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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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We can spend some time in meditation. Most people would already be familiar with the importance of meditation practice. Indeed the necessity of meditation cannot be underestimated. It really seems very, very essential for one's life. The necessity and the essential nature of meditation can be understood when we realise that we should not let our mind be in a state of chaos and disturbance. If we allow our mind to follow its natural course it seems more than likely that it will be influenced by distractions and disturbances.

We would all have a certain amount of experience of our mind being influenced by negativity or distractions. That leads to a mind that is unsettled, unclear and disturbed; a state of mind that lacks a genuine sense of calmness and peace. When we notice that then we would begin to understand the necessity of meditation. It would dawn upon us that meditation is the best technique for bringing about genuine peace and happiness in one's mind, and to protect one's mind from adversities or distractions. When the mind is protected from the influence of distractions it becomes naturally serviceable, in a positive way. That leads us to take up the responsibility of meditation.

When we adopt the technique of meditation it brings about a naturally peaceful and clear state of mind. The consequence of having a naturally peaceful and clear state of mind is that the activities that we want to accomplish would be accomplished easily and spontaneously. The main point of meditation is that it is a technique to allow our mind to familiarise itself with positive states of mind, which leads to good conduct.

Having mentioned that the practice of meditation is a technique of voluntarily familiarising one's mind with good thoughts which result in good conduct, the question is, 'How do we do that?' How do we familiarise our mind so that we'll adopt positive conduct rather than negativity? In contrast to that, how do we voluntarily avoid familiarising our mind with objects that cause delusions to arise in our mind, objects that cause disturbance to the mind? How do we avoid that? This is something that we need to look into and investigate.

The manner of familiarising our mind so that it naturally adopts good conduct and a positive frame of mind would be to choose a meditation object that does not cause delusions to arise in the mind. We have to be very particular about the object of meditation. The best would be a virtuous object or an object that does not cause disturbance or delusions to arise in our mind. Choosing an appropriate object for meditation practice is of prime importance. The more we focus on such an object, the more we become familiar with that object. Then, by the

very virtue of just focusing on an object that does not cause the delusions to arise, a clear state of the mind would naturally increase, as would a peaceful and calm state of mind. Conversely, if we allow our mind to be influenced by distractions and focus on objects that cause delusions to arise, then the more we familiarise with those objects the more disturbed the mind becomes. The calmness and the natural peacefulness in the mind will be disturbed and we will not be in a peaceful state of mind.

Therefore it is a matter of making the right choice of what to focus on and what to familiarise with as we see the great advantages of focusing on a virtuous object. By default, the more we focus on a virtuous object the more distant we become from objects that cause delusions to arise in the mind. This is a natural occurrence because of how the mind functions. This is something that we need to understand.

The teachings advise to imagine the chosen object for meditation to have some weight and also for it to be luminous. That advice is given in relation to overcoming the two main obstacles to our meditation. The two main obstacles of meditation are excitement or laxity. Laxity is a form of dullness in the mind. Excitement and laxity are the two main obstacles to having a clear and attentive focus on the object.

When one imagines the object to have a bit of weight it helps the mind to have a steady focus on the object. The excitement that is described as an obstacle to meditation is a subtle kind of excitement, not the general distractions that we have. This sort of excitement will be detected when one advances further in meditation. However right now, we have the gross level of excitement that makes it very hard for us to remain focused for any duration. The mind keeps getting distracted. Excitement could be described as the mind by being distracted by objects of attachment.

Laxity is a state of mind that occurs where the mind becomes very dull and dark, and one is not able to have a clear image of the object. Thus, imagining the object to be luminous helps to clear away laxity from one's mind. The two main tools that oppose these obstacles are mindfulness and introspection.

Mindfulness is described as the state of mind that maintains one's focus on the object and constantly keeps it in mind. Introspection is the state of mind that checks whether our mind is maintaining focus or not, and by immediately detecting any distraction it brings the mind back onto the object. Therefore mindfulness and introspection are both essential tools for maintaining focus on the object of meditation.

