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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual we can spend some time for meditation. The main thing to keep in mind, as explained previously, is to adopt an upright but relaxed and comfortable posture.

Most important is to secure a state of mind that is calm, relaxed, clear and bright. That is something that I emphasise regularly as being one of the most important elements of meditation.

Indeed, when we have successfully adopted this two-fold state of relaxation within our body and mind, we can attain a state that becomes conducive to achieving a good purpose.

While we may have techniques to try to adopt a relaxed body, we may find it difficult to have a genuinely relaxed mind. That is because of the habituation of the mind of constantly being busy with distractions and thoughts. A mind that is genuinely relaxed and free from distracting thoughts is something we may find difficult to adopt right away. A busy state of mind also affects our physical body in a negative way.

Most of us would have experienced this. We have all, except maybe young children, had that experience of being aware of our state of mind is overly busy. Those of us who have an awareness of our state of mind we can definitely notice that.

As long as our mind is very busy and constantly distracted, that will be detrimental to our well-being. Conversely, if we can adopt a relaxed physical body and genuinely secure a relaxed and calm state of mind, this definitely will contribute to our well-being.

While we acknowledge that we have a distracted and busy mind, we may fail to understand the real reason why or how a distracted mind causes us distress. Thus we need to further analyse and investigate specifically what kind of distractions there are, because the mind has different objects, different thoughts, ideas and plans that it focus on. It is essential that we pinpoint what kind of thoughts and distractions our mind is preoccupied with, that become a cause for our mental distress and turmoil.

When we detect the thoughts or distractions that cause us distress and turmoil, then we begin to see that correlation; we begin to also acknowledge that there is some fault within our state of mind and attitude.

It is essential that we begin to acknowledge that there is something wrong with our way of thinking and how we allow our mind to be influenced by negative states of mind. It is essential to acknowledge and detect that because then we will begin to seriously take the initiative to try to correct that, and then become less preoccupied

thinking that external things are the cause for our disturbance and turmoil. Normally we don't acknowledge the internal causes for our disturbances; we are mostly used to blaming external factors as a cause for our problems.

Therefore we are preoccupied with trying to control external situations – this could be people, objects and so forth that we assume are the causes for our turmoil and unhappiness. For as long as we believe that external things and conditions are the main cause of our problems and difficulties, then we will never be able to deal with the real cause of our distress and turmoil. As long as we really believe that 'there's nothing wrong with me and everything is fine with me' or 'If I've got a problem or difficulty, that's because something else is causing that, something external to me is causing this' or thinking 'if there's no disturbance from outside, as far as I am concerned, everything is fine with me'. This sort of attitude fails to pinpoint the main causes of our distress.

In the process of doing the self-analysis and checking within our own state of mind, we will detect the causes for our problems. It is really essential to take a personal responsibility for our own behaviour, by cultivating a good attitude within ourselves. That means, if we can consider ourselves neutral, then it is as if there's a separate element within ourselves that initiates good thoughts and good behaviours or negative thoughts and behaviours within ourselves. So the individual being is like a neutral being but in conjunction with this neutral being or self, there are, behind us, these thoughts and motivations that determine whether we go in the right direction or in a direction where it's harmful. In the process of doing the self-analysis to be able to clearly understand and detect what are the positive attitudes and positive states of mind within ourselves that initiate good mental states and good behaviours, we need to sincerely acknowledge that. By acknowledging and understanding that positive thoughts direct one in behaving well towards others, one can rejoice in having the good thoughts which further strengthens our good qualities. So that is how we adopt a positive direction within our own life.

Whereas when the negative thoughts and negative states of mind arise, again by acknowledging that as a motivator - these negative states of mind lead me to engage in negative behaviours, ill will and unpleasant gestures towards others. So therefore it is these negative states of mind that I need to completely avoid and overcome, we need to consider them as an inner enemy and thus not to allow ourselves to be dominated or influenced by these negative thoughts. If we can recognise and understand them as an enemy, then we would avoid them and not allow them to control us. Similarly we don't allow our own negative states of mind to dominate us. Meditation is the process of recognising the distinction between the positive and negative states within ourselves.

Self-analysis means to periodically assess ourselves, checking what state of mind we are in. Are we being influenced by a negative state of mind or not? Is a positive state of mind occurring within ourselves?

