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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation. In order to engage in meditation one needs to both physically and mentally withdraw oneself. The physical body should be brought out of its slothful state. Likewise the mind, which is also slothful and distracted, should be withdrawn from all distractions. A slothful or distracted mind is what we try to overcome in meditation. If we can let our mind be influenced by a positive state of mind that would be beneficial for us.

One needs to withdraw oneself and become more attentive on a physical and mental level. Withdrawing our physical body from adverse activity and trying to sit in a correct posture is relatively easy to do. Anyone could easily help us to get into a correct physical posture. But it is more important that we pay attention to the mind, withdrawing it from distractions and maintaining a focused mind.

As mentioned regularly, the definition of meditation is familiarising the mind with a virtuous object. Acquainting and familiarising our mind with virtuous objects means specifically the positive states of mind that are within us. Good thoughts and good attitudes are something that we can develop within ourselves. Developing these positive states of mind is possible if we pay a bit more attention and put some effort into cultivating them. In order to achieve this we have to make the effort of acquainting and familiarising ourselves with these positive states.

The reverse of acquainting and familiarising ourselves with positive states of mind is to acquaint and familiarise ourselves with negative states of mind. This is something that we already do naturally. We can see that if we allow ourselves to be influenced by negative states of mind and acquaint ourselves with them, then that just brings more and more troubles, frustrations, difficulties and problems for oneself.

To help point out the positive and negative effects or consequences of our state of mind let us examine one particular positive state of mind and its opposite. Let us take the most essential, positive state of mind, which is love and compassion. Love and a compassionate attitude are something to be cultivated within us. The more we familiarise and acquaint ourselves with the positive attitude of love and compassion, the more it brings joy and peace within us. Anger is the exact opposite of love and compassion. We can all notice through our own experience that as soon as anger arises it disturbs our mind, which becomes agitated and very negative.

It is essential to relate to our own experiences to see the positive and negative effects of certain attitudes. Continuing with love and compassion, let us relate to a personal experience of how we feel when we have a loving and compassionate attitude towards a friend. When we are in a state of mind where we are feeling love and a compassionate concern towards our friend, what kind of feeling do we have

within ourselves? How do we feel at that time? Alternatively, when we feel upset or angry with our friends how do we feel at that time? Using our experience to analyse and investigate the truth of these affects is something that will be good for ourselves. As we are using our own experience it brings the learning home and we really feel that.

It is essential for us to regularly check our mind through self-analysis. Self-analysis uses our intelligence to look within ourselves to examine what state of mind brings about what kind of effects within us. In very simple language, it means that one checks one's mind. Without doing some self-analysis it seems that it is quite unlikely that we can begin to feel and understand the benefits of positive states of mind and the negative consequences of negative states of mind. If we just follow our distracted mind in our daily life then that frame of mind is not conducive for us to be able to undertake that self-analysis. We become too distracted to be able to reflect upon the positive or the negative effects of our attitudes.

In order to undertake self-analysis, we need to withdraw our mind. This is where the practice of meditation comes in. The ideal is to withdraw our mind completely from disturbing objects and distractions, and focus inward. If one is not able to completely withdraw one's mind, if we can only have an internal focus of fifty percent or even twenty-five percent, that amount of energy and time to look within ourselves will still make our self-analysis fruitful. The reason why I am being a little lenient in saying maybe 50%, or even at the very least 25%, is because we are very accustomed to having objects of distraction. We seem to enjoy those objects of distraction and being preoccupied with them. So, if I were to say to completely withdraw from all external distractions that might be too difficult for you. We are trying to find an easy way to meditate: not to be too stressful and too difficult for us but to find an easier approach. If I were to explain the technique of meditation as withdrawing yourself 50%, then that would seem to be more reasonable and manageable for you.

Having taken that initial lenient approach, the fact is that the real effect of the practice of meditation seems to come only from complete 100% withdrawing the mind from distractions and maintaining that focus on our object of meditation. Whatever duration it is, if we can focus 100% on that object, it is then that familiarity really begins to take place.

