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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 would be good to spend some time in meditation. For that we sit in a relaxed and comfortable posture. It is also good to bring to mind the main purpose of why we engage in the practice of meditation and to remind ourselves of the main points that I have been making many times over. Meditation primarily serves as a technique to protect one's mind and particularly to protect the good qualities of the mind, such as love and compassion.

One of the most essential things to protect is the virtuous mind. This encompasses all positive states. Through the practice of meditation we familiarise ourselves more and more with a virtuous state of mind. When it becomes part of our daily life, then when we sleep, we can sleep with a virtuous mind, we wake up with a virtuous mind, we eat and engage in our normal activities with a virtuous state of mind. Then, of course, we have a specific time set aside, to practice Dharma, which is the means to maintain that virtuous state of mind. That time is even more essential. In this way, as we familiarise ourselves with the virtuous state of mind it becomes part of our daily life, and becomes really meaningful.

The more we familiarise ourselves with a virtuous state of mind the more we start to notice and realise for ourselves that a virtuous state of mind is an essential state of mind to have. It serves as a basis for us to have a worthwhile, meaningful life. We will particularly come to notice that a virtuous state of mind is the basis of a calm, clear and a joyous mind. When we have these elements of a clear, calm and joyous mind then our overall well-being is maintained. Whatever activity we engage in is engaged in with a happy state of mind.

As we familiarise ourselves with a virtuous state of mind then, due to that familiarity, we will be able to combine our normal activities with a virtuous state of mind; for example, engaging in normal activities such as eating or sleeping or moving about in a virtuous state of mind. We can be more specific about how even normal activities can be combined with virtue. For example, whenever we eat the purpose of eating is to nourish our body. So as we eat if we can be mindful of the fact that we are eating so that we can nourish the body to be able to benefit others, then the very act of eating becomes a virtue because it is done with a noble intention. Likewise, sleep is an activity that replenishes or restores the energy within our body and helps to maintain good health. When we sleep we can also have the same intention 'I am sleeping to restore the energy in my body so that I can be of benefit for others'. When we move about and engage in our normal activities with the intention, 'May my activities, work and

so forth become a means to serve others' then those deeds are performed with a very noble motivation. Thus it becomes a virtuous act.

Before we eat if we can take a few moments to try to generate that noble intention in our mind, we would come to notice an extra sense of joy in one's mind. Even though the act of eating is the same as before it brings a sense of real joy in our mind because of the noble intention. In this way we can begin to see how a virtuous state of mind is the basis and cause for us to have a joyous and happy life.

In relation to generating a noble intention while eating, there is the practice of offering before a meal. All religious traditions seem to have a prayer to say before a meal. Christians definitely have a prayer, and in Buddhism we have a prayer that we say before a meal. The time for prayer gives us the time to generate the noble intention.

Any deeds that we do for the assistance of oneself and others can be done with a virtuous state of mind. The significance of trying to generate and maintain a virtuous frame of mind is that it leads to a calmer and more joyous mind. The generation of the virtuous mind opposes negative states of mind, the delusions, arising in the mind. During the time that we have a virtuous mind we're stopping the delusions from arising in our mind. That is how it protects our mind and causes it to be in a joyous state.

The point that I am emphasising is how noble intentions become a means to have a virtuous and joyous state of mind. The virtuous state of mind can be in many different forms. In general, what is being pointed out here is that we try to generate them first and once they have been generated we try to maintain them. Then we try to further increase the virtuous state of mind within oneself through the practice of meditation. That is the significance of the practice of meditation.

The technique of meditation itself involves withdrawing our mind from all distractions, bringing the focus within ourselves and placing it on a particular object. That is what the technique involves.

The technique involves withdrawing our mind from distractions and maintaining our focus on a chosen object. During the practice of meditation we are familiarising our mind with an object that does not cause the delusions or negative states to arise in our mind. That is how we block them off during the practice of meditation. As we familiarise ourselves with the practice of meditation the opportunity for the negative states of mind to arise within ourselves become less and less. Familiarising ourselves more and more with the practice of meditation becomes very significant and very relevant in our daily life. The technique of blocking the influence of the negative states is very essential in our everyday life, particularly in our relationships.

In our relationships with those that we have a connection with such as our partners, relatives and so forth, we do have a sense of love for each other. We care for each other and are concerned for each other. Nevertheless, there are times where we may get involved in arguments, conflict

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and so forth. That is because the love and good connections that we have are obstructed by anger that arises in our mind. Anger disrupts the good communication, the good feeling that you have for others. One can notice in one's relationships that as soon as anger arises it causes conflict and leads to arguments and so forth. As soon as anger arises in a relationship there is unease and discomfort. Since none of us wish to have discomfort and all of us like to have a nourishing, good relationship with others, it is important that we try to reduce anger and stop it arising in our mind. Practising meditation will help to reduce negative states of mind such as anger.

