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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual we can spend some time for meditation. For that purpose, we will sit in a comfortable and relaxed posture. The other preliminary requirement for meditation is to have a good motivation, which is basically developing a good attitude in one's mind. One needs to try to generate a kind mind – it is not as if someone can do this for us.

So then the question is do we have that positive attitude within ourselves or not? It is worthwhile checking up on this. For some people, that mind would naturally be there; one may already have that kind, positive attitude within oneself prior to engaging in meditation. In this case, generating a positive motivation means just to maintain and enhance that positive frame of mind as much as possible. If one has a positive state of mind, particularly love and compassion, then one simply maintains that.

If we do not have that prevailing state of mind prior to meditation then, as the teachings mention, we need to generate it. We need to intentionally invoke a positive state of mind that is imbued with love and compassion. Whether we currently manifest a positive mind or not, there is no one who does not have the basis of love and compassion within themselves – all of us equally have those attitudes within us.

As human beings, we all naturally have the basis of love and compassion within us. It is just a matter of activating and using those positive states of mind. When our mind is imbued with love and compassion, it brings only benefit for us and for others. That is why it is referred to as a positive state of mind, because the consequence of having such states of mind is that they will bring positive results for us and for others.

Having generated such a loving and compassionate state of mind, we then try to maintain it at all times, whether we are walking, sitting, or even sleeping: we try to walk with love and compassion, sit with love and compassion, and sleep with love and compassion in one's mind. In that way, one's whole demeanour or being will be imbued with love and compassion. That is how it becomes most worthwhile.

By their very definition, the attitudes of love and compassion involve concern for others at all times. Love is a concern for others to be happy, particularly when we reflect on the situation of others who are deprived of happiness. Compassion is a particular state of mind wishing others to be free from suffering, which arises when we focus on others who have suffering. Thus these states of mind are really the constant concern for others to be happy and be free from suffering. Because by their

very nature those states of mind involve concern for others, as a consequence any action that comes from those states of mind will always benefit other beings.

If we look at our relationships with others, the elements that contribute to bringing about mutual benefit and well-being are these positive states of mind. When we have a sense of mutual love and compassion for each other, a real concern for each other, those genuine positive states of mind will bring about a practical benefit, particularly at times when it is most needed. During times of difficulty and hardship, those who extend a helping hand towards us are those who have those positive attitudes within their mind.

When we begin to understand how having a positive mind of love and compassion contributes to others' well-being, we will realise that this positive attitude is the best companion for us to have at all times. It will never fail us, because it will always be with us. In terms of external friendships, those who have a sense of love and compassion within their mind will also become our best friends. So, both internally and externally, one will find that the elements of love and compassion are the best companions. That is also true for those living together in a relationship: the most essential element for maintaining a harmonious relationship is mutual love and compassion, there is no question about that.

Meditating on love and compassion basically means familiarising one's mind with these qualities. Anyone who does this will be able to exhibit genuine happiness, good mannerisms such as a genuine smile, and genuine kindness towards others. Because such a person is being genuinely kind and showing good mannerisms towards others, others will respond in a positive way. Thus as an internal companion, generating love and compassion or familiarising one's mind with love and compassion becomes an unfailing source of happiness and joy within us at all times.

In relation to external companions, just as love and compassion within us means that we will have a genuine concern for others, likewise anyone else who has also developed love and compassion will have exactly the same qualities – a genuine concern for others, and a genuine sense of joy and happiness within their own mind. As a companion, anyone who has those qualities of love and compassion within their mind becomes an unfailing, genuine, good companion for us as well. So we can see how love and compassion serve as the best unfailing companions for us, internally and externally.

Once we clearly understand that love and compassion are the most essential states of mind for our internal development, and familiarise our mind with them through meditation, the next important thing we must contemplate is how to protect such valuable state of mind. What destroys this sense of love and compassion are the negative states of mind, such as anger. Anger is the direct opposite, the negative state of mind that harms or hinders the love and compassion in one's mind. The moment anger arises in our mind towards someone, any sense of love and compassion we feel for them completely subsides. We can see through our own experience how true this is. Although we may have a

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sense of love, care and compassion towards another, the moment anger arises, we lose our sense of concern for that person.

Thus to protect oneself, one must thoroughly familiarise one's mind with cherishing other beings and appreciate their kindness. Familiarising our mind in this way helps us to maintain a sense of caring, love and compassion towards others at all times. The great master, Shantideva, mentioned that sentient beings are the very source of all our happiness; all the joy and happiness we gain is from other sentient beings. Thus we should always look upon them with great love and kindness. He then cautioned that we should not generate a negative state of mind such as anger towards them. In essence Shantideva is saying that all our happiness comes from the kindness of others; every joy we experience comes from others. Thus we must consider others as being precious, and not develop hateful, angry states of mind towards any other being.

