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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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As I regularly emphasise, the main point of doing meditation practice is so that we can prevent our mind from being in a chaotic and negative state. As we notice for ourselves, as soon as the negative attitude arises we immediately feel discomfort, and we immediately feel unsettled within ourselves. So, it is worthwhile that we adopt the means to protect our mind from being in that state.

As we adopt the meditation technique and find that it is effective then through the process of meditation, we will begin to slowly notice more and more what kind of positive state of mind serves as antidote for overcoming particular negative states of mind.

The great significance of noticing for oneself, from one's own experience that there are antidotes, is that it will relieve us from feeling hopeless and depressed. You may feel that you are incapable of doing anything, feeling restricted and weighed down with a heavy mind, but you can relieve yourself of that feeling. Most of us get caught up in a situation where we either recall previous incidents, or as soon as things go wrong, we get into the habit of immediately feeling depressed and stuck.

In practising meditation if we can begin to understand that there is much more to meditation than just being able to focus single-pointedly, then we will start to get some real benefit. The most essential point to understand is that our happiness and well-being depends on transforming our own mind. It is not dependent on changing our religion or trying to find the best technique. That is not the point, it is really about transforming our own mind.

To recognise that our happiness and joy is dependent on transforming our negative state of mind into a positive state of mind, we can use the analogy of wearing uncomfortable shoes on our feet. If we keep wearing shoes that are uncomfortable, it becomes more and more painful regardless of how the shoes look. Just because we feel that 'these are my new shoes and they look good' we may insist on wearing them even though they are uncomfortable. Eventually we will not be able to walk properly as we will develop blisters, which can be very painful. So the way to make our feet comfortable is to actually remove the shoes and change them for more comfortable shoes, so that one can walk comfortably. If there were no other shoes available then of course one wouldn't have a choice, unless we resort to walking barefoot.

So in applying that analogy to the need for transforming our mind, if we begin to accept that allowing ourselves to be influenced by an angry state of mind causes us

disturbance, then it is most appropriate that we change our focus. Anger arises when we focus on an object that causes us to feel uncomfortable and upset. So if we keep focusing on that same object which then causes anger to arise, then to that extent we will keep experiencing unease and discomfort within oneself. The way to release us from the anger is by changing our focal object. If we begin to focus on an object that does not cause anger to arise, it can make us feel comfortable and joyful. When we focus on that particular object, it immediately releases us from anger and feeling upset. When we think about it in this way, we begin to realize that it is really a matter of changing our focus. It is a matter of actually applying the technique.

So in relation to what I mentioned earlier, we have an option to transform our mind, rather than remaining in a state of feeling heavy and depressed. That is done when we choose to focus on an object which does not cause anger to arise within one's mind. We can then feel the relief from the stress and negativity in one's mind. It is important that we understand this point about the practical application of the meditation. This one essential point can actually lead us to understand many other ways to benefit ourselves. By relating to one point we can then expand to understand more points of how to benefit oneself and others as well.

As the great master Shantideva has mentioned in his works, for as long as one does not understand the workings of one's own mind, whatever one does one will not feel settled. Here he is referring to understanding the ultimate nature of one's mind which is the emptiness of the mind, however even on the conventional level if one begins to understand how one's mind works, that will give us more control over our own mind.

So what I have been attempting to present are some essential points about the practice which I feel can be applied in one's daily life. It is my attempt to present these essential points but whether it actually applies to you or not is something that you can investigate and check out. If it seems worthwhile then you can apply it, if not then you may just leave it aside.

In presenting and sharing these essential points about the mind I have some personal experience myself. The experience I relate to is from an early part of my life where I had to leave home at the age of 17 and have never been able to go back. Once I left home I faced many physical hardships and there was no help from home—financial and so forth. Even with the physical hardships that surrounded me I never had a really depressed and unhappy state of mind. I attribute that to maintaining a positive frame of mind. I base that on, the experiences that I have had. By maintaining a strong and positive mind, one will be able to endure even physical hardships. That is my experience.

Now for the meditation practice, let us remind ourselves to be in a comfortable posture. We need also to pay attention to our state of mind which is free from distractions, external and internal distractions, by bringing the mind inwards. So having brought our focus inwards we focus on the breath. We bring our entire focus upon the breath and for the next few minutes do

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not allow our mind to be influenced by anything else. If you become distracted just remember to bring the focus back on to the breath. *[Pause for 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

###### 4.2.2.1.2.3.1.4. The need to develop joy about the possibility of entering a path by which one's own and other's welfare can be completely accomplished and the subsequent need to enter into the path.

