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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual, we can spend some time in meditation. So we find a comfortable position for ourselves. Once you are in a relaxed physical posture, it would be very meaningful if you could search for the means to also have a relaxed mind.

Generally, we can assume that whatever activity we engage in is a means to gain some happiness for ourselves. Whilst that may be the case, we might all notice for ourselves that while we may engage in activities and so forth, it is rare that these contribute to a calm and peaceful mind. It is worthwhile to consider the truth of us having the natural wish to be happy and not wishing to experience any kind of suffering and so, to that end, whatever activity we engage in is meant to fulfil that purpose. When we look into the results of many of our activities and check if whether they actually contribute to bringing about genuine happiness and relieving suffering, we would find that this result is quite rare.

Based on the fact that we ultimately wish for happiness and do not wish to experience any kind of suffering and that our activities are meant to fulfil that goal, we need to consider whether the methods that we are applying to achieve those goals are correct methods or not. We might have a general assumption that whatever method we have is proper and correct but when we look deeper we can get a clearer picture and realise that the methods we are using don't actually work. This way of thinking and analysing is a very good technique in itself to bring our focus and mind inwards and look within oneself. It even helps to put things into perspective and maintain an inner focus.

When we look into the method that we are applying it may, on the surface, seem to be fine and that there is no mistake in the methods. As we analyse the techniques or methods that we are using we might come to recognise that the methods that we are applying in our daily life are actually a means to gain happiness on a physical level and that they don't really contribute to our mental happiness. If we look into most of the activities that we are involved with in our daily life we'd find that our work and so forth are means to acquire better conditions for ourselves, and that those conditions, food and shelter and so forth, serve as a means to provide good physical conditions, physical comfort and happiness.

Whether this contributes to our mental happiness or not is questionable and if we investigate further we will find that it doesn't really contribute to our mental happiness. This can be verified. When we honestly look into ourselves we will find that all the endeavours we have engaged in so far have not been a source of stability or mental happiness. They are not a source of gaining satisfaction and a settled mind. We have not gained from them. If we investigate our own state of mind we can conclude that this doesn't have anything substantial to offer us, or others, on a mental level.

When we look at our external conditions we can rightly say that we have made progress because we have acquired a lot of things. We may have a lot of material things but when it comes to our mental state we don't find that we have something really substantial, whereby we can feel confident there is some real value within one's mind.

Having done this self-analysis and investigation of our own state of being, we can come to the point of realising that we have made a significant amount of material progress, which is a condition for our physical comfort and happiness, and that we do need a certain amount of material conditions. But we can also come to realise that we have not developed something substantial within one's state of mind.

We then need to make a decision that I need to try to find the means whereby I can utilise this material progress to the optimum benefit for myself. Material progress may not be of great benefit if one lacks mental qualities. If we utilise that material progress to develop good qualities within our mind then that would be of real benefit for oneself. It is worthwhile for us to consider this. When we look at our present situation, while we may have made significant progress materially we have not made mental progress. In pursuing material progress we may have neglected the state of our mind and not gained qualities on a mental level.

The clear sign that one lacks mental qualities is finding oneself in a disturbed state of mind with one's mind chaotically full of worries, frustrations and so forth. When one identifies that within oneself then it is reasonable for us to resolve upon finding a proper method or technique to bring about a genuine calmness and reduce anxiety, distress and a chaotic state of mind.

When we look into the causes of anxiety, stress and a very busy mind we will be able to identify that it is the distractions in our mind that cause all these problems. We would find that when we have lots of distractions our mind is unable to maintain focused on any particular thing and that an unfocused and distracted mind lacks clarity. The mind seems to be in a chaotic and confused state. Allowing ourselves to be influenced by the distractions causes an unbalanced state of mind. We will be able to identify that the main fault is not being able to maintain an inward focus.

When we come to the point in our analysis where we identify that it is the lack of inner focus that causes the distractions and turmoil within one's mind we would recognise that a method or technique to develop and maintain an inner focus would bring happiness to one's mind. That is something we would be able to recognise.

When we reach the point of recognising the need to maintain an inner focus we will be able to identify the value of meditation. Meditation is a technique that allows one's mind to maintain a focus on a chosen object and, by maintaining a focus on that object, for the mind to become clearer and brighter. The means or technique to achieve that is what is called 'meditation'.

When, through one's own self analysis, one reaches a point of clearly identifying one's own state of mind and recognises that one has a troubled or a very distracted mind, and then recognises the need for a focused mind, at that point, one will resolve to engage in meditation practice.

