worthwhile for us to try to learn the technique. We need to remind ourselves to actually put the technique that brings those results for us into practice. Otherwise, even though we instinctively wish to have a peaceful and happy state of mind, if we don't pay attention to what can bring that about, we may be engaged in a lot of other things on a physical level and instead of feeling relaxed and peaceful in our minds we might start feeling tense. The tension in the mind can also lead to feeling tense in our body and this is where people have to visit a physiotherapist and get massages and other treatments. One can actually feel quite tense in one's shoulders and one's back. This comes from a tense mind.

One begins with a technique that is simple and easy to follow. As we familiarise oneself with this simple technique of meditation then slowly and gradually we will be able to further develop our meditation technique so that it is even more subtle and profound.

Whatever object we choose to focus on, even though initially we may not entirely comprehend the benefits of the technique, we will definitely still get the benefits. If we just keep our focus and try not to think too much about the purpose of meditation, we can actually gain some positive experience from that and then we can go further. The point is, even though we may not yet have a

full understanding of the ramifications of the practice or a full understanding of our own mind, the mere fact of having adopted the technique of meditation and maintaining a focus inward will bring some benefit.

As we adopt that and make it part of our regular daily practice, the understanding of our own mind will start to become clearer and clearer. One will be able to clearly identify that a distracted mind is what causes turmoil and anxiety in our mind. We will begin to notice that the distracted state of mind is our own doing to the extent that we allow ourselves to be in a distracted state. That distracted mind, a mind that is full of different plots and ideas and keeping busy going in circles, is something that we contribute our time and energy to. When we clearly identify and recognise that as being a cause for the disturbance and anxiety within us then we will naturally begin to reduce paying attention to that and reduce giving time and energy to the distractions. Then we will begin to let go of distractions and slowly become more and more in tune with the more subtle and calm state of our mind. In this way we will get the real benefits of the practice and we will begin to develop our meditation technique even further to become subtler and subtler.

The manner in which we go deeply into meditation and into a more subtle level of meditation relates to the level of concentration and focus that we can place on to the meditation object that we are focussing on. There are those who say that when they reflect upon the more subtle level of the mind or subtle consciousness, they can recall subtle memories going back a few years or even going back many years to when they are quite young. One can even go back to memories of past lives. There are those who comment about how that seems possible. Likewise even with our state of mind now there are different levels we can go on to and connect with. The subtlest levels come with concentration.

Having described some of the benefits and techniques of meditation we can now come to our actual practice of meditation. We need to develop a commitment to doing the practice and the object that we choose to focus on here is on our breath. Firstly we remind ourselves to have a relaxed, upright and comfortable posture and then we try to generate a relaxed, clear, fresh state of mind. Within that clear and bright state of mind we make the commitment to temporarily withdraw from all distractions that includes all forms of thoughts and all forms of ideas. Temporarily we just forget about them all, whether they are good thoughts or bad thoughts. We try not to discern or make any distinctions between good thoughts and bad thoughts and just completely withdraw from all forms of distractions and bring the focus inwards. This initially means we are not focussing on anything in particular. As we reach that point it will be difficult for us to maintain a completely blank state of mind for too long, so we use the breath as an object to focus on. We place our focus and attention upon our breath and maintain a hundred percent focus on the breath itself. We will maintain the focus in that way for the next few minutes. (*Pause for meditation.*)

That will be sufficient for now. I will go through a few lines from the text.

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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  
4.2.2.1.2.3.1.3. Toiling and persevering in order to provide refuge for others from suffering is fitting of a noble man, and scholars

In our last session we were covering the topic, 'What is it that qualifies a person to be called a person of great capacity, an adept or scholar. The text from Master Chandragomin's *Letter to a Student* reads:

*Those who see beings disturbed by the smoke cloud of ignorance that enshrouds the world,  
Helplessly fallen into the blazing fire of suffering,  
And hastily make efforts as if their own heads were on fire,  
Are here called 'great persons' and 'adepts'.*

The connotation of the 'world' in this context is firstly the sentient beings who dwell in the world. These ordinary living beings dwell in existence and their existence is clouded by ignorance. The analogy to ignorance is a dark cloud or smoky substance.