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Acknowledge our positive state of mind for what it is, and encourage yourself to further cultivate and develop it. When a negative state of mind arises, then acknowledge it for what it is and try to develop a determination not to be influenced by the negative state of mind and not to let it take control over ourselves. If we adopt this process sincerely and make it part of our daily life, then naturally we will develop a more positive outlook in whatever we do. This is a process where we are gradually increasing the positive qualities within us and decreasing our negative states of mind and negative attitudes. When the positivity increases and the negativity naturally decrease, then we have the qualities of someone whom we would consider a good person that encompasses a genuine sense of well-being. If we wish to progress and if we wish to have a genuine positive transformation in our life, then adopting this technique of self-analysis of checking our state of mind, will be a great benefit. This is why I emphasise this technique and encourage people to adopt it, as I feel it will definitely have a positive effect.

Let's look at a more tangible example of how this technique or this process of self-analysis benefits us in a practical way. When we get angry at someone, our normal reaction is to see the object and person as being totally at fault. There are a hundred reasons for us to feel uncomfortable and so we feel justified being upset and angry with the person. But yet the reality is that the moment the anger arises we actually suffer, we feel uncomfortable. For as long as we totally believe that the object or person is the actual cause for our anger and distress, then we will never take the personal responsibility of overcoming the main causes of anger.

Maybe there will be someone who is going to cause us distress, however in this analysis, the real cause for our distress is the anger which is developed within us. The object itself doesn't cause the anger. We need to understand that the emotional state of mind called anger is something that we have developed within ourselves. Now of course it is not to say that the external object, the other person, may contribute to us feeling uncomfortable, or contribute to us getting upset or angry, but without the seed of anger within ourselves there will be no possible way for us to become angry. So if we acknowledge that, then we have a fairer state of mind and we become more honest with ourselves. We understand that what the person said or did might have contributed to us feeling upset and uncomfortable, but where does the nature of that feeling upset come from? Did they give it to me? Or is it something that I feel within myself? If I don't have the seed of anger, could that person possibly make me feel angry?

It is a fact that for certain people, even when people may say inappropriate things or engage inappropriate behaviours or gestures, they experience no anger in the mind, they will not be affected, and anger will not arise. That is because they have overcome and abandoned anger. Even for ourselves, sometimes when we are feeling joyous, someone may make an offensive remark, but we don't get affected by it and we feel okay. We have not allowed ourselves to become angry or upset about the remarks, regardless of the other person's actions. We

have not taken it personally, so we don't get hurt or affected. So this goes to show that the real cause and ownership for our feelings and emotions lies within us and not on the external object. The external object may be a contribution, but the primary cause is within us. Thus if we don't wish to experience hurt, ill feeling and anger and so forth, it is our responsibility to deal with our emotions and try to combat them. This is a more reasonable way of looking at it.

When we begin to acknowledge these points as facts, then we also begin to understand the statements and teachings of Buddha, where he said that everything is related to our mind. All happiness and miseries within us are dependent on our state of mind or attitude. As the Buddha said in his teachings and advice, 'One is one's own protector'!! So we also get the sense of what this means. Ultimately your real protector is yourself; that is when we take the initiative to cultivate and develop the protection within us. The Buddha mentioned that we are our own protector. This can be understood on many different levels, from gross levels to subtle levels, on the progress of our spiritual development. This is a phrase that is not to be taken lightly; it has great meaning in it.

The Buddha further emphasised 'who else is there to be one's protector, other than oneself'? What is being explained or presented by the Buddha is that, from the very basic level of controlling our emotions and our state of mind, up to the higher levels of cultivating particular type of realisations and entering to the path that lead to enlightenment, depends on one's own efforts. The Buddha also explained that his understanding and realisations cannot be imparted to others. So therefore what is being clearly indicated here is that as much as others may have a concern for us, they cannot ultimately protect our mind. There are strategies where others may be able to help protect us physically, but when it comes to the state of mind, it is difficult for someone else to protect our mind from negativity. Generally speaking, it is very difficult. However, when we associate ourselves with highly realised beings, then due to their incredibly compassionate mind and their great realisations, we do get a positive influence where our mind feels calm and settled in their presence. To that extent we get the benefit. When we associate with great realised beings we do get positive effects – that of course can be experienced. However ultimately we need to take the initiative and take a grip of our own state of mind and apply the antidote for overcoming the negativities within us, ultimately to protect ourselves and our mind. This is what we need to understand.

