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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual we can spend some time in meditation. For that purpose, we adopt a comfortable sitting posture. We should also try to induce a clear, bright state of mind—in particular, we are aiming for a joyous, happy state of mind, which we all have the capacity to achieve.

One way of thinking about the purpose of meditation is that it is a means of fulfilling one's responsibility. As a being with a mind or intelligence, one's main responsibility is to obtain happiness for oneself and try to get rid of one's misery or suffering. Whatever we do comes down to this essential point.

Why do we have this instinctive and spontaneous wish to strive for happiness and overcome suffering? When we investigate, we will notice that primarily it comes from the identification with our sense of individuality; what we call 'me' or 'I'. We all have the natural tendency to cling to our own individuality. On the basis of that, we instinctively have the thought 'I want this' and 'I don't want that'. Along with that spontaneous like and dislike comes an attachment to people or things that we want, and an aversion or anger towards the things we do not like.

With this spontaneous wish comes the 'responsibility' to obtain happiness for oneself and overcome misery or suffering. This spontaneous and natural wish is our given right: we have the right to fulfill our wish to obtain happiness and rid ourselves of all suffering. Now the question arises, do we have the ability? Although it is our spontaneous instinctive wish, is it something within our grasp, something we are capable of doing? The answer is—we are capable.

When we look at the essential tools we need in order to achieve our wishes, simply put, they are a clear and bright state of mind, along with a strong and healthy body.

One may then ask, how do we obtain such a state of mind and a healthy body? We have all experienced how a clear, bright state of mind contributes to a joyous, happy state of mind, and how achieving our goals depends on having a clear mind. So now the question is how do we obtain a clear, bright state of mind? Through this sort of analysis, we can use our intelligence to identify what it is we need to adopt and what it is we need to avoid.

In relation to having a healthy and strong body, we can clearly recognise that the main conducive factor for maintaining good health and a strong body is having a proper diet: eating foods that help to nourish and strengthen the body, and avoiding certain kinds of food that harm our health. We might already have quite a bit of knowledge about how to maintain good health. But it depends on ourselves whether we apply it or not. So while we don't lack knowledge of what contributes to our good health and a strong body, it's a matter of whether we apply it or not.

In relation to having a clear, bright state of mind, first we need to look into what may be preventing it. What are the states of mind that oppose a clear and bright state of mind? Recognising this is the first step. As we investigate further we will be able to identify the states of mind that oppose the clear, bright state of mind; we would notice that it is what we call the distractions that cause a lack of clarity and disturbance in our mind: allowing oneself to be influenced by the distractions causes the mind to be in an unclear state.

After we recognise that, it is a matter of us applying a technique or method to minimise the distractions and not follow them. When we further investigate, we will understand that meditation is a technique that allows the mind to withdraw from the distractions and by bringing the focus inwards and then maintain a clear attentive focus.

Regarding the happiness we strive for, how do we define it? There are two levels of happiness we can experience—physical and mental. As mentioned previously, what contributes to physical happiness is good health and a strong body. Having good conditions, such as good clothing, housing and wealth, also contributes to physical happiness. In order to achieve a certain amount of wealth, we need to have a healthy body, otherwise we would not be able to pursue that level of material happiness. Given that we are in a good physical condition, we are capable of acquiring those things.

However, when it comes to achieving mental happiness, we need to acquire certain qualities or conditions on the mental level. As mentioned earlier, first we need to recognise what opposes mental happiness, which is following distractions. When we adopt the technique that enables us to withdraw the mind from the distractions and maintain an inner focus, it will naturally induce a sense of calmness, joy and happiness within us. That is how we achieve mental happiness.

Spending time doing such a mental analysis—checking the conditions and causes for one's happiness, as well as its opposing factors—may seem a bit trivial; it may not seem like a spiritual practice, but in fact it is most essential that we engage in such investigation. After all, it is ultimately for our benefit, our happiness. Therefore this type of investigation is not to be taken lightly and as a trivial matter; it is really important and essential for one's well-being.

As mentioned previously, in order for us to maintain a certain level of physical well being, we need to engage in the means to acquire those conditions. However, the main point I am emphasising this evening is that spending all of one's time and energy in acquiring only the conditions for our physical comfort and wellbeing is insufficient. We would not be spending time and energy in acquiring the internal requirements for our mental happiness. Therefore, it is in our best interest to spend some time and energy investigating the causes and conditions for mental happiness. When one is able to identify them, one then acquires these internal conditions and causes. Thus, while we need to spend time and energy acquiring external means for our well-being, we should also spend time and energy developing the internal conditions for our mental happiness. That combination will definitely help us achieve overall well-being.

These points that I emphasise regularly, apparently have been of benefit for some people who have come here. Regular and new students have confided to me that the presentation of how we need to invest some time and energy

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in our inner development and mental happiness is not really emphasised in the outside world. So this advice has been very important in their lives.