Those who are familiar with the practice of the Guru Puja would recall the verses where it says that, just like oneself, every living creature wishes only for joy and happiness, and that they are never content: no matter how much happiness they have, they are never content with it, and they do not wish even the slightest suffering.

If we relate this to ourselves, we can see how true it is. If we have a sense of joy or happiness, we want to increase or extend it further; we are never satisfied with the initial sense of joy and happiness. Whereas when it comes to experiencing suffering, we don't wish for even the slightest discomfort. Just as this is true for us, it is also true for all other beings. As the Guru Puja suggests, because of that reason, we are all equal: all other beings equally have the same wish to experience happiness and not experience suffering, so one must not cause suffering for others. Just as one does not wish to experience suffering oneself, one should not cause others suffering, but as much as possible give them joy and happiness.

We can begin to implement this practice with those we are close to. The people we live with and associate with daily are the very people we need to start with in our practice of extending genuine love and compassion. We can relate the advice given in the few lines from the Guru Puja to our partner – for example, reminding ourselves that: 'Just as I do not wish to experience any kind of suffering, the same is also true for my partner. And in terms of happiness, just as I'm not satisfied with any kind of happiness and joy, likewise my partner or friend has the same wish or inclination: they also would want every possible happiness and joy. We are exactly the same in that way. Thus rather than just focusing on myself and my own interest, it is right to take the other into consideration and try to contribute to their joy and happiness, and help eliminate or reduce their suffering.'

At the end of that particular verse in the Guru Puja, it says: 'Because all beings like me wish only for happiness and not to experience any suffering, thus I must practise bringing others joy and happiness'. While this extends in a broad sense to all sentient beings, at a practical level, we must try to extend this thought to the people we associate with our daily life. If we can actually recall this advice

from the teachings and contemplate it every day, it will actually be very beneficial for us.

In relation to putting this into practice with the person you live with such as your partner, at certain times when the relationship is tense, this advice might take the form of just reminding each other: 'OK, let's just go into separate rooms for a while and just meditate on love and compassion' (*laughter*). After going into separate rooms for a few minutes and trying to meditate sincerely on love and compassion, it is possible that you might come out smiling at each other (*more laughter*). But then it is also possible that going into separate rooms may aggravate you even more, so of course you have to be careful to do it wisely!

As mentioned previously, we need to protect those positive states of mind of love and compassion as much as we can. The most practical way of doing that is through the practice of meditation. Initially, we practise meditation as a technique to settle down our mind and keep it focused. This focused and clear mind then becomes a tool to protect the positive states of mind within us. Thus the meditation practice we will do now – focusing on our breath – becomes the means to protect our mind.

So we now can assess our physical posture, sitting in a comfortable and relaxed position. Then we remind ourselves that in order to protect and maintain the positive, healthy states of mind within us, we need to apply the proper techniques. Protecting our mind means to protect it from something: what we are protecting our mind from is the influence of the delusions, which are the negative states of mind. The opposing forces within us are the delusions or negative states of mind. To protect our mind in the practice of meditation means to withdraw it from every form of distraction, every form of delusion or negative state.

Withdrawing the mind from these distractions, one brings one's full attention and focus to the meditation object, which is the breathing. In this manner, we keep our mind focused on the natural rhythm of our breathing and try to maintain our focus one hundred percent on our breath for the next few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

Is there anyone who has a good question they may have been saving that we can address?

*Question: When developing love and compassion it seems to contribute to feelings of desire as well; is it possible to develop love and compassion without desire?*

*Answer:* It is true that desire can manifest in our mind when we feel love and compassion towards others. When you focus on an appealing object, because it appears appealing, there is also a danger that desire or attachment may be generated towards the object. Thus initially when one practises developing love towards someone, there is the danger that the love can turn into attachment.

When great or noble beings known as bodhisattvas train in developing love towards other beings, as described earlier in the teachings, this is combined with the attitude of seeing others as being appealing, using the example of one's mother. If you have a good relationship with your

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mother, your mother would appear as being very appealing to you. In the same way, by thinking of all others as being as kind as your mother, you would see them as being as appealing as your mother, and extend a sense of love towards them.

Because of the danger of attachment arising when we develop love, it is said that we need to combine the practice with wisdom. When one cultivates wisdom along with love and compassion, the love will then be a pure love, where there is not even a fraction of attachment towards the other person. Thus what protects bodhisattvas when they develop love towards other beings without attachment is their wisdom.

When the attitude of love is developed with reasoning based upon one's own interest, the danger of attachment is definitely there. In fact that is how attachment arises. For example, when you feel love towards your children, the reason is based on self-interest, i.e. because they are 'my' children; and in relation to your partner, you feel love because it is 'my' partner or 'my' companion. So your reason is always based on the reason of self-interest, and when such love is extended, attachment will definitely be produced. We can see that from experience. Thus the reason attachment is easily produced with love based on self-interest is that this love and compassion are actually mixed with a self-cherishing mind. A clear sign of whether your love is based on attachment is that when your attachment for the other fades away, the love and compassion you claimed to have for them earlier also becomes non-existent.