The main point mentioned earlier about the means and ways of how to begin to take control over our own mind so that we cultivate the positive qualities within us and begin to eliminate and slowly discard the negative state of mind and attitudes that process is what we consider as spiritual development. The main technique for this is meditation. This is where the meditation technique comes in. The meditation technique is a technique where we intentionally avoid focusing on distractions and placing our mind entirely and one hundred percent on an object that does not cause negative emotions or disturbances to arise within us. We can choose either virtuous objects or

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neutral objects that do not cause the delusions to arise. Having chosen an object, then we place our complete focus on it. When we have fully acknowledged and understood that it is the distractions that are the main cause for our mental disturbance and turmoil, then we will develop a strong initiative not to allow our mind to be influenced by them, and not to give in to them.

Among the various distractions, I feel that one of the objects that causes us to have an agitated and disturbed mind is focusing on people who are close to us, such as close friends and relatives. That is why a real practitioner tries to avoid and associate too much with people who are close to them, and try to adopt a more solitary life, where the practice is not disturbed by others. Through my personal investigation and observance, I have noticed that being overly concerned with people close to us can cause a disturbance in our mind. By being overly concerned about their well-being, we start to become unnecessarily worried and concerned but without any real benefit for them. It seems to cause us unnecessary inner turmoil. This is what I have observed and how I see it. Being overly concerned or attached to people close to us becomes one of the main factors causing us agitation.

We therefore can minimise our association with them, if we are overly concerned with attachment to them. We need to adopt the meditation practice so that our mind becomes more focused on a virtuous object. Because people close to us can easily distract us, they become the cause for us to experience distress and turmoil, so they are not considered virtuous objects to focus on when we meditate. In the meditation practice, when we are focused on a specific single pointed meditation, we need to avoid focusing on any objects that cause distraction, whether they are thoughts or people. We need to completely withdraw from all forms of distractions and during the meditation practice, for whatever time we have committed ourselves to, be completely focused on the virtuous object of meditation.

When we adopt a proper technique of meditation where, as mentioned previously, having chosen an internal object to focus on, we place our entire focus on the object. By distancing ourselves from all forms of distractions, then we will experience a positive result of that meditation practice. We will be relieved of negative states of mind and negative influences. That is because we have voluntarily chosen to focus on a virtuous object or an object that does not cause any distractions or delusions to arise. The meditation technique works when we apply it properly and wholeheartedly. But what about when we come out of the meditation? It seems our mind gets distracted again and the mind seems to be influenced again by negativities such as attachment, anger, and jealousy. So how do we deal with that situation? Some people have confided in me, and they are being very honest, that when they adopted the meditation technique of contemplating an object that does not cause any delusions it actually does work – their attachment has reduced, yet they are unable to maintain that. They say they don't want to be detached; that they don't feel comfortable without attachment; that it is too difficult to maintain detachment. So they are being honest.

The main point here is if we feel uncomfortable in not having any attachment, then that shows that we have not applied the meditation technique properly, that is, in a way to make our mind positive. Either we are not ready for that, or we are not willing to be ready for that. However, maybe we have not yet seen the entire faults of attachment and understood the extent of their negative impact. So even though we might still be influenced by negativities such as attachment and anger, it is not to say that we would not gain any positive effect from the meditation. Not only during the meditation time but even after we come out of the meditation, if we have adopted the technique properly in a genuine way, then there will be positive effects. When we come into contact with an object of delusion, such as attachment or anger, it will not affect us to such a great degree where we become completely infatuated or completely overwhelmed by that.

By regularly applying the meditation technique, then we begin to notice the positive affects. We aren't completely overwhelmed or completely give in to the delusions or negative state of mind when they arise. They might not arise very intensely or even if they do arise intensely, they won't last so long. You will not be affected by it for a long period of time. This happens when we are familiar with the meditation technique. It is with these measures that these positive signs occur over time, and this becomes an incentive for us to continue and maintain the practice. The more we become familiar with a meditation technique, the less intense the delusions become, and thus the mind becomes more and more settled. We have to start with our meditation practice now; we have to make our attempts and try to maintain that in our everyday life. That is the process.

In the process of applying the meditation practice in our everyday life, such as when we adopt the meditation practice to combat particular negative states of mind such as meditating on patience and compassion to overcome anger, these meditation practices are done specifically to help us when anger does arise. If anger does not arise at all, then there's no need to do the practice, but because anger does arise within ourselves, we need to do the practice so that we can apply it when these conditions arise. Because there are objects to be patient with, we have the opportunity to develop patience. Because there's an object to develop or feel compassion towards, we have an opportunity to develop compassion.