The manner of focusing on the chosen object of meditation is done by first familiarising oneself with the object. This means that if it is an actual physical object one observes the object well first. In the case of using the breath as an object because it is not a physical object—we can't see the breath and familiarise ourselves in that way. If the object is an actual visual object then initially we familiarise ourselves with the shape, colour and aspect of the object itself. We familiarise ourselves by observing it visually first, then in the actual meditation practice it is the mental image that one focuses on. It is that mental

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image that one will be focusing on and using as an object in meditation.

When we have familiarised ourselves well with the object we would notice that mental image of the object comes up very easily in our mind. It is that mental image that one keeps one's attention and focus on. This is a very particular, unique feature explained by the great Indian master Asanga. Of course it is explained in many other teachings as well. However Asanga makes it very clear that the method of focusing on the object of meditation is to understand that it is not the visual object that one is focusing on. It is not the object of eye consciousness but rather the object of mental consciousness. Asanga clarified very clearly that the object of focus is not a solid external object that is made up of matter but is a mental image. This is a unique point that one needs to understand. Based on that mental image, one will be able to develop a really sound and clear focus.

One needs to understand that this particular instruction and method involves a technique that allows the mind to maintain its inward focus. If the object of meditation were an external object like matter then, because one is focusing outside using the visual consciousness, the mind would be slightly distracted. When one makes one's object an internal object, focusing on a mental image, then by focusing on that the mind is naturally contained within one and focuses inward. This particular feature is a very essential point to understand.

Of course those who are adopting the meditation technique of using an internal object to focus on, would notice that initially one may not have a clear image. That is because we are not familiar with it. It might be a little hazy or the particular aspects of the object, its colours, shapes and so forth would not be very clear.

However as we familiarise ourselves with the object more and more, it will eventually and gradually become clearer and clearer. This is something one needs to know from the very beginning so one does not give up and see the technique as irrelevant or not working because initially the object is not clear. Even with objects that we are familiar with, like certain people, when we really try to focus we might find that it is not very clear because we are not familiar with the mental image. However with familiarity the image will become clear; as clear as seeing it with our naked eyes.

One can reach a point in meditation where the internalised mental object is incredibly clear and vivid just as we would see it with our naked eyes. That comes with acquaintance and familiarity with focusing on the internal object. Knowing that that would be the eventual result one should not give up hope and see the value of really focusing on the internalised object.

Another point that we need to consider or bear in mind is that there are some passages in the text which say that anything can suffice as an object to focus on to develop calm abiding or stabilisation. However one needs to take into consideration that these passages only relate to those who have already developed some level of concentration. If one has already developed calm abiding then any object can be used as an object to focus on without disturbing the mind. That means these passages are not

referring to meditators who are beginners. It is a fact and reality that if you were to use an object that causes attachment to arise then as soon as you focus on the object, rather than helping to develop concentration, your mind will be distracted by the object. An object of attachment will only cause the disturbance of attachment to arise. This is the point to keep in mind in understanding these passages relates in their context.

There are specific objects indicated in the teachings as appropriate objects to overcome particular types of delusions; such as focusing on the unattractive attributes of an object in order to overcome attachment to the object. Focusing on the unattractive attributes or faults of the object will reduce attachment to the object and becomes an effective meditation to reduce attachment within oneself. The most appropriate object to focus on to overcome a very distracted mind, a mind with lots of disturbing thoughts or a very busy mind, is said to be one's breath. Focusing on one's breath will help the very busy or distracted mind to settle down. Meditation on the breath will be specifically helpful for that.

It is said that meditation on the interdependent connection of all things is a good meditation to overcome a dull or ignorant state of mind. To overcome pride, meditate on the different constituents that make up one self. In order to overcome anger, meditate on love and compassion. These are some of the specific antidotes to overcome specific negative states of mind.