The technique of meditation involves focusing on an object that does not cause delusions to arise in the mind. The meditation object has such characteristics that by its very nature it does not allow the delusions to arise in the mind. The more we familiarise ourselves with such an object the less opportunity there is for the delusions to occur in one's mind. The more you acquaint yourself with something that opposes another thing, the more naturally the thing that is opposed will subside. That is a natural sequence of how things work.

For example, compassion is a direct opposite of anger. So the more we familiarise ourselves with the mind of compassion the more it is natural for anger to subside. There is a natural opposite for all the delusions that occur in our mind. As we familiarise ourselves with the object that does not cause a delusion to arise there is less opportunity for delusion to arise in our mind and in this way the delusions gradually become less and less dominant in our mind. Through the process of meditation we can slowly reach a point where the delusions don't occur in our mind. That is what we call a calm and peaceful mind.

The process of applying the technique of meditation in our daily life will also naturally increase our ability to distinguish what is useful and what is harmful to us. This ability is called analytical wisdom. In the process of applying the technique of meditation in our daily life, the intelligence to distinguish between what is good and bad for us, becomes more and more evident within ourselves. We begin to develop a specific inner wisdom called analytical wisdom. This will become the best aid to immediately identify what is harmful to us and to be avoided and what is useful and to be adopted. This applies to attitudes and situations in life and so forth. It becomes a good aid and helps us to have a meaningful life.

As the process of applying the technique of meditation in our daily life increases our analytical wisdom, we slowly begin to identify the positive states of mind that are to be adopted and the negative states of mind that are to be abandoned. In this way certain attitudes that we were not able to identify earlier become clearer in our mind. Anger is seen as harmful regardless of who the anger is directed towards, whether it is one's friends, enemies or strangers. In every instance, whether it's one's friend, enemies or strangers as soon as anger arises, it's harmful to oneself. It is something to be avoided. That becomes very clear in one's mind from one's own experience.

The opposite of anger is compassion which is a useful attitude to develop. Again we can focus on one friend, enemies or strangers. Regardless of whether the other is a friend, enemy or stranger, it becomes worthwhile to feel compassion towards them. This becomes very clear and evident from one's own experience. In this way we begin to transform ourselves and get to a higher level in our practice.

Having explained the benefits of meditation in this way we can now spend some time in meditation. These explanations were to set the mood for why we are doing the practice of meditation and explaining the technique itself.

What I regularly share is not just the technique of meditation to be adopted in our short time meditation here, but some practical advice that can be useful outside of the formal practice of meditation when one is outside in the world in one's daily life. My attempt is to share advice that would be beneficial in both situations, during the actual formal practice of meditation as well as outside in one's daily life. I see that both are essential. To try to adopt the right attitudes is essential in both cases. That is why I share this practical advice.

Just to remind ourselves again, to practise meditation we sit in a comfortable, relaxed posture. The mind is intentionally withdrawn from all distractions. We temporarily put all the thoughts and pre-occupations in our mind completely aside and withdraw from all of that. We place our full attention on the focal object and try to maintain one-hundred-percent focus on that object. The object that we adopt for our meditation is our own breath. So, we bring our full attention and focus onto our breath. For the duration of our formal meditation we try to keep our full attention, full awareness, upon our breath itself. We try not to allow any other thoughts dominate us. We keep our focus on the breath. So, for the next few minutes we will adopt this technique. (*Pause for meditation.*)

That will be sufficient for now. It would be good to try to adopt a regular practice of meditation, just as we have attempted now, in one's daily life. The technique, focusing on one's breath, is a quite simple but very effective practice. It is effective, particularly for those of us who consider ourselves beginners, at times when our mind is overwhelmed with different thoughts, worries or concerns. When our mind is filled with many different preconceptions it is very difficult to try to focus on a virtuous object because the mind is agitated and disturbed. It seems really difficult at those times to get into the right frame of mind to focus on a virtuous object. It seems there is a tendency when our mind is disturbed and agitated for all sorts of other negative states of mind to dominate. Our mind becomes preoccupied with that. Even if we were to try to think about something virtuous because our mind is already in a disturbed state it's more likely that the mind will associate with a negative thought and all sorts of distractions rather than the virtuous and positive state of mind.

