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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual we can spend some time in meditation. Therefore, we can adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture, and likewise ensure we have a clear and bright state of mind.

When a person adopts an appropriate physical posture and combines it with an appropriate state of mind, the person will experience a genuine sense of joy and happiness as a consequence. Of course, that person's body and mind will also experience unwanted or uncomfortable situations at times – what we would call suffering – but despite these difficulties, the person can acknowledge and understand that joy and happiness is available as an experience too. Your physical body and your mind are like personal possessions, which can create problems and suffering, but can also create joy and happiness.

This is something to ponder and contemplate. Interestingly, we can experience either happiness or suffering, but not at the same time. Investigating what kinds of physical and mental states causes us joy and happiness, and investigating what kinds of physical and mental states causes us misery and unhappiness, is a worthwhile process. Looking within and analysing your physical and mental states, rather than finding faults externally, is a form of meditation.

If you took the initiative and honestly looked within yourself, you would notice that your physical condition is not the primary contributor to either your joy or misery. Rather, your mind is the main factor causing your happiness or suffering. When you realise this fact, you will begin to understand how your mind works. You will also begin to identify and acknowledge that you have positive and negative states of mind. After you recognise and acknowledge these two different types of mind you will be able to clearly understand that negative attitudes contribute to your suffering and positive attitudes contribute to your happiness. In this way your intelligence, or wisdom, identifies the two primary states of mind: positive and negative.

This acknowledgement and understanding only comes about when you pay careful attention to your mind and really scrutinise what is happening within yourself. If you didn't do this analysis, and just skimmed the surface of the idea, you might not recognise that your mind is the significant contributor to your wellbeing, and you might continue to fall victim to blaming the external world for all your problems. However, identifying and recognising your states of mind through self-analysis enables you to thoroughly understand and acknowledge how your mind

works. You are then able to see that 'good' and 'bad' situations are depended on your attitude.

Meditation entails identifying and distinguishing between positive and negative states of mind. It enables the meditator to change and transform negative attitudes so that they do not lead to ill consequences and personal harm. It also nurtures, protects and strengthens positive attitudes. In this way, negative states of mind are eventually overcome. However, we need to understand that this transformation does not happen overnight, but is gradual and requires regular practise. If we seek out immediate results, then we are setting ourselves up for failure and disappointment. But if we know that meditation definitely works as a method to overcome negative attitudes, then, if we are patient and consistent, we will reap the benefits.

Adopting a formal meditation practice by spending a specific time focused on an object is important because it is a way to understand your mind better. If your formal practice is done consistently and regularly, your mind will form a habit of looking internally so that, even when you are not in a formal meditation session, you are aware and vigilant about the state of your mind during daily activities. Such a practice familiarises your mind to focus and cultivate an awareness of negative states as they manifest during your everyday life. Otherwise you may be unaware of what these negative states are and when they arise. So a regular and consistent practice enables you to identify and warn yourself to be cautious as soon as a negative state occurs, so that you can avoid the negative consequences.

People often tell me that meditation really helps them in their lives. Some say that just being able to recognise and identify a negative state of mind is a great help, and this would be true because when a negative state of mind is identified, it is more difficult for it to be influential. I've experienced this in my own practice, which is why I'm sharing this information with you. I have mentioned before that my negative states of mind have influenced me in unconstructive ways in the past so I am now cautious when a negative state of mind arises. This is why I am not strongly influenced or dominated by negative states of mind now. This is a practice we can all become familiar with and adopt because we all have access to the meditation technique.

Courage is a result of consistent meditation, which is contrary to some notions that meditators shy away from the external world. By facing your own mind and not relying on others, you become your own guide and can detect when your mind is in danger. Being able to protect your mind in this way gives you tremendous courage to face any situation. The only reason why we find situations confronting or fall victim to difficulties in the outside world is because of an unprotected mind. Therefore, developing awareness through a formal meditation practice enables us to get familiar with the state of our minds in our everyday lives and assists us to be cautious and diligent about our attitudes. In this way, if we detect a state of mind that could be a cause for confrontation with others, we can immediately deal with it, and thus overcome a potentially disastrous situation.

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So this is how meditation works. Meditation, as presented in the Buddhist teachings, seems to be unique because many have confided in me that they have learnt meditation techniques, but were not instructed to carry that awareness and diligence outside the meditation session; although they were instructed to focus and concentrate while meditating, there was not much advice on what to do afterwards. They confided in me that they were surprised and amazed to hear that their diligence and awareness needs to continue outside of their meditation session. Since their original instructions focused on what to do while meditating, they thought it was okay to not be mindful while they weren't meditating. So being mindful, or aware of our attitudes, and using introspection, or diligence to monitor our negative states of mind, is done during our meditation sessions and in our everyday lives. Many people find this Buddhist technique beneficial – even those who have meditated for many years – because it is a practical means to assist us in our daily lives.

Individuals, who take this instruction to heart and make genuine attempts to be mindful and aware in their daily lives, have become joyful and happy in every situation they find themselves in. We do notice people who, no matter the situation, seem relaxed and genuinely happy, and this is a result of their meditation practice. Their transformation is because of their genuine attempts to look honestly at their own mind, and to identify and analyse the delusions and negativities they find. By recognising these states of mind and admitting they have them, they are able to be vigilant about and work with their delusions so that they are not fooled or dominated by them. Starting a meditation practice will not mean that delusions will be overcome immediately because negative states of mind will still occur. In fact, someone who has practised meditation significantly for a long time will still have difficulties in life because problems arise for as long as the delusions are in the mind. However, for regular meditators, the delusions will not take as strong a hold and difficult situations will not be completely overwhelming. The benefit of their meditation practice will be that problems will not be daunting, and they will be able to face and endure difficult situations willingly and joyfully; no matter what situation they find themselves in they will not lose their sense of happiness.