In order to get the actual, authentic effects of meditation one needs to focus 100% on the meditation object that we have chosen. Only that way do we get the actual effects. If we were to take a particular example of the practise of meditation, such as practising meditation to overcome desire, the object described in the teaching that one focuses on is the faults of the objects of desire. For a male the object of desire may be an attractive woman, and for a woman it may be an attractive man. If one is normally attracted to the opposite sex these would be examples of objects of desire. When a meditator, who has spent sufficient time in authentic practice, comes out of meditation and sees the object of desire, because of having meditated on the faults of objects of desire, they would not fall for it. Rather than feeling attraction towards the object, they will feel a sense of distance to the point of feeling disgust in acquiring the object of desire. They would see it as a fault. That would be the actual outcome of the practise of meditating on the faults of objects of desire.

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Having used particular examples earlier, the main point that I am stressing and emphasising is that the positive effect of the practice of meditation is to become familiar and acquainted with the state of mind whereby one does not fall for the objects of distraction. 'Fall for' means that one would not be influenced by the objects of distraction. That would be a benefit because the opposite of that is to be completely influenced by the object of distraction, which leads to a disturbed mind. Ordinarily our mind is easily influenced by external distractions. Because there are countless examples out there in relation to each object of distraction, it brings some sort of agony to our mind. It disturbs our mind to that extent.

The main fault does not lie in the objects of distraction; there are always going to be endless objects of distraction. There are always going to be objects that seem to be nicer and more beautiful and so forth. The fault does not lie in the object itself and one cannot try to think that one can overcome desire by overcoming the external objects. Rather we can overcome desire by subduing our own mind, that is, to work internally and not allowing the mind to be influenced by the distractions. When the mind becomes subdued, the external distractions and so forth will not hinder or obstruct oneself and cause disturbance to one's mind.

To use that earlier example again; for an ordained person such as a monk, seeing a beautiful woman, or for a nun seeing a beautiful man, could be an object of distraction for an untrained mind. However, when a monk or nun practises according to the teachings and practises meditation in subduing the mind by seeing the faults of these objects, then they can reach a state where they are not affected even when they are amongst, for example, hundreds of beautiful women. It will not obstruct their mind, or hinder the vows that a monk has. Disturbance to the mind such as longing to touch, smile with a lustful mind or wishing to communicate out of desire, will all be overcome. This is an example of a situation where, if the mind itself is subdued, then when such a person is amongst objects of distraction it will not become a cause for the mind to become disturbed. Specifically, the vows of monks and nuns will not be interrupted. In this way we can definitely see a positive outcome or consequence of the practice itself. In order to protect one's vows one needs to have the attitude of renunciation and that will protect the vows. Protection through renunciation has more meaning when we have that understanding.

Having explained some of the practical benefits of the practice of meditation, there are various types of meditation to overcome different negative states of mind. The practice that we engage in here, on a regular basis is the initial simple practice of focussing on the breath. The breath is a neutral object. Focusing on the breath allows the mind to settle and become relatively peaceful and calmer. In order to experience such an effect one needs to do it in a very sincere way. The practice itself has to be done in a very sincere manner where, for the time that we spend in meditation, we make a strong commitment in our mind that for the next few minutes I will not allow my mind to be distracted. Even when thoughts or ideas pop into my mind I will not give them strength. I will not allow my mind to be influenced by them, but rather keep my mind completely focussed on the breath itself.

The actual technique when one finds the mind becoming distracted is to constantly bring the mind back to focusing on the breath, and trying to maintain the focus for as long as

possible. If we can have that constant awareness of bringing the mind back to the breath every time we notice we get distracted, and try to maintain our focus on the breath, we are familiarising our mind with the object. So, as mentioned previously, sit in an appropriate posture and make that determination in our mind to focus on our breath, withdraw into your mind and try to maintain the focus. (*Pause for meditation*).