One of the connotations of what is translated here as 'living beings' is translated in some other texts as 'migrators'. Living beings are like migrators, which in this context means that due to the mind being enshrouded with ignorance, living beings will involuntarily migrate from one samsaric existence to the next. This is why they are referred to as the migrators. They go from one existence to the next.

The text also mentions the 'disturbed state of mind'. The disturbed state of mind refers to the mind being enshrouded by ignorance and disturbed by the delusions. Because their mind is enshrouded by ignorance and disturbed by delusions living beings have 'helplessly fallen into the blazing fire of suffering'. 'Helplessly' has the connotation that without any wish to suffer, one is helpless due to the ignorance and the delusions and has no choice but to endure the sufferings.

The 3rd line of this verse is, 'and hastily make efforts as if their own heads were on fire, are here called "great persons" and "adepts"'. This is relating back to those individuals who see beings disturbed by clouds of ignorance that enshroud the world. 'Helplessly fallen into the blazing fire of suffering' refers to the various types of suffering that are experienced by ordinary living beings without any choice. Seeing and understanding that situation, great people and adepts hastily make efforts as if their own heads were on fire. The analogy use here is that if someone's head is on fire there is no time wasted in putting it out. One would not remain idle and just let it be. Rather one would take every measure to put out the fire on one's head. So just as that would be done hastily, the analogy is that those beings react immediately when they see the condition of living beings in cyclic existence who are experiencing suffering without any choice. 'Without any choice' relates to the reality of living beings experiencing the sufferings.

We can take ourselves as an example. Each and every one of us would not wish to involuntarily experience any suffering, discomfort or problems in life. We all would

not involuntarily wish for that. Nevertheless we experience problems and difficulties and various types of disturbances in our lives even though we do not wish for it. Using ourselves as an analogy, we know for a fact that we do not wish to experience any level of suffering yet we don't have any control of it. Just by wishing not to experience it does not prevent us from experiencing those sufferings. We experience them without a choice, without a wish for it. Like that, there are countless other living beings who experience suffering to a much greater extent without any choice.

The being who can see that suffering is caused by disturbances of the mind, primarily by ignorance, thus wishes to immediately benefit those who are suffering, is called here a person of great capacity or an adept or scholar. That was also explained in our previous session. These are the qualities and criteria of someone called a great being or a person of great capacity.

What these passages are presenting are the means and ways to develop great love and compassion in one's heart. This is a description of the qualities of a being of great capacity or what is called a Mahayanist. Even at our level we can learn from this that relating to others' suffering can develop a sense of compassion that comes from an understanding of their unease or discomfort. What is presented here is the means to develop compassion and love towards others. Relating to their suffering develops a sense of sympathy and the wish for them not to experience that sort of suffering. Recognising their suffering and relating to the suffering instils in us a keen wish for them not to experience that.

What we can also understand is that relating to our own suffering, our own discomfort, can help us to understand others' sufferings. As related earlier, the cause of our disturbances or suffering is ultimately the various delusions in our mind. When anger arises and is manifested in our mind we immediately feel the negative consequences for ourselves. As we understand that uneasy discomfort within ourselves, we can relate it to others. When others are in an angry state of mind it brings about discomfort within them as well. Consequently, when we notice others in an angry state of mind we can develop a sense of sympathy and compassion rather than feeling upset. They are actually experiencing a level of discomfort and suffering.

As I have emphasised in the past, even though some of these practices may be of bodhisattvas who have the great capacity to benefit all sentient beings, at our level as ordinary beings, we can begin a similar practice of feeling sympathy and compassion for those that we associate with regularly such as are our partners, friends or companions. It is really important that we develop an understanding of when others are in discomfort and unease. This can help us develop compassion and patience in relation to their suffering. Our own experience can become something that can instil in us the wish to develop further compassion and love towards all beings.