I have spent time describing what meditation is and explaining what it entails because people find the information useful. So, having talked about the practical benefits of meditation, it would be unfair not to practise now with the time we have left!

So, as mentioned previously, you first adopt a relaxed posture and clear state of mind. Then, you make the commitment to withdraw your attention from all your thoughts for the next few minutes. You can just leave everything aside for a while because nothing going on is really relevant at this moment. Instead, you can place your full attention and focus on the chosen object, which is your own breath. You can remind yourself that all your problems in life so far have occurred because you have followed your distracted thoughts and distracted state of mind – all your whimsical thoughts and confusions are because your mind has wandered about in every

direction. Having identified the real cause of your problems as being internal, and as not having a controlled and composed mind, you can commit to not being influenced by your thoughts, ideas or worldly concerns while you bring your full attention to your breath for the next few minutes. Use your breathing as a medium to focus on, but keep the rhythm of your breath natural and relaxed so that it is unforced and without a laboured sound. Focus on the relaxed rhythm of your breathing by imagining each inhale going in and each exhale leaving, and attend to nothing else while you practise this contemplative meditation. [*Pause for meditation.*]

That should be sufficient for now.

#### **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**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2. How to develop an awakening mind**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1. The stages of training the awakening mind**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1. Training the mind in the pith instructions on the six causes and effect, which comes from the lineage traced to the great master Atisha**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2. Extensive explanation**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2. The actual training in the stages**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1. Training the mind to strive for the welfare of others**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1. Establishing the basis for that mind to arise**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.2. Establishing the appealing aspect of all**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.2.2. Recalling their kindness**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.2.2.5. The way to cultivate an attitude of loving kindness for all beings**

The last point from the text covered in the previous session was very important so we will go over it again. Having developed the mind of recognising the kindness of your mother in this life and applying that recognition to all other beings, then the wish to repay that kindness is developed.

The text explains this extensively and also summarises the main point, which reads:

In short, contemplate how your mother provided help and happiness, and cleared away harm and suffering to the best of her knowledge and ability.

This is the essence of the teaching; to really contemplate how your mother in this life cared for and nurtured you, and attempted to help and make you happy to the best of her ability. She did this by trying to provide you with happiness and by trying to clear away your suffering. These two intentions relate to two of the most important aspects of Buddhism: love and compassion. Love is defined as wishing others to be happy, and compassion is defined as wishing others not to experience any suffering. So what is essentially being presented in the text is how our mothers cared for us with love and compassion.

Your mother tried to provide you with the means to be happy, and then further cared for you so that you would not experience any harm or suffering. She did this nurturing to the best of her knowledge and ability, and as

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the great masters of the past have taught, this shows the genuine love and compassion a mother has for her child. The great masters have also described that the way a mother looks at and holds her child is different to other relationships. We can see this when we observe mothers with young children. For example, when a child is running around, the mother is always concerned and makes sure the child does not fall into danger. We also can see the affectionate and loving way she holds her child, and the loving and affectionate way a mother looks at her child when she is near to it. [*Geshe-la describes in English the gentle, affectionate and compassionate eyes of a mother looking at her child.*]

We can recognise the unique relationship that a mother and her child have, and develop a great sense of wellbeing and joy by acknowledging that special connection. In this way, we will want to give love and compassion back to all our mothers in our previous lives. So contemplating how our mothers have nurtured us and compassionately cared for us helps us to naturally wish to return that love and kindness to them, beginning with our mother in this life, and, by extension, to all other beings.

I find this teaching from the text very effective for my mind. These few lines bring me solace and my understanding is increased by contemplating the genuine and unique relationship between a mother and child. By relating that special connection to my biological mother in this life, I can then extend my understanding of this loving and compassionate relationship to others. The text presents and emphasises this very practical approach to transform the mind and I find just reading and thinking about these points very effective.

We now come to the fifth subdivision of the text, which is the way to cultivate an attitude of loving kindness to all beings. The text reads:

By cultivating a remembrance of your mother's kindness, you will remember it not just in words. Once you have given rise to such a remembrance, recognise that other friends and relatives such as your father are your mother, and cultivate a remembrance of their kindness. Then do the same with person's toward whom you have neutral feelings. Once you have produced an attitude toward them which is similar to how you feel toward your friends, recognise that your enemies are your mothers, and cultivate a remembrance of their kindness.

The text here explains the gradual process of contemplating the kindness of your biological mother, which goes beyond merely understanding the teaching's words, and developing a genuine feeling in your heart, which is then applied to others. By beginning with our father, who is also our parent, and extending that feeling to our relatives, and then to our friends, we can familiarise ourselves with and develop a genuine wish to repay their kindness.

Remembering the kindness can then be extended to strangers, who we normally have neutral feelings towards - because we have no strong feelings of fondness or aversion when regarding them.

From applying a heart-felt love and compassion to strangers, we can then apply the same feelings to our enemies, and to those people we currently have an aversion. Even though we find these people difficult to have a relationship with, it is possible for us to develop a loving and compassionate feeling towards them as well.

So, in this way, we can remember the kindness of all living creatures and use that attitude to develop a loving and compassionate feeling towards all beings in order to cultivate a wish to repay their kindness. The particular way to repay others' kindness is explained in the next point in the text, which we can go through in our next session.

Before we end the session for the evening, let us again take a few moments to do a formal contemplative meditation. This time the object to use for our contemplation will be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. When this mantra is recited, we will again refrain from allowing our minds to wander and instead commit to keeping our minds focused on the sound that we hear. When the recitation stops, we can concentrate on the residue of the sound and the joyful sensation that we feel. Maintaining that experience for a short period of time will suffice as a contemplative meditation and in that way we can end our session.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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