As mentioned previously, the main method for developing our internal happiness and well-being is the practice of meditation. Simply explained, it is a method or technique for temporarily withdrawing the mind from all external distractions and bringing our focus inward, rather than letting the mind wander off and be distracted by external phenomena. The technique of bringing the focus of the mind inward and spending some time regularly doing formal meditation in one's daily life is very important.

Those who have made an attempt to do some regular meditation practice would attest through their own experience that spending some time in the morning focusing inward brings about a clear and joyous state of mind. If we start of our day with such a frame of mind, it is likely we will have a good day. So regularly spending a few minutes in the morning doing some meditation practice is really worthwhile.

The technique here is to withdraw one's mind from all forms of distraction and place it upon a chosen object. Familiarising our mind with this practice is essential for inducing that clear, bright state of mind accompanied by a joyous, happy mind. Having understood the benefits of meditation, it is then worthwhile to commit oneself to actually engage in the practice.

It is most important to maintain a regular, consistent practice. If one adopts a consistent meditation practice, regardless of the duration then, given time, one will definitely see some improvement in one's life. This transformation is not to be measured in days or weeks, but rather in months and years. Particularly for students who have adopted meditation practice earlier in their lives, it is good to check how one's mind has become more settled and how one has actually benefited from the practice over the past few years. When one gauges one's practice over a span of years, one will notice the benefits of meditation. That will be enough to encourage us to keep engaging in the practice and further develop oneself. This is the way to engage in the meditation practice effectively.

Now we can spend some time for meditation practice. The appropriate posture has been described previously. The main thing is to try to keep the body relaxed and upright in a sitting posture. The meditation technique involves choosing an appropriate object and trying to maintain one's focus on it. This prevents our mind from following distractions. We make the commitment that, for the duration of the meditation, we will not allow the mind to be distracted by different thoughts and ideas, but rather bring our full attention and focus within and place it upon the chosen object for meditation, which is the breath. So we place our full attention, one hundred percent, on the breath itself and maintain it during the meditation. When we are able to maintain that focus, we are applying the technique appropriately. That is what we will do for the next few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

That should be sufficient for now. We may continue from the text unless people have some questions.

*Question:* When focusing on the breath, does one focus on the breath that one feels at the nostrils or does one follow the breath going in?

*Response:* The actual technique involves going beyond concentrating on the physical breath, and rather adopting a

mental image of the breath. As we breathe in and out, it is a reminder to keep our focus on the internal object, which is a mental image of the breath. It is helpful to use the in- and out-breath to keep track of the breathing but the actual focus is on the mental image of the breath.

The point of the practice is that one goes beyond the physical aspects of things and becomes more attuned at the mental level. If we were to focus on the breath itself, either when it moves past the tip of the nostrils or on the full in-breath, that would be like a distraction in itself. When the breath is prescribed as an object of focus, there are some who misinterpret the instruction and use the actual physical breath as an object of focus. This intentional focus on the physical breathing leads to them forcefully breathe in and out. This is what the Buddhist teachings advise us to avoid: to avoid breathing forcefully, but rather to adopt a breathing technique within which we can hardly feel the breath at all. If the breath were forced, you would feel warm or cool air coming out of your nostrils. That sensation itself can become a distraction. Even the noise of the breath can become a distraction. Thus it is advised in the teachings that the rhythm of the breath be effortless and without sound. Then it becomes a very, very natural action. We hardly notice the actual breath going in and out of the nostrils or any physical aspects of it. The breath is in a very calm, natural state: that is what has been the advised.

However, as mentioned, people have interpreted different techniques of breathing meditation. Someone close to me even mentioned that he uses a rhythm like a mouse sniffing around (*laughter*), as a measure for focusing on the breath! Apparently he teaches this meditation technique to others. I am not in any way putting down this technique. If it works and helps one acquire a focused mind, that's fine. But what I have been presenting here is from the Buddhist teachings.

*Question:* I just have a question in relation to the Praises to the Twenty-one Taras, some of the verses mention the slaying of the enemy; can Geshe la explain the meaning of that?

*Response:* There would be higher levels of explanation in relation to what are called the Tantric teachings of Buddhism—higher levels of meaning and more profound explanations. However, on a general level, the 'slaying of enemy' can be understood as not relating to a personal enemy, but rather certain beings with malicious intent and very evil minds. There are certain individuals who would harm many, many living beings. So to protect them from the harm of engaging in the negative action of harming many others, if there were a choice, it would be better for them to be subdued and slayed rather than allowing them to take the lives of so many other beings. One can understand it in this context.

The main thing is not to relate it to a personal enemy but to someone showing harm towards countless other beings. It is better to slay or rather vanquish such an evil being, rather than let them harm many others. That interpretation would be more on a conventional level.

On a deeper level, we can understand 'slaying the enemy' to mean the internal enemy, which in Buddhism refers to the delusions such as hatred, anger, etc. The delusions—the states of mind of anger, desire, pride and so forth—are the real enemy, the internal enemy. So slaying the enemy refers to overcoming the delusions, whether within oneself or others. So when one incorporates the meaning of the Tara Praises for one's personal practice, this verse is to be

understood as vanquishing the internal enemy, the delusions, that one may detect within oneself, for example, one's own anger.

