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## *The Condensed Lam Rim*

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As usual it will be good to spend a few minutes in meditation. The purpose of meditation is to develop a clear mind that is suitable for the practice of Dharma—a mind that is subdued and kind.

One of the great masters, said, “Even though we do not wish to suffer we go after the causes for suffering, and even though we wish happiness we abandon all the causes for happiness”. This is really true in our situation. Most ordinary beings fail to understand or know the causes of suffering. Some of the causes are attachment to fleeting pleasures. By failing to recognise these causes they actually pursue them, which only serves as the cause for further suffering.

Even though beings wish for happiness, and do not wish for suffering, they actually engage in the causes of suffering as though they purposely wanted to create suffering for themselves. Likewise, even though beings wish for happiness they fail to recognise the causes of happiness such as the virtues and practices for subduing the mind. Thus they neglect this and do not create the causes for happiness. It is as though they are purposely abandoning the causes for one’s own happiness. This is a pitiful state.

The great master Atisha has said that looking into one’s mind is the supreme practice. This is very sound advice because checking one’s mind with proper analysis means looking into the state of one’s own mind and refraining from the negativities and adopting the virtues. If we can apply this in our daily life it becomes the very means to follow the Dharma.

Atisha further mentioned that the highest virtue is benefiting others. He also said that the best moral practice is subduing one’s own mind. It is very true that without subduing the mind we cannot possibly engage in any kind of moral or ethical practise. So the first step of any practice is subduing the mind.

One’s best friend is mindfulness and introspection, which serve as a continuous aid for making sure that we are engaging in virtue and abandoning nonvirtue. The great master Lama Tsong Khapa said that the best attitude to develop within oneself is an attitude of kindness and refraining from harm towards others. That is the supreme attitude that one must develop and cherish at all times, and it is developed through proper analysis and self-investigation. This involves checking one’s own mind and making sure that it is imbued with an attitude of kindness and being constantly vigilant about refraining from harming others. This is very sound advice that one should consider and keep in one’s heart at all times.

Summarising all this advice, we can definitely conclude that the main goal of meditation is to generate a kind mind that is free from violence or harmfulness towards others. That is what this is all leading towards. One must try to maintain this focus and never waver from this main purpose of meditation. That then becomes the basis of all happiness for oneself as well as for others. We can see that the peacefulness of one’s mind is disturbed as soon as the opposite of non-harmfulness, which is harming others, arises. One’s mind becomes agitated, which completely disturbs the peace in one’s mind. Alternatively, if one develops non-harmfulness and the wish to benefit others it naturally brings the mind into a calm and peaceful state. That is something we must keep in focus.

When we look into why we do anything that harms others we come to the same basic answer. We do it because we ultimately want happiness. When we are harming others we are actually attempting to bring happiness to ourselves. That very attitude is based in wanting happiness for oneself but because of the wrong means we believe that if we harm, or do something to, others then it will somehow bring us happiness. This is a completely contrived method.

Whenever we look into whatever we are doing we come back to that basic, simple purpose of bringing about personal happiness. Even though our attitude is based on gaining some benefit and the happiness that our contrived mind seeks, we are very short-sighted in wanting only a momentary happiness. Even if the momentary happiness that we wish to experience involves harming others we don’t hesitate to engage in it.

Having a habit of harming others in any way in order to gain some temporary happiness for themselves comes from a self-cherishing mind. This self-cherishing mind is a contrived, faulty state of mind that has an attitude of wanting only some fleeting pleasure and immediate happiness. But doing this actually destroys our real long-term happiness.

Because the means of gaining short-term happiness is faulty and contrived and involves harming others there is also an immediate result, which is that others will not appreciate one. Such a person will always be uncomfortable or uneasy amongst others because others feel uncomfortable with them. In this way such a person is never really satisfied and only temporarily happy, and this actually destroys the means and causes for gaining ultimate happiness. As mentioned in the quotation earlier, even though we wish for happiness we turn away and abandon the causes for happiness, as if it were an enemy.

The alternative to harming others is genuinely wishing others to be happy and always thinking about how to benefit and help others. People naturally consider such a person trustworthy and reliable and will naturally like and want to be near such a person. If one actually cultivates an attitude of wishing to benefit others, or at least refrain from harming others, it naturally brings about a good connection with those around oneself and so others naturally trust one. This is true in mutual

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relationships, such as between partners, living in communities, with neighbours, with one's relatives and in a larger society. A person who practises developing this attitude will naturally be welcomed, will be considered worthy and a person who others are happy to be with. Such a person will always be welcomed and appreciated by others wherever they go. This is something that occurs naturally.