Now we will cover some further explanation of this heading.

As the text explains:

*Therefore, the Mahayana is the origin of all the good of self and others; the medicine that alleviates all troubles; the great path travelled by all knowledgeable persons; nourishment for all beings who see, hear, remember and come into contact with it; and that which has the great skill-in-means that engages you in others' welfare and thereby indirectly achieves your own welfare in its entirety.*

The Mahayana path, or what we call the Great Vehicle, is like a panacea for removing all diseases, in that it removes all problems of our mind. The great path travelled by all knowledgeable persons implies that it is the only path which leads to the ultimate state of enlightenment. It is also nourishment for all beings who see, hear or remember and come into contact with this path. The text continues to explain, that the Mahayana Vehicle has a great skilful means that engages you in the welfare of others, and thereby increases your own welfare in its entirety. In other words when fully engaging in bringing about the welfare of others it actually fulfils your own need and your own goal as well. This is really a great point to reflect upon and understand.

The text continues:

*One who enters this path thinks 'Wonderful I have found what I am looking for'. Enter this supreme vehicle with all of the "strength and excellent person" that you have.*

This is how someone with a sincere motivation would feel when they enter into the path. The text concludes by encouraging a person to enter the supreme vehicle with all the strength of an excellent person that you have. It is exhorting one to actually enter the path which brings about the complete benefit in its entirety for others and oneself. For someone who has the inclination to benefit others and to think about their ultimate welfare, then it is really worthwhile to enter such a noble path.

The value of adopting the Mahayana path or the Great Vehicle is where one develops the genuine consideration for others. It is inappropriate to think only about one's own welfare, however it is completely appropriate and essential that we think about the welfare of other sentient beings. The reasoning one uses is that when one considers one's own welfare in relation to other sentient beings, then we are just one person. To be obsessed with the welfare and goodness of just one person while neglecting the welfare of numberless sentient beings is totally unreasonable and inappropriate.

The attitude one adopts is to transform the attitude of focusing merely on one's own welfare to that of focusing on the welfare and benefit of all living beings. When one does this the ultimate reason one uses for thinking about the welfare of all others is based on one's own experience. Even the slightest happiness is something that we wish for and the slightest suffering is something that we do not wish to experience.

Just as that is the case for ourselves, all other living beings are in the same situation, that they have the same likes and dislikes as ourselves. All other living beings also wish for every type of happiness and do not wish to experience even the slightest suffering.

As there is no difference between my own experiences and the wishes that I have and those of others then to focus merely on my own welfare, bringing about happiness just for my self is very inappropriate. It would be very short-sighted and a very selfish attitude.

By contemplating these reasons and how others are in the same situation as oneself then, rather than focusing on bringing about the welfare of just oneself, it is much more appropriate to work for the benefit of other sentient beings. After all, when you work for all sentient beings, you are included in that as well. Whereas if you focus only on yourself others are completely excluded. This is a very logical.

The only thing which might prevent one from working for others welfare is if one feels one would left out without benefit, but in fact there is no loss, only gain by working for the welfare of other sentient beings. If all sentient beings maintain the attitude of working for all sentient beings oneself is included in that. By working for others, as the text mentioned earlier, one's own welfare will be fulfilled. Therefore based on that it is much more worthwhile to consider engaging oneself in working for the welfare of other sentient beings. In using these reasons and logic and reflecting on this again and again it is not just a psychological gain but one would find there is a deep, purpose and meaning in this presentation. One begins to really understand that it is really worthwhile to adopt that attitude.

It is by familiarising oneself with the attitude explained earlier that one can also gain a profound understanding of how it is not only necessary but definitely possible to develop compassion for one's enemy. The possibility comes when one considers how one does not wish to experience any suffering, likewise one's so called enemy also does not wish to experience any kind of pain and suffering. And just as one would wish for good things such as care, love, appreciation by others and so forth, one's enemy also has the same wishes, they wish to be loved, cared for and appreciated. There is really no difference in the wishes, the likes and dislikes of one's so called enemy and oneself.