The topic we have been covering throughout the year is called the Graduated Path to Enlightenment or Lam Rim Tibetan. I consider myself to be very fortunate to be able to present these teachings. For those who have come and listened to the teachings it might also have benefited you. It might have been worthwhile for you too. The essence of the practice of the teachings on the Graduated Path to Enlightenment is to develop the altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all beings, which is called bodhicitta in Sanskrit. If the essence of the teaching is bodhicitta or the altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment, then the basis of this is love and compassion. The main obstruction to achieving that altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment based on love and compassion is the self-cherishing mind or attitude. Self-cherishing is an attitude that obstructs love and compassion growing within one's mind.

The actual development of great compassion to generate bodhicitta is said to be not only the basis, but also the whole structure, of the entire path of Buddhist teachings. Both the Lower Vehicle and the Greater Vehicle teachings are said to be the initial basis for the practice of a bodhisattva, a being who has developed bodhicitta. Prior to developing bodhicitta one has to develop great compassion within one's mind. Having developed bodhicitta and thus become a bodhisattva, the various practices of a bodhisattva to benefit others are said to be based on having great compassion. Great compassion is an aid to engage in the difficult practices of a bodhisattva. It is essential while practising the path to enlightenment. Then, at the very end when enlightenment has been obtained and a bodhisattva becomes a Buddha, great compassion is again essential, as it is great compassion that inspires them to benefit and help other sentient beings. It is in that context that it is said that great compassion is the basis of the path. Compassion is likened to the very roots prior to entering the path, a firm tree while engaging in practices along the path, and the fruit at the end of the path, which is attaining enlightenment.

Generally it seems that love and compassion serves as a basis for happiness in our life. When the definition of Dharma, which is the actual entire structure of Buddhist teachings, is put in a simple way we can say that it is the compassionate attitude. Someone who develops a loving and compassionate attitude towards others, during that time, is practising the Dharma. In very simple, lay terms we can say that Dharma is a loving and compassionate attitude based on honesty.

Cultivating love and compassion is not something that we develop only strangers who are out there. Instead, we need to initially develop this attitude towards those whom we associate or live with on a daily basis. That is where we begin our practice. Someone who claims that they have love and compassion and is focussing on others, but who neglects love and compassion for those who are close to them is someone who, despite their claims, is missing the point. In reality their practice is without real flavour, like very bland food. Whereas the practice of someone who may not claim to

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have love and compassion towards others but in fact exhibits real love and compassion to those who are near them on a daily basis, their practice of love and compassion is full of flavour.

Having explained that love and compassion is the essence and basis of the path and Dharma, we need to then look into how love and compassion is developed. A real, authentic, unconditional love and compassion is an attitude expressed without a strong self-cherishing mind and without a strong self-interest. Love and compassion towards others, which is mixed with a self-cherishing mind, with self-interest and an ulterior motive, is not real, authentic, love and compassion. There are two different types of love and compassion; one that is mixed with a self-cherishing mind and one that is free from the self-cherishing mind. When we really look into it, we will begin to notice big differences.

An authentic or unconditional attitude of love and compassion is a love and compassion where the other is the primary concern, whereas the love and compassion that is mixed with a self-cherishing attitude, has oneself as the primary concern. Having others as our primary concern is, for example, the authentic love and compassion that we experience when we see someone who is in a very distressed situation and suffering immensely. When we see others in great suffering, even though it may only be for a few moments, we may have the strong attitude of wanting to do something to relieve them of their sufferings. Or, if they are deprived of joy and happiness, wishing them to be happy and joyful. That would be great love.

True love and compassion is developed in relation to others, where the other's suffering is the main concern as opposed to oneself as the main concern. The love and compassion which has oneself as the main concern, i.e. mixed with a self-cherishing attitude, would be, for example, the love and compassion we feel towards our friends, one's son or daughter, one's immediate family members. We can see that the very reason we feel love or concern is because he is my friend or my son or daughter or my relative. When the 'me' is the primary concern, then because they are related to me one feels affection and love towards the other. In other words, it is like thinking, 'As long as they are nice to 'me', I will love and care for them'.