As we train in the meditation technique it allows us to develop a particular intelligence or wisdom called analytical wisdom, which is a wisdom or intelligence that is able to distinguish between the positive and negative qualities

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within one's mind. Having clearly distinguished the positive and negative states of mind we will be able to work towards eliminating the negative states of mind and acquiring the positive states of mind.

If one doesn't apply this analytical wisdom, or hasn't developed this to a certain level, one might be in a state where one may see a quality in the faults within oneself and see faults in the qualities within oneself. For example, there are some people who see anger as a useful emotion that we need. Rather than seeing the faults of anger they actually endorse anger as an emotion that we need to have. If we see good qualities in anger then the wish to overcome and eliminate anger will not arise.

In a similar way, there are many states of mind that we can fail to recognise as faults. That is where danger arises for oneself. When we develop the analytical wisdom we can rely upon our own inner wisdom to make decisions in our life. By clearly seeing or identifying what is useful and what is harmful to us we will be able to make the decision to adopt that which is beneficial for oneself and others, and discard that which is harmful to oneself and others. Rather than relying upon someone else's opinion and having to ask someone else all the time, we can rely upon the inner wisdom that we have developed through the practice of meditation. At that point we achieve stability in our life and mind.

What I have been presenting so far is a tool to do a self-investigation, a self-analysis, and if one sees the benefits of doing this self-analysis and the need to practise meditation then one's resolve becomes quite firm and stable. We begin to take the practice itself to heart and we take more initiative in engaging in the practice of meditation.

The practice of meditation is something that we need to apply in continuous stages on a daily basis. We apply the practice gradually and slowly. If from the very beginning we can have an approach of engaging in the practice on a gradual, continual basis then positive results will surely come through time. If we are too ambitious at the start of our practice we are setting ourselves up for failure. We might very easily give up the practice when we don't see immediate results. Therefore it is really important that we see the benefit of the practice through one's own analysis and by thinking and checking up on oneself. Let us now actually engage in the practice of meditation.

To engage in the practice of meditation we readjust our physical posture to an upright, comfortable posture and we resolve upon doing the practice wholeheartedly. This means that we develop within ourselves the commitment that, for the next few minutes, "I will not allow my mind to be influenced by distractions". We intentionally bring our focus inwards and place it upon our own breath. In our meditation here we try to maintain a full attention and focus just on our breath. We try to have a very gentle approach to focusing one's breath and as we engage in that focus we will begin to notice that our mind becomes calm. We just try to remain in that state of calmness with a focused mind for the next few minutes. *(Pause for meditation)*

We have been able to develop a peaceful mind. Try not to disturb that. We can assume that our minds are in a peaceful state. That is fine. We just leave it as that. After the mediation session when one sees a smile on the face, it confirms the peace in the mind.

Indeed a calm and happy state of mind is something that I find essential in one's life. I personally have spent lots of

time investigating the relevance of having a calm, happy and joyous state of mind. I find that there is nothing that contradicts the idea that a joyous and happy mind is one of the main essential tools for well-being in one's life. Whatever we are doing, a joyous and happy mind seems to maintain one's well-being. I would consider a happy and joyous mind as the ultimate, temporary saviour or protector of oneself. For as long as one is in a happy, joyous state of mind then nothing can really hurt or harm one. I tell those that I closely associate with that the protector of their relationships is a joyous and happy mind within both of you. That is something that you need to maintain. This is something that I share with others and I find that it is really essential. We can also safely assume that a happy mind is really a Dharma practice.

The reason why I would consider a happy state of mind as real Dharma is because one would come to notice that a happy state of mind actually becomes a means to relieve oneself of minor difficulties and problems that would otherwise become big problems. It helps to alleviate a lot of small problems in one's life. When we maintain a happy state of mind many problems become insignificant and don't harm us. So, to that extent, we can see that it is a real benefit. When we have been able to maintain a happy state of mind it becomes our best companion and the best assistance for us in whatever we do. Therefore I regularly emphasise in my teachings or advice that one must try not to lose the happy state of mind and put every measure into protecting it. I emphasise that again and again because of how essential a happy state of mind is.

When we consider how we gain a happy state of mind we see that are various means. I feel that one of the ways is to have a good relationship with others. When one has good relationship with others it becomes one of the sources of a happy mind.