As described in the teachings, we cultivate unconditional, spontaneous love and compassion for others on a basis of using others as the reason for having those feelings – because others are suffering, because they are impoverished, or because they need happiness – not because of one's own self-interest. This then develops into a genuine sense of love and compassion, and is much more durable. This specific instruction in the teachings on how to develop love and compassion with the other's interest in mind is very profound advice.

*Question: At times I may feel a need to talk with someone close about a problem, but I also feel very irritated when I am with that person, so it is difficult to talk with them. Is there some technique to deal with that?*

*Answer:* If you can try to use reason and see the advantages of resolving one's differences through good communication, this may help to reduce the irritation. So it might be helpful to try to contemplate the advantages of reconciliation.

I have often advised others that when you want to have a discussion to resolve an issue, prior to facing the other person, it is good to first check your own mind to see if it is settled or not. If your mind is quite agitated, it is best not to approach the other person for the time being. With an agitated state of mind, even if you have the wish to resolve an issue, because the mind is strongly agitated, talking to the other person would not help. It is a good idea to first check your mind to see if it is settled, then either try to use a technique to settle the mind, or wait a bit for it to settle down. When the mind is relatively calm, it is much easier to approach the other person. If the other

person is not ready yet, and if their mind is still agitated, again that would not be a suitable time. So although one feels ready and settled, one has to further develop some patience to wait for the other person to feel settled as well, because both sides need to feel relatively calm and settled to have a meaningful discussion.

When you actually engage in discussion to resolve something, both parties need to be clear that it is the issue at hand that needs to be resolved. What seems to happen in many cases is that people leave aside the immediate issue that needs resolving and instead bring up past history, which brings up uncomfortable feelings. That leads you back to square one, where each one comes up with their own emotions and bad feelings from the past, so that issues never really seem to get resolved. Rather, you completely divert from what has to be discussed to something from the past. So it is important that both agree to focus on resolving the current issue.

*Question: Geshe-la, I have a friend who has a chronic illness like myself, a situation where some courage, endurance, and resilience is needed, but the person who I'm talking of doesn't seem to have any of these. And I'm just wondering if everyone is capable of having these attributes?*

*Answer:* Generally we would have to say that, according to the explanations in the teachings, everyone definitely has the ability to develop some sort of resilience and endurance in times of hardship. However, it is a matter of whether it has been cultivated and whether one's resources have been tapped into or not.

For certain individuals, their problems seems to become a priority in their lives and they become quite attached to them, saying 'this is my difficulty, this is my problem, who are you to try to advise me, it is not your problem, it is mine'. It seems as if they are obsessed with their problem and don't really look beyond it; they have a fixed state of mind about how that problem should be solved.

In relation to sickness, there are certain individuals who may feel that the only way to get rid of their sickness is through medication and medical treatment. But if that medical treatment doesn't help them, then they feel there is no other way. Trying to help them adopt a different mental attitude is difficult, because they have already made up their mind, thinking: 'That's it. Either the treatment will work for me, and I'll get over this; if not, nothing else will help.' So in that situation, it is difficult.

If we know someone with that mind-set, which may become a temporary block for them, we should not be discouraged from trying to help them in any way we can. We may become frustrated in trying to help them, but if the treatment does not work for them, getting impatient with them for not having any hope will not be helpful. Rather, it is good to just understand that it's OK for them to have that temporary mind-set and try to find some other means to be kind and nice to them. That is important from one's own side.

In terms of the practical way in which a positive state of mind can help, generally speaking it is difficult to assert that generating a positive state of mind or trying to do some meditation will immediately relieve physical pain.

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While there are certain circumstances and cases where meditation and so forth have relieved pain, to expect that to happen immediately is not very realistic in every case.

Normally if one has not trained the mind and does not have the tools to remain positive and strong, when one then experiences a serious illness, the physical pain can cause the mind to feel agitated, frustrated and unhappy. So, on top of the physical pain, the mind will also be burdened with problems and worries. However, if one trains one's mind to maintain a positive attitude, one will not have that extra burden of worry and so forth in one's mind. Thus even physical suffering becomes more manageable. And through familiarity and practices, it is possible that even the physical pain will go away. So in that way we can see the practical benefit of having a positive attitudes in one's mind.

What you can share with your friend is that because you have a similar chronic illness yourself, you can say: 'I am a little bit better than before, my condition has improved'. Then let the other person ask 'why, how?' When it becomes a response to the question, your advice may be more acceptable to the other person. Thus one has to use tact: if you try to give advice without it being asked for, it might not be accepted. But if you try using a less direct way, and just talk about yourself letting the other person become curious and ask questions, this might be more acceptable.

Before we conclude for the evening, we can spend a few minutes in contemplation. Find a comfortable and relaxed posture as we did before, and this time we will focus on the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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