The love and compassion that one feels towards others which has oneself as the primary concern, is a love and compassion mixed with a self-cherishing attitude. That comes about because of the attachment we have towards the objects that we feel love and compassion towards. The main reason self-cherishing arises is because of attachment or desire. So, the difference between love and compassion with others as the main concern, versus one self as the main concern is whether it is mixed with attachment or not. Love and compassion that is mixed with attachment is not very stable.

We can observe that the love and attachment that one feels towards someone that one is attached to lasts only as long as they are appealing or attractive to one self. As soon as they become unattractive then the love and compassion one claimed to have had earlier starts to vanish and disappear. We know this from our own experience. I am not implying that every relationship is based on a fleeting attraction. There are good relationships that go beyond mere attractiveness and attachment, and which are much more durable. However, in most ordinary cases, we can see that relationships are based mainly on fleeting attractions and attachments. One may have initially said, 'Oh, I really love

you; I have deep concern for you!! When you expressed that, you may have even felt it at that moment, but when the situation changes and the other is not as attractive any longer, you would have noticed that the earlier claims are not true anymore.

The main context here is attachment itself. When attachment itself is reduced, then the degree of one's love and compassion towards the object will also be lessened.

To give a more concrete example, when attachment to the object is very strong, there seems to be a strong sense of concern and love towards the object to the point where one claims real love and so forth. If, in that state of mind, the object says that they want to leave you, then you may wet your pillow crying with sadness. Whereas, when you do not have any attachment anymore, if they say they want to leave, would you cry? No, on the contrary you may feel glad if they left.

At that moment when one has very strong attachment does one have an intention of separating from the object of one's desire? One doesn't have that. I have experienced being distracted; when I was young and living in the monastery, my dear mother used to visit me on rare occasions. So, when I heard my mum was going to come and visit me, my teacher would notice that my mind got very excited and I would not be able to focus on any studies. My teacher would then say, 'Relax, you don't have to become too anxious, just wait until your mum comes'.

The main point that I am emphasising here is the difference between a loving and compassionate attitude with a mind free of attachment, or at best the least attachment in one's mind, and a loving and compassionate attitude with strong attachment. We all have different kinds of relationships. To try to have a relationship without any attachment would be quite difficult if not impossible. A relationship without any attachment is something very unrealistic in the initial stage. In a relationship we have with others, there may be some attachment initially. However, by seeing the faults of attachment and the advantages of real authentic love and compassion, one should strive to increase the loving and compassionate attitude towards the other, and slowly minimise and decrease the attachment. If we can increase the loving and compassionate attitude towards others, then as the attachment decreases, the relationship would become much more stable and will last longer than a relationship that is based merely on attachment and attraction. Furthermore, there are disadvantages of having strong attachment. I am not sure, but maybe we could say from a medical point of view that having relationship based only attachment to the other may even be harmful for one self, physically or otherwise.

If one can practise increasing the real loving and compassionate attitude towards the other in a relationship, and maintain an authentic loving and compassionate attitude, it seems the relationship itself will be a more relaxed. There would not be much stress and it would be more relaxed than a relationship based on very strong attachment and attractions. Now it seems that there may be some joy at certain times in a relationship with strong attraction and attachment, but somehow the overriding emotion seems to be an unsettling one, a little bit like sadness. I am not very experienced with this but it seems that with strong attachment to the other, there is a feeling of emptiness and anxiety rather than a real, tranquil, lasting joy.

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Further, in a state of strong attachment and desire the actual practice of meditation and trying to focus one's mind seems to be very difficult. In the great masterpiece text of Shantideva he mentioned that the primary distraction and obstruction to meditation is desire or attachment.

To summarise again, the main point I am emphasising is that in our daily life we should try to acquaint ourselves with the loving and compassionate attitude, and that is something we should take as a primary source within ourselves. Not losing that compassionate and loving attitude and trying to protect it becomes very important. We can definitely see from our own experience that as soon as the loving and compassionate attitude within our mind starts to weaken, agitation or anger towards others becomes stronger. Thus we need to train ourselves, on a daily basis, to try to increase our love and compassion.