A person who develops the attitude of wishing to benefit others and refraining from harming others is not only appreciated by humans but even by animals. We see many who cherish and take care of animals. We can see how animals naturally respond to that person with affection; they trust and like the person. That is because even animals, which are not as intelligent as humans, appreciate and respond to kindness. Consequently there is no question that humans, who are more intelligent and have the ability to analyse and think, will definitely appreciate such a person.

Developing this attitude is essential for bringing about a real, genuine sense of well-being and happiness for oneself and within one's family, community and so forth. A person who develops this attitude inspires others to develop such an attitude as well. When surrounded by people who are developing that attitude and living their life with that attitude in mind they will have an enjoyable time. Their communication with others will be a joyful communication; when they are eating together, it will be a joyful eating together; when they are working, it will be joyful working together. Whether it is just relaxing at home, or whatever activity one may be engaging in, if it is engaged in with that attitude constantly developing in one's mind there will naturally be a feeling of well-being within one's mind. That's what we can call feeling joy and happiness.

This attitude is an attitude that can be cherished and nourished by anyone who wishes for well-being whether they consider themselves religious or not. It is something that is very beneficial and can add to one's sense of well-being. Furthermore it is this sort of attitude that one should develop within oneself and one should inspire and seek in others.

I particularly advise young adults who may not yet be engaged in a serious relationship that it is important not to be too hasty in getting into a relationship, particularly relationships of commitment such as marriage and so forth. It is better to wait and see how the situation develops. When one initially engages in a relationship and there is a strong attachment involved, one usually sees the other side of the relationship as good. Even when there are faults they are somehow obscured by one's attachment to the other person. One chooses to only see the good qualities and exaggerate those qualities. Even if there are faults we somehow ignore them and don't see them because of the strong attachment or desire. As time goes by and attachment lessens one begins to see the true side of the other person. Similarly, one would also begin to show one's true nature to them.

In this way, one can see over time whether the person is suitable or not. Otherwise we act as though we are

getting a meal after not having eaten for three or four days and we'll just eat whatever meal is brought in front of us, without really thinking what is in it and whether it is tasty or not. Relationships shouldn't be like consuming any meal that comes about. When one is very hungry and eats any meal available one may not have time to really investigate whether the meal is suitable or not and may actually be sick afterwards.

In a state of strong attachment or desire the only strong wish is to be with the other person and experience comfort and joy. After having that sort of experience there might actually be a bad taste afterwards. It is important not to just seek the pleasurable experience but to go beyond that and seek more in the nature of the relationship. As mentioned earlier, poor food may give you a stomach ache. Similarly, if one does not take time to check out the suitability of a relationship there might be a bad experience afterwards. That is something that we do not wish to experience and something that it is better to avoid.

For all of us our ultimate wishes are for well-being and happiness for ourselves. It is really important that we look into the causes and conditions that bring about personal happiness and suffering. We must cultivate this attitude of checking our mind and our attitude. Taking care of our mind and attitude is something we have complete responsibility for. We have control over this and can do that for ourselves and, as we develop ourselves, we can inspire others. If we neglect looking into our attitude and mind and neglect working with our mind then negative delusions such as attachment and anger will naturally take over our mind and influence us.

We can all see how, in a state of anger, we can lose control and do things and say things that we think are for our benefit, but as we notice soon afterwards the result is actually always undesirable. It disturbs our own peace of mind and it really harms relationships with others. We do all sorts of things that we strongly regret later. This happens with our parents. Initially there is no chance to get angry with, or say things to, or retaliate against, our parents. But later, in moments of anger that come about uncontrollably, we say and do things to our parents that are unpleasant. Afterwards we feel bad about it.

It is similar with attachment. When there is very strong attachment and desire it obscures our perception to the point that we do things that are irrational and bring about more unpleasant feelings later on. When influenced by strong attachment or anger we act irrationally because the very negative emotions in the mind obscure reality. Therefore it is very important that we take time to investigate our attitudes and try to subdue or apply antidotes for overcoming anger and strong attachment. The technique for doing this is called meditation.

When strong anger arises in the mind we notice that the mind becomes agitated and taints our view. We see everything as negative. Whatever we do has a bad taste. However, if we work with our mind we can start to recognise our state of mind and try to work with it to

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slowly overcome it and bring our mind inwards and calm ourselves down. As we calm down, things brighten up a bit. We see the brighter side of situations and things don't seem as negative and bad.

We can immediately see the effect when the emotion of anger is reduced in our mind. It is similar when any other delusions are subdued. When the mind is subdued things are much better. As we meditate on an antidote for overcoming anger, and anger is reduced in our mind, the mind becomes calmer and more peaceful. We use meditation to protect ourselves from negative states and to bring us into a happier state. There is no other real method than that. Meditating on the antidote for overcoming anger can be considered as an actual practice of Dharma. That meditation is also the ultimate protector and saviour.