Meditating on these objects will definitely have the positive effect of reducing the intensity or the manifest level of these delusions. In this way we come to know there are many different objects to focus on as a means to overcome the different types of delusions in our mind.

Now leaving all that aside for the time being, let us go to a simple object in our meditation now. We adopt an appropriate posture for the meditation. The meditation that we will engage in is a meditation to try to settle our mind from a very distracted and busy state. First of all we need to make a commitment to our self that 'for the next few minutes I will not allow my mind to be influence by the distractions'. That is done by intentionally withdrawing one's mind from all forms of distractions, be it thought, memories or any other distractions, and bringing our mind inward and focusing our whole attention inward. Having brought our attention and focus inward we then place it upon the object of our focus which, in our meditation now, will be our natural breathing. So we place our full attention and focus on the breath itself. In this way we will engage in the meditation for the next few minutes. (*Pause for meditation.*)

That will be sufficient for now. We can adopt a similar structure, just as we have attempted now, to engage in the practice of meditation in our daily life. The duration is not important. It is not necessary to have a long session of meditation. What is more important is to have a consistency in one's practice. The result comes from a regular and constant practice rather than sporadic meditation. If we do practice continuously in our daily life then a positive result is bound to take place.

What is equally important, if not more important, is to have constant mindfulness in one's daily life. Even one is

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not engaged in the practice of meditation we need to have mindfulness. It is essential to apply mindfulness and introspection in one's daily life. Both aspects need to be maintained, a sense of mindfulness and introspection, which in very simple terms might be vigilance over one's state of mind. What that means is to periodically check one's state of mind and if one notices that a disturbing state of mind arises, or delusions such as anger or attachment arise, to immediately detect it for what it is, recognise it. Remind oneself 'if I allow my mind to be influenced by anger it will not do me good. It will not bring about good results for me. It will be destructive and there are no good results out of anger'.

If one can remind oneself of that then it will help one not to completely identify with anger and just be immersed within anger and feel righteous about it. Rather one will be a little wary about that state of mind and when we are wary about the mind of anger being destructive then, by the very fact of recognising it for what it is, it will actually defuse the intensity of the mind of anger and you will not be affected too badly. It is the same with attachment and other delusions as well. We can recognise it and remind oneself, speak to oneself, 'I must be careful now. I'm being influenced now by a negative state of mind which will have uncomfortable consequences if I allow it to harbour within myself.' By merely talking to oneself and reminding oneself in this way, through that familiarity, we will slowly become more and more acquainted with a positive state of mind. Our mind will not be agitated or on edge all the time, but rather more at ease. That is because the virtue of the quality of the mind is said to be that whatever it familiarises with it will follow suit. It will take that aspect.

So if we familiarise the mind with a positive frame of mind then, naturally, that would be the aspect the mind it will adapt to. If we don't pay attention to that and allow our mind to familiarise itself with negative states of mind then that aspect will take over and we will be easily influenced by that negative state of mind. To that extent, we need to be mindful.

Being vigilant about one's state of mind is basically, in a very practical simple way, reminding oneself one should be wary of befriending a state of mind of anger. One should be wary of befriending a mind of attachment. One should be wary of befriending a state of mind that is consumed with or infected by jealousy. Why? We may think that becoming friends with a state of anger will help us. Likewise with attachment, we may assume that if we befriend and acquaint ourselves with attachment it will benefit us. We'll get what we need, we'll get what we want. That is how we are accustomed to thinking. It is the same with jealousy. But the reality of allowing anger to harbour within one's mind is actually contrary. Rather than helping or benefiting us it disturbs our mind. As soon as anger arises, and for as long as anger is manifested within one's mind, we feel uncomfortable and disturbed. It does not bring us peace. There is no one who will experience a peaceful state of mind by expressing anger.