As there is no difference between oneself and one's enemy it is appropriate that we consider about their welfare as well rather than thinking of harming them. If one can consider how to help them to gain what oneself wishes for, this would be most appropriate and beneficial for oneself too. Rather than holding a grudge against them, if you can feel compassion for their suffering, for

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their discomfort, then that would be really worthwhile. This is an essential point that we need to consider.

Going back to the bigger picture in relation to all sentient beings, it is definitely much more worthwhile that we consider the welfare of all sentient beings in contrast to focusing only on oneself. If we were to focus just on ourselves and neglect the welfare of others, one will actually feel a little uncomfortable and unsettled within. Whenever we engage in something, whatever it may be, when we find that there is a strong selfish motive involved in what we are doing we don't really feel that comfortable. It actually bothers our conscience.

This shows that there is a natural instinct within us that knows that it is not right to be selfish; that it is not proper to focus just on oneself while neglecting the welfare of other sentient beings. So again in relation to one's own welfare and benefit, it is appropriate and worthwhile to consider the welfare of other sentient beings. Even on a conventional level we can see that the Mahayana teachings supports the needs of the society; working for the masses is something we appreciate in normal society. Anyone who works only for themselves, for their own benefit is considered selfish, whereas someone who is working for the society to the benefit the people, that would be considered a noble and worthwhile deed. So, basically the Mahayana attitude is an attitude that takes the benefit of others into specific consideration.

Having considered that this practice of the Mahayana is a worthwhile and meaningful practice one feels inspired to practice it. I emphasise regularly the way to begin the practice of developing a genuine love and compassion for others is to begin with those who one is closely associated with; one's partner, friends or family, one's colleagues, the ones that closely surround you in your normal everyday life. These are the ones with whom we cultivate the practice. We develop and express our genuine concern, love and compassion towards them. This is something which I emphasise regularly.

If we neglect the very ones who are associated with us, the ones we consider our loved and dear ones, if we don't pay attention to their needs and we begin to neglect them then there is no way that we can really benefit others, such as strangers and enemies. If we can't manage to help and develop a genuine concern for those that we consider friends who are close, then we will definitely not be able to benefit other beings. It will be merely pretentious to think that we can actually help others. Thus, it is really important that those we deal with everyday are the ones that we begin our practice of love and compassion with. Thinking of their welfare, trying not to engage in activities which will upset them or harm them and trying to find ways to benefit them. This practical aspect will be explained in more detail later on in the text.

The way to generate love and compassion is to begin with someone one feels close to. After one has become familiar with the practice of genuine love and compassion then one expands the practice to include, those that we are indifferent to, such as strangers. When one feels comfortable expressing feelings of love and compassion towards strangers then we expand the scope to our enemies, feeling love and compassion towards our

enemies. In this way we notice that it is a very skilful means of presenting the practice.

If the practice suggested that we feel love and compassion towards an enemy right from the start, we might feel 'oh, this is something totally inappropriate, I can't handle it' and we may give up the whole practice. Whereas when it is presented in a way that encourages genuine love and compassion towards someone close to you, that appeals to you because you already have feelings of love and concerned towards them.

As one engages in the actual practice then it will become manageable to expand one's love and compassion towards those we call strangers and then to our so called enemies. It is in this skilful way that the teachings are presented. One can begin to appreciate the teaching and try to apply it in one's practice.

Another important point to be understood here is that if one cannot feel genuine love and compassion towards those one is closely associated with, then to feel love and compassion towards an enemy will not be possible. How could it be possible because the very term 'enemy' means someone with whom you feel uncomfortable with; someone you don't want to associate with or want nothing to do with. How can you feel love and compassion for someone like that if you cannot feel love and compassion for someone that you are supposedly close with? There is no possibility for that to occur. If we cannot express genuine love and compassion towards someone who actually benefits and helps us then how could we possibly develop genuine love and compassion towards someone who harms us? It is not possible at all! [*Geshe-la chuckles*]

When the teaching presents the systematic way to engage in the practice, that process is something that should appeal to one who needs to understand how to engage in the practice. When we consider these points logically we can see that there is a very sound logic in this presentation.

We can conclude the session this evening by spending a few more minutes in meditation. The object of our focus this time will be the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we hear the sound of the mantra we try to maintain complete focus on the sound of the mantra itself, without allowing any distraction to influence us. When the recitation stops, we can maintain our focus on that residual sound for awhile.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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