The reason for developing and meditating on the positive states of mind of compassion and patience, is so that we can apply it at the appropriate time. If there's no-one to make us angry, or if there's no anger arising in our mind, then there's no need to engage in those practices. So, we need not be surprised that there are still people around who might become the condition that causes us anger if we still get angry. Instead, acknowledge this, and say 'okay, anger is arising, so now I can apply the practice of cultivating patience. The patience that I was meditating on earlier is what I need to apply now. The compassion that I was cultivating earlier is what I can apply now. This is the time to apply it, then it becomes worthwhile. That is how we put meditation into practice. Meditating on it earlier means we can put it into practice properly

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when we need it, for example, when there are conditions for us to be upset, then we are able to apply it.

We need to constantly analyse our state of mind, and be constantly vigilant about what kind state of mind is arising. If anger arises, we need to be able to detect it and send all the warning bells to ourselves, saying – ‘here comes anger, I have to be careful here, I need to be mindful here’. We need to acknowledge anger as it arises, to recognise anger for what it is and not let it get carried further and not let it inflict our mind and not to let it overwhelm us. As soon as it arises, we need to detect it. I also tell myself, as I have mentioned previously, ‘Geshe Doga, be careful here, some negative state of mind is arising, so be wary, be careful’. Being aware of it already helps me not to make it escalate and then the consequences don’t take place. Then at the end of the day, I can congratulate myself saying ‘Geshe Doga, okay, you have been fine today, you have behaved well, so good on you’, and then to carry on the next day. So this is the small practice that I try to adopt in my life. I cannot claim that I have any other great level of practices that I engage in and have gained realisations from.

If we can change our own attitudes instead of blaming others all the time and finding faults with others, then we can look within ourselves and investigate that there’s something going wrong with us. The cause is our own negative state of mind, and we need to check ourselves rather than checking others. When there is a condition for us to become angry, that is the time to apply the practice of patience. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama shares in his teachings, in the past there was a monk who was meditating on patience at a pilgrimage site. Someone came by circumambulating the stupa, and he saw the monk in his meditative state and said, ‘what are you doing, what are you meditating on?’ The monk says, ‘well, I am meditating on patience’. The other person criticised him, and the monk immediately became angry and responded with angry words. So as His Holiness, Dalai Lama mentioned, that was a clear sign that the monk was not able to apply patience at a time when someone was criticising him. The monk was attempting to meditate on patience but failed to apply patience when someone made him angry. He was not able to apply the practice when it was most needed.

This is a good example of how we need to try to remind ourselves that the very purpose of our practice is so that when situation arises that causes us to lose patience normally or become angry, then that is the time we need to apply or use our practice. This is something that we need to constantly remind ourselves of, so that we don’t give in to a negative state of mind. When we are mindful and try to constantly reassess our state of mind, then we will naturally improve and slowly our life will become happier and more joyous, rather than becoming more miserable and unhappy. We will be happier because we have taken the initiative to apply the practice in our daily life. This is how we measure our progress, which will be in a gradual but steady way. When we do that, we are secure in having a meaningful and good life.

We will now apply the meditation technique, adopting and readjusting ourselves to sit in a comfortable and

relaxed posture and most importantly to set our mind to be committed to distancing ourselves from all forms of distractions and placing it upon our breath. As mentioned previously, this is to internalise the vision or image of the breath we are focusing on.

We have to understand that the meditation object we choose is an internal object, which completely eliminates our mind from a preoccupation with other forms of distractions. Therefore the very act of focusing on an internal object helps us to reduce the state of mind that is constantly preoccupied with different thoughts, ideas and all forms of distractions. We need to be mindful of this in order for the technique to work, and we need to be fully committed and focusing on that internal object, being completely mindful and being wary of not allowing our mind to be influenced by other forms of distractions. This practice is indeed the actual practice where we begin to have real control of our own mind, thus we need to be mindful of that. So for the next few minutes we will focus on the breath itself. (*meditation*).

While maintaining our physical posture, focus our mind on the object, which is the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra. During the recitation we try to keep our entire focus on the sound of the mantra and when this recitation subsides, then we try to maintain that focus on the residue of the sound for a while. That becomes our meditation practice.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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