The Buddha himself mentioned in his advice to the ordained community, the Sangha, that a harmonious gathering of Sangha is a happy and joyous community and within that happy and joyous community, practices can be done very well. What he was saying to the ordained community of his followers applies to all of us. Having good relationships and living harmoniously with others is the main source of our happiness, and if we are happy then whatever goals we have, whatever practice we may engage in, will be fruitful, We will get good a result from that.

#### 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

###### 4.2.2.1.2.3.2. The actual paths

###### 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.1. Teaching that the awakened mind is the sole entrance gate to the Mahayana

###### 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.1.1. Ascertaining that within the Mahayana there are both sutra and mantra vehicles and that the awakening mind is the sole entrance gate to that

###### 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.1.2. Though one may fancy oneself as a Mahayana practitioner it depends entirely upon that awakening mind

We can now cover a few lines from the text. In our previous session we were covering a subdivision that described the importance or benefit of practicing in the Mahayana path. Having given a description of how essential that is the text

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goes into explaining the actual meaning of practicing. That is divided into three subheadings.

The subdivision comes under the heading 'The actual paths'. The first subdivision is, 'Teaching that the awakened mind is the sole entrance or gate to the Mahayana'. The next subdivision is, 'How to develop bodhicitta or the awakening mind'. The first heading mentioned that the awakening mind or bodhicitta is entrance to the Mahayana path. The next is then how does one actually develop the awakening mind or the bodhicitta mind? The third subdivision is, 'What is the manner to engage in the practice?' What is the manner of engaging in the practice when one has developed the awakening mind?

You can see that the material is explained in a very systematic and logical sequence. First it gives the explanation of why one needs to develop the awakening mind or bodhicitta in order to enter the Mahayana path and that the only way to enter the Mahayana path is by developing the awakening mind. Then the text systematically goes into explaining how to develop the awakening mind. Then having explained that it goes into the details of the practices that one needs to practically engage in after having developed the awakening mind. This is the practice of the six perfections. It is commonly stated in the teachings that a Mahayana practitioner one needs to have a mind imbued with bodhicitta and their practices need to comply with the six perfections.

So the teaching first explains that the awakening mind is the sole entrance or gate to the Mahayana. This heading is also subdivided into different categories. The first explains that in the Mahayana path itself there are the sutric path and the tantric path. The Mahayana path itself is divided into two. In both categories of the Mahayana path, whether it is the sutric Mahayana path or the tantric Mahayana path, the entrance or the doorway is the same. It is the awakening mind.

The text presents a question, 'Given that you should enter the Mahayana in the above mentioned manner, what is the entrance?' The reply is that the conqueror, the Buddha, taught that there are no Mahayana vehicles other than the perfection vehicle and the tantra vehicle. Whichever of these you enter the only entrance is the awakening mind or bodhicitta. This is clarifying that the awakening mind is the only means that serves as a criteria to enter the Mahayana path.

The reason for this clarification is that lesser people might doubt the need to develop bodhicitta in order to practice Mahayana. 'In the sutra tradition it seems that one needs to develop bodhicitta but I wonder if it is necessary if one practices tantra?' There may be those who have that doubt or question in their mind. In order to be very clear from the very beginning the teaching clarifies that from the very outset that no matter what type of path you enter, whether it is the sutric or the tantric path, one definitely needs to have developed the bodhicitta mind first.

Then we come to the second subdivision of this category. This is, 'Though one may fancy oneself as a Mahayana practitioner it depends entirely upon that awakening mind.'

What is explained in the text is that once you have generated the awakening mind you are recognised as a Mahayana practitioner. Even though you may not have generated any other good qualities such as realising emptiness, if one has developed bodhicitta one is called a Mahayanist.

The text continues that when you are separated from the awakening mind, no matter what other qualities you may have such as the knowledge of emptiness and so forth, you lapse from the Mahayana and fall to the level of Hearers and the likes. What is being explained is that if one were to give up the awakening or bodhicitta mind one will fall from the rank of the Mahayana to the lower vehicle, even if one has a realisation of emptiness. Having lost or given up the awakening mind one falls from the Mahayana path.

What is being emphasised here is that whether one is considered a Mahayanist or not is dependent on having the awakening mind. Those who have developed the awakening mind or bodhicitta within their mind stream are Mahayanist and those who have not developed that or lapse from it are not Mahayanist.

We may conclude the session for the evening at this point. Before we end the session we can again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time the object of our focus will be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. We again try to place our entire focus upon the sound of the mantra and we try to maintain our focus on that. When the recitation stops we try to maintain that focus for a short while afterwards. In that way it becomes an appropriate meditation of keeping our mind focused.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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