As I mention regularly, developing a sense of love and compassion towards others is the basis for us to bring real

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benefit to others. A wish to benefit others comes from the sense of love and compassion towards others.

I have personal accounts of the value of this. In an earlier part of my life I was admitted to a hospital in Rajasthan in India with some other monks. One of the monks who was admitted to the hospital was a few years older than me. The type of disease that he contracted had symptoms of boils on his body. There was a lot of swelling. The swelling and boils on his body were so bad at this point that he was quite unrecognisable. It was similar to a story that was shown on TV recently about a woman who had bad boils on her body. The monk's condition was something like that. I recall he had very bad boils all over the body.

The doctors, having diagnosed his disease, said they had no medication that would cure him. We were informed he was expected to die soon and we were asked to pray for him.

Amongst the doctors there was a young lady doctor. She was quite young, very skilled and extremely kind. Her husband was a doctor too. Not only was she intelligent, skilled and kind but also very beautiful. People were referring to her as a goddess because she was so very beautiful. We learned that she was not only a doctor but a pharmacist as well. She had the skill of mixing medicines and working with medicines. This young doctor, having diagnosed the patient herself, said, 'There is a medication and there is a cure for this condition. I can go to another part of the city to get the medicine'. She used her own money.

Having prescribed the medication she took it upon herself to care for this older monk. She would come up to three times a day to check on him, even at night she came alone to check on the patient. The monk started to get better and better each day. Eventually he was completely cured of that disease.

The monk was completely cured and his health was restored back to his normal vitality and strength and he was able to continue with his normal activities. As he regained his strength he would do his practices and prayers as normal. He would often comment, 'Every time I do my prayers I dedicate my virtues to the long life and well-being of the lady doctor, particularly as she is the one who has made it possible for me to continue my life.' This is the monk who was given up by the other doctors and diagnosed with a disease that would be fatal. We were even asked to say prayers for him when he dies, but he actually lived for many more years. As I have said he was only a few years older than myself. At that time I was in my early thirties. He would have been about forty-one or forty-two then. He lived for many more years.

The point that I am making is that the great concern, love and compassion of this doctor helped the monk and saved him from the disease so that he could live a good fruitful life. This was all due to great love and compassion of the doctor taking care of him personally. So, when there is kindness and a genuine wish to benefit others you can actually help them. This is one incident, one story, that I have personally witnessed as an account of benefitting someone. So, you can benefit others.

Even animals respond to love and compassion shown towards them. We can take the example of someone who has pets. Pets respond very well to their owners. That is mainly because of the care the owner has for the pet. They respond and seem to listen and do whatever they are told by their owners.

I can relate one incident that I have seen for myself. When an owner of a pet was going into a store to buy something he told his dog to sit and wait till he came out. The dog obeyed and just sat without moving.

Another example of an animal responding to kindness is a story that I have told before. It involves a monk who was resident here in the past, Thubten Donyo. He used to give bread to the possum that came up to his window sill. Thubten Donyo had the habit of giving the possum a piece of bread in the evening. Before he gave the possum the piece of bread he would touch the top of the possum's head with the bread and then give it to the possum. After some time the possum learned, when shown a piece of bread, to put his head down before receiving it. This goes to show that animals have that response and they are intelligent as well. The possum seemed to learn that before he got the piece of bread he had to do the ritual of bowing his head down first.

The main point of relating these different stories is that there is value in genuine love and compassion expressed to others. The sense of well-being and connection becomes very strong when one invokes a genuine concern and compassion towards others. These stories are a way to illustrate the real value and benefit of expressing love and compassion. I am relating these stories as a way to remind you there is a great necessity for us to develop a genuine sense of love and compassion. The communication and connection that we have with others becomes really profound. A very nice warm feeling develops from a genuine sense of love and compassion.

Before we conclude for the evening, we will again spend a few minutes in meditation; this time we focus on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. We initially focus on the sound and when the mantra recitations stops we can try to maintain a sense of focus on the residue of that sound for a while. We can follow that technique to meditate.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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