To recap, according to the teachings, love is an attitude whereby we see the lack of happiness in other's mind and wish them to be happy. Compassion is seeing another in a suffering state, wishing them to be free from suffering. That attitude of love and compassion is something we need to train in from the very basic right up to the advanced level. If both sides in a relationship can have that attitude towards each other, wishing the other to be happy and wishing the other to be free from any kind of distress or pain, that mutual sharing would then be a source of real joy and happiness within that relationship. The relationship would also be long-lasting. That is something that we need train in with those who are close to ourselves. That is where we begin to train, and if we are successful with the ones that we deal with on a daily basis we can then expand our practice.

When we relate the actual practice in this way to our daily lives the practice comes home to us. It is not as if we have to go far away or into solitude to practise. In fact it is right here in our daily life with the people whom we love and associate with that we should begin our practice. It becomes a very practical practice because if one is living with someone, the person we live with and deal with becomes the object of one's practice. That is very practical. It is because the practice is so readily available in our everyday life that the Buddha has mentioned that liberation is possible even for those who are leading a lay life. There is a particular term in Tibetan for lay life which is 'the life of a householder', referring to relationships between a man and woman who live together in lay life.

However, in order to actually engage in the practice there is an essential attitude one must develop, which is patience. Without patience one could not practice. The practice of patience becomes essential, because when we begin to practise love and compassion from our own side, we might not always get a good response from the other. We may feel that the other is not appreciating us and when the other does not respond in the same way, we might start getting upset and agitated. This is where patience becomes very important, to avoid disturbing our mind.

The practice of patience means that in a mutual relationship, when one begins to try to practise being kind and considerate, and in response if the other frowns and doesn't use pleasant words to us, then we need to withstand that and not allow it to become a reason for us to get upset and angry. If we can actually maintain our concern and love for the other without getting upset and angry at that time, then we are practising patience. Patience is not retaliating with anger. Not retaliating with words but feeling disturbed

within one's mind is not real patience. Patience means that the mind itself does not get disturbed.

How does one practise and not allow the mind to get disturbed if the other frowns or is noticeably upset or says abusive words to one? The way one should train one's mind so that one does not allow that to become a reason to get upset is to think along the lines that for the person, one's friend or whoever it may be, to be frowning or using words that are unreasonable and which may be upsetting shows that they are not settled in their mind. They must be upset, and something must be disturbing them. They must also be sad. There must be some reason they are sad and so they are reacting in that way.

If we can think in that way we could actually feel compassion towards them and accept their behaviour, rather than becoming upset and angry. This is true because when they are well and happy they wouldn't act in that way. They wouldn't show a frown if they are happy. They wouldn't say nasty things to one when they feel happy. Because they love you and you love them they wouldn't do that normally. The very fact that they are showing a frown or they are saying things that are unreasonable and unpleasant is an indication that their mind is disturbed and that they are not happy. One could think to oneself, 'Oh, my dear friend or my partner must not be happy. That is why they are saying these things. I will not allow myself to retaliate and be upset and angry with them, to cause more unhappiness'. The proper way of dealing with the situation, is to find means of consoling them and making them feel better. This would really be useful for our mind too. As mentioned in the teachings, the antidote to anger is cultivating love and compassion. When we relate in this practical way we can see how that is true.

We can further demonstrate the truth of these earlier statements. If one looks at one's own experience in relationships with others whom we loved and had concern for, would we normally say abusive words and be aggressive towards them? In our normal state of mind we wouldn't do that. If we do find ourselves being abusive to the others or showing a frown to them, it is when we are unhappy ourselves and are disturbed. Relating to our own experience and knowing and realising that when we say abusive words or frown towards others it is because we are unhappy, we can then understand that it is exactly the reason for others to be in that state too. Using one's own experience one can gauge how others are feeling.

If we can try to practise in this practical way in our daily life it would be very beneficial for our mind.

The practice of Dharma is a way of avoiding intentionally harming and hurting others and trying to benefit others in whatever way we can. If we can benefit others then that becomes a practice of Dharma. When we avoid hurting others, that is also the practice of Dharma. In this practical way whatever we can do in our daily lives is how we begin to train ourselves.