How do you define the practice of Dharma? The essence of the practice of Dharma is to turn the mind away from negativity. When the mind is engaging in negativity that which turns the mind and brings it away from that negativity is the practice of Dharma. In this case bringing the mind, which was initially in the state of anger, into a more peaceful state is the practice of Dharma. If we were to allow the mind to continue to be in that state of anger we would engage in actions that can be quite drastic and harmful to ourself. Therefore, when the mind is turned away from the emotion of anger that naturally saves us from any mishaps or danger that we might fall into. That is how it becomes a saviour or protector.

Having explained the importance and benefit of meditation we can take sometime to engage in meditation. Before we actually go into meditation it is important to note that while the focus of our meditation is the breath, the freshness of the mind should always be maintained. When we first begin to focus on the breath our mind might be quite fresh and sharp, because it is the beginning. However it is important that we maintain that freshness plus the focus of the mind on the object, which is the breath.

If we don't use our vigilance, or what we call mindfulness, the mind might slowly slip into either of the main faults of meditation, which are dullness and excitement. Dullness is where the mind starts to sink in a bit, and is almost removed from the object. The mind is still focussed on the object but it becomes too relaxed. When the mind becomes too relaxed a sort of subtle, dullness arises. If one maintains that state of dullness it is said to be one of the main obstacles to actual meditation.

The other extreme, which is also a fault, is where the mind feels high. If there is too much heightened feeling in the mind and that is also an obstacle. One has to find the balance of maintaining focus on the object, without feeling too removed and dull or too excited with heightened feeling.

The tool for maintaining the balance is mindfulness and introspection. Mindfulness and introspection are used to check out each moment to make sure our mind remains focussed on the object of meditation and free from these two obstacles. The extent to which dullness or agitation

arises in the mind is something we should be able to discern through our own experience of meditation. As we engage in meditation it will become quite obvious after a while if our mind is sinking and becoming lethargic. Sinking is the dullness that arises in the obstacle of dullness. When the mind is too tight or heightened it leads to excitement. This discernment is something that comes about through practise. So, in this way, initially try to focus on the object and keep the mind focussed there. We'll spend a few moments in meditation. (*Pause for meditation*). If the meditation duration is too long that also might not be good.

I'd like to take the opportunity this evening to thank everyone for coming to the classes. There is no doubt that you have come with the very good intention of finding out ways and means of learning the Dharma and trying to use it to subdue the mind to help and benefit oneself and others. I wish to thank you for coming to the teaching continuously with such an attitude. From my side, I have conducted the teachings with the best intention I can have, which is a kind attitude and an attitude of wishing to benefit others. Whether it has been a benefit or not you can decide for yourself. I don't know, but that is definitely my attitude. If this has been of benefit then it might be appropriate for you to be thankful as well. But if it has not been of benefit and actually caused harm then I have to apologise. .

This evening is the last session for this year. The Wednesday session will resume on 10 January with meditations lead by others. I think the meditation will be conducted along the lines of visualisations of Avalokitesvara, or Chenrezig as we call him in Tibetan. This is consistent with having studied meditation and trying to do some meditation. The session will be guided and you will be led through the meditation.

Those who may not be interested in doing that particular type of visualisation of Chenrezig may do whatever meditation suits them. One could come here and participate in a group and do any meditation that you feel you are better at, because you think, 'I'm better at this kind of meditation so it is more appropriate for me.' The main thing is that one has the wish to come. If the practice is done in a group it will be beneficial for those who wish to come.

In line with tradition, I wish everyone a Merry Xmas and Happy New Year, many hundreds and thousands of times over. In the Tibetan tradition the New Year celebration is one of the biggest celebrations of the year. As young children we didn't sleep on the night before because we were so excited waiting for the next day. On New Year's day we would get new clothes to wear and nice food to eat. We couldn't wait for dawn to rise, because that is when New Year starts in the Tibetan tradition. Many of us would not sleep all night. I don't know if there is a similar tradition here.

Part of the tradition was to try to stop oneself from getting upset or angry for that day. It was believed that if you got angry on the first day of New Year then the whole year could be a year where one develops anger. So

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everyone took great care not to get angry on New Year's day. There are many who have commented that meditation on the first day of New Year is very effective and beneficial and that it carries an effect throughout the year. Because of that I used to lead a meditation near the beach. Even though I am not able to engage in that anymore people can come and do their own meditation here in January. That would be also useful and beneficial, even though I'm not able to come. We will end the session this evening with usual meditation focusing on the mantra of Shakyamuni.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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Edited Version*

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