It is the same with attachment but it may be a little bit more difficult to initially detect. If we were to give in to

attachment what is the result? It seems that we find ourselves restless, always very busy trying to accomplish something and having no time to really relax and be calm. What is causing that? It is out of trying to satiate our desires that we become very busy. Then either we are not content with what we have, or we are trying to get something that we don't have and think we need to make us happy. We are busy either trying to acquire things we don't have, or we are not content with what we have and we are trying to acquire more. In that process we constantly allow ourselves to be very, very busy and distracted and that causes a sense of restlessness within ourselves. That is how befriending the mind of attachment disturbs us. We experience agitation because of that.

It is the same as soon as a jealous mind arises. We feel very uncomfortable. When we find that this is true for ourselves then one needs to try to resolve this by engaging in its opposite. Instead of befriending anger, befriend a mind of non-anger. Instead of befriending a mind of attachment, befriend and acquaint yourselves with a mind of non-attachment. Likewise with non-jealousy. These are the positive states of mind; a mind devoid of anger, a mind devoid of attachment, jealousy, pride and other delusions. These are positive states of mind that will bring a genuine sense of calmness and peace. This is how we need to resolve to focus the direction in our lives.

The main point I am attempting to emphasise here is that the advantage of meditation is that consistently applying the practice of meditation will be of great benefit or help on a practical level.

We need to further acquaint ourselves with the positive states of mind that we need to adopt and further increase within oneself. On the other hand, we first need to detect and recognise for ourselves the states of mind that are harmful to one and which we need to decrease. As ordinary people we all have both states of mind within us: positive states of mind and negative states of mind. The positive states of mind need to be increased and the negative attitudes and so forth need to be decreased or minimised and eventually overcome. The technique that makes it possible for us to do that is the practice of meditation. Meditation is a perfect aid or technique for one to do that. Thus it is highly beneficial for one's life.

Before we conclude, I would like to again emphasise this point that practice is a means to increase positive states of mind, the most essential of which is love and compassion within one's heart. So what would be a practical technique to do that in one's daily life? One way is to generate a genuine, sincere state of mind where one wishes, based on the prayer on the four immeasurables, how wonderful it would be if all sentient beings, all living beings, were to have happiness and the causes of happiness. May they have happiness and the causes of happiness. Furthermore, how wonderful it would be if all beings were free from suffering and its causes; may they be free of from suffering and its causes. Recollecting these two passages and starting to genuinely feel how wonderful it would be if all beings were not to suffer at all and how wonderful it would be if all beings were to

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experience genuine happiness and generating that wish within one's own mind and focusing on that becomes a supreme meditation of developing love and compassion.

Another simple technique would be to follow, for example, His Holiness the Dalai Lama's advice which is to spend just a few moments in every day in one's life just making the resolve within oneself in the morning that, 'For today I will not intentionally harm any living being. I will not go out of my way to harm even slightly harm any living being and I resolve to do whatever possible to benefit sentient beings'. If one can cultivate that commitment within one's heart and then focus on that for a few moments it becomes an incredibly powerful way of developing love and compassion. On a practical level it is a powerful way to accumulate merit and a powerful means for purifying negative karma. It seems that that would be the most practical and powerful way to do that. It is highly meaningful if we can spend just a few minutes in our daily life thinking in this way.

We can conclude for the evening and we can continue the text we are studying in our next session. The particular point we reached in last session is the part where the text explains compassion as most essential in the beginning, in the middle and in the end. Having covered the first two parts we are on the part where the text explains how compassion is essential at the end. Following that explanation the next topic is the most wonderful and incredible advice about how to develop love and compassion in an awakening mind. These are teachings we can look forward to.

Before we end the session for the evening we can again spend a few minutes in meditation. We again adopt an appropriate physical posture. The object of focus this time will be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. We try to keep our full attention and focus on the sound as we hear it. When the recitation stops try to maintain a focus on the residue of the sound. Just maintain a focus on that and don't allow the mind to be distracted by anything else. Just keep your mind focused on that. This is another appropriate meditation technique to develop good concentration. So we can adopt that.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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