I will conclude here for the evening with greetings to everyone for an auspicious time for the New Year. May all go well and may all be auspicious. As I mentioned the other day, it is customary to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Of course in wishing everyone a happy new year it is yet to be seen whether it will become a good happy new year or not. It is questionable whether it will be a good year or not but nevertheless it seems the words are nice and auspicious. To wish someone a happy new year is the best we can do for others to start a good new

year.

Besides this greeting, from my own side I pray that everyone will have a good meaningful, happy life in general. May everything go well and you be free of all illness, have minimal suffering and good sound health. That is something I can offer as a prayer to everyone. Prostrating to other sentient beings is said to be very significant. I prostrate to you by putting my palms together, which is a gesture of prostration. Shantideva and other great masters have said that there is equal benefit in prostrating to Buddha and prostrating to sentient beings.

The reason for this equal benefit is that in order to achieve enlightenment we need to depend on sentient beings just as we depend on the Buddha to guide us. We need sentient beings to develop the ultimate goodness and wellbeing. In fact it seems that, in the conventional sense, we would say we might be more reliant on sentient beings. The actual benefit we get from sentient beings is more immediate. We have to deal with sentient beings everyday. The Buddha has all the might and majesty of an enlightened being. However, because of our obscuration we are not able to see the Buddha right now in its actual form. There might be emanations or tulkus of enlightened minds or enlightened beings around us but we may not see them. However sentient beings are something we can relate to and associate with everyday. In that sense we are getting more benefit.

Monday evenings will start on the 7 January 2008. Wednesday evenings will commence from the 16 January 2008. This will be a practise evening meditating on the Buddha of Compassion Avalokiteshvara, or Chenrezig in Tibetan. It will be good for new or older students alike to come to the practice. It is a good opportunity to accumulate merit to come to the practice even if one were to do a few malas or one mala of reciting the mantra Om Mani Padme Hum. To that extent one would have gained some benefit and merit and thus it would be good to come. Experienced students who have received initiation can come along and do the practice with the visualisation. If one can do the visualisation in an appropriate way by seeing oneself as inseparable from the deity Avalokiteshvara and his holy body, speech and mind being in union with one's own body speech and mind and if with that visualisation one recites the mantra 'Om Mani Padme Hum' for even a short time one would notice that during that period when one has the focus of inseparability of the deity and one self, that there is a big difference in one's mind. Thus it would be very beneficial for experienced students to come.

I wish to thank everyone. From my side I try to give some teachings and share my knowledge. From your side, you come and listen to it. That mutually interdependent relationship takes place in our gathering here. Through that interdependent relationship we can see we all benefit from engaging in the teachings and listening, reflecting and meditating on them. That is the obvious benefit that we all experience and we can share in a gathering such as this one. When we look into why and how this has become possible, it is because we have Tara Institute. Having the Institute run on a daily basis is possible due to the selfless contributions primarily of the members of the Institute who give the regular donations that support this Institute. Others also give random donations and in that way become a contributor to of the running of this institute. I would like to take this opportunity to particularly thank with great appreciation those who are supporting the centre in this way by becoming members or otherwise making contributions in

whatever way. It is obvious that whatever contribution has been made towards the Institute is definitely put to good use. Not one single cent has been wasted because it has been used for the purpose of the Dharma, to acquire great benefit for oneself and others. In that way there is definitely great benefit. That is why I would like to thank you for your support.

It is customary to say it three times, 'Thank you, thank you, thank you'. The three 'thank you's' represent the Three Jewels in order to get the blessing of the Three Jewels.

In relation to next year, I am optimistic that it will go well and the reason why I am optimistic is because I feel this year has gone well. Even though I lack great proficiency or knowledge in the teachings, I can confirm that whatever teachings sessions I have done were with a good attitude or a good motivation, based on the belief that there will be some benefit for others. Whether it has benefited you or not is something that you would be able to find out for yourself. However, from my side, I can definitely assure you and confirm that I have not neglected the proper attitude. Based on that, I feel that we will definitely have a good new year.

Before we conclude for the evening, let us spend a few more minutes in meditation. This time we focus on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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