The First Dalai Lama, Gyalwa Gendun Drup said "when searching for the enemy, it is to be found within oneself", which means the delusions. Vanquishing or overcoming the delusions is the ultimate way to overcome the enemy. How do we define a conventional enemy? Who do we consider to be an enemy? An enemy is someone who destroys or hinders one's joy or happiness and brings us misery. We would consider such an individual as an enemy: that would be how we define an enemy.

We can apply that definition to the delusions within us. It is true that the definition corresponds exactly to the inner delusions such as anger. When we relate to our own anger, for example, as soon as anger arises, it destroys our happiness and our peace of mind. If we are in a calm, happy, joyful state, as soon as anger arises in our mind, we would feel agitated and disturbed. So anger hinders our peace and joy, and as soon as it arises, we feel uncomfortable, unsettled and in turmoil. Thus anger is a factor that destroys or hinders our happiness and brings about suffering. To that extent it is an enemy; it has all the characteristics and fits the definition of an enemy. Trying to overcome and vanquish the delusions is how we apply this advice on a personal level.

Another great master, the Indian master Shantideva, also mentioned it would be impossible for us to vanquish all our external enemies; whereas if we were to actually vanquish the internal enemy of anger, it would be the equivalent of having overcome all external enemies. When we think about it, this is a profound truth: if we don't have anger ourselves how could we possibly be harmed by anyone else? We would not be agitated, we would not get angry: no one would harm us because we wouldn't get angry or upset. What really harms us is the state of mind of anger. Thus if we overcome anger it is definitely equivalent to having overcome all external enemies; we will not have external enemies.

Furthermore, even if we were to try to vanquish all external enemies, when the appropriate conditions arose in future, they would come back to harm us with even more vigor and strength. Even if they were weakened temporarily, they would come back again to destroy us with even more strength. Whereas when we overcome the internal enemy of anger—and overcoming here implies completely eliminating the very root of anger from one's mind—it will never recur. It is possible to achieve such a state where anger will never again manifest in one's mind. When you overcome it entirely, there will be no possibility that it will come back again, unlike the external enemy.

There is a certain Tibetan saying that if you try to aim for the forehead but there is actually dirt in his eyes then that will not suffice. The main point is that if you try to aim to overcome something but miss the target, then one hasn't achieved one's goal; that is the main point.

*Question:* Can you please explain the meaning of 'Suchness' in a brief way?

*Response:* 'Suchness' is another term for emptiness, which relates to the ultimate reality of all existence. The ultimate reality of any phenomena, is that it is empty of inherent existence; which means there is nothing that exists independently by itself. Everything is dependent on something else for its existence; there is nothing that has its

own intrinsic existence. Thus, 'suchness' refers to the ultimate reality of anything that exists, which is that it lacks intrinsic, independent existence. Rather it exists in relation to, or in dependence on, many, many other factors. Being an older student, you would know that answer yourself. However it is a very good question.

Of course, gaining an understanding of emptiness is incredibly profound and gives a really deep understanding of reality itself. We mentioned earlier that the reality or nature of all phenomena is that they lack intrinsic independent existence. We can use the self as an example. When we refer to the self, how does the self actually appear to you? How does the 'I' appear to you? The individual identity that we call the 'me' or 'I'? When we really think about it, we will notice for ourselves that the 'I' or 'me' that we instinctively cling on to is an 'I' that seems to exist independently; that it exists autonomously from its own side. The stronger the notion of 'I' or self is, the stronger the clinging or the grasping to the 'I' will be. Thus when we notice the strong inclination 'I like this' or 'I don't like that', we also notice that we become really obsessed with what 'I like' and what 'I don't like'. This is because of the misconception we have of the 'I' to begin with.

Therefore when it dawns upon us that the 'I' of which we are so possessive does not actually exist in the way we perceive it, the strong clinging or grasping to the 'I' weakens. Then the distinction of 'I like' and 'I don't like' will be minimised. That is how an understanding of selflessness or emptiness based upon oneself – the 'I' or 'me' – is really important in helping us overcome our negative states of mind or delusions.

I would like to thank you for the good questions; they were really very good questions, I really appreciate that. Of course, I am not sure whether I have given you good answers, but I have noticed that your questions are very good!

Before we conclude for the evening, it will be meaningful and appropriate to again a few minutes again in meditation. This time the object of meditation will be the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. When we hear the sound, we try to first make a commitment to withdraw our mind from all external distractions and place our focus one hundred percent on the sound of the mantra. When the recitation ceases, we try to maintain our focus on the residual sound. At that point, because there would be no sound, it seems as if we are focusing on an object that exists in vacuity. That becomes a meaningful meditation in itself, just maintaining an awareness of that vacuity or the emptiness of the sound. Focusing your mind on that becomes a very meaningful meditation, as a means to diverting ourselves from distractions.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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