When the mind is in such an agitated state the most effective remedy seems to be just focusing on one's breath. Focusing on one's breath is a very simple

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technique. By just committing ourselves to focusing on our breath all the distractions and agitation in the mind naturally subside. Then, when the mind becomes more relaxed and calm, it restores the clarity in our mind. Whatever activity we wish to engage in, it will be more effective when the mind is in a calm state. Whatever topic we want to meditate on becomes more effective. So initially the technique is to just settle down the mind by focusing on the breath.

We could cover some topics from the text. However, if there is anyone who would like to ask a question, you may do so by raising your hand.

*Question: Geshe-la, in class on Tuesday you mentioned deluded wisdom; what exactly is deluded wisdom; is it related to analytical wisdom?*

Deluded wisdom is definitely not related to what we call analytical wisdom. If it were related to analytical wisdom it wouldn't be a deluded wisdom. It would be a proper wisdom. Deluded wisdom specifically relates to the wrong view that is called the view of the transitory collections. That's the technical term for the view of focusing on the 'I' or the self and deciding that it is a truly existent or independently existent 'I'. It is an intelligence or wisdom that decides that the 'I' is a truly and independently existent I. That is false, thus it is a deluded wisdom.

*Question: When we decide to do something, is it with a deluded wisdom?*

That depends very much what is it that we are deciding to do. It depends on that. Having analysed it and made a decision it depends on whether the decision is based upon a deluded wisdom or a virtuous wisdom. It depends on what we have decided to do, doesn't it?

Because the state of mind plays a very important role in making decisions, I regularly emphasise that if the state of mind is dominated by anger we should be very wary about making any decisions. Similarly when the mind is dominated by strong desire it is also a time when one has to be wary in making decisions. Similarly when the mind is engulfed in ignorance, like being in darkness, it is a time when we have to be wary about making decisions. With anger I have often mentioned that it is far better not make any affirmative decisions when one is angry. That could be quite disastrous. It could lead to negative consequences. That is the reason why I warn people about that.

I have related some stories of the disastrous effects of making decisions when anger dominates the mind. An incident that I related earlier was of two individuals who were actually quite good friends. But apparently at the time when one of them was quite angry he got into a fight and started hitting the other, which caused the other to bleed. When the one who had given the blow actually noticed the bleeding he came to his senses. His general concern for the other as a friend might have come back. He was very concerned and tried to console the other, but by then the harm of the wound had already happened.

When one is dominated by anger it is best not to engage in an act that we have decided upon in that state. Rather,

it is better if we can overcome the anger, let it subside and try to appease the anger, before we act. If we were to overcome anger after the action has been taken, a mistake has already been made. It doesn't serve really much purpose to overcome anger afterwards. It is far better to try to deal with anger before we act.

If one is regularly analysing the disadvantages and ill-effects of anger then, when anger does arise, because of the earlier acquaintance with that state of mind and seeing the ill-effects of anger, it will help to reduce the anger because one will already be familiar with the attitude that anger is not good. Anger can be harmful. When one is used to that, it can be help to subdue anger in the event it arises.

As soon as anger arises we start reminding ourselves that, 'Anger is a harmful state of mind. If I decide and do anything out of anger, it can be quite disastrous. The results are not beneficial.' When one reminds oneself in this way one would find that we start to cool down.

*Question: What practice would Geshe-la advise when one is experiencing a lot of difficulties and troubles in one's life?*

As mentioned earlier, focusing on one's breath is the most appropriate technique if one is inclined to do a formal meditation. If one is not be able to do a formal meditation session, then the main thing is to have the right attitude. With that attitude it is best not be too preoccupied with whatever is causing the troubles. The more we think about problems and difficulties the more they seem to escalate.

Even though something may have caused some problem or confusion, try to not be too preoccupied with it. Try to distract oneself with other things. It is particularly good to remind oneself that it is impossible to change the past. Whatever has occurred in the past has led one to one's current situation. This goes for both good or bad. Whatever good or bad happened in the past, it is done. One cannot change the past.

One has, however, the ability and potential to change one's future. That is something it is good to remind ourselves, 'Regardless of what has happened in the past, that has gone. Let me look forward, try to be more positive about my future.' Thinking in a positive way can definitely lead to a better future.

It is good to recognise and understand that if we can adopt the right attitude whatever problems and difficulties we face can become an aid for us to grow and learn much more in life. They are a great source of experience for us. No matter how difficult and bad a situation may be, with the right attitude we can definitely learn from it and gain the experience not to make similar mistakes in the future.

If we can start to regularly familiarise ourselves with a positive attitude then that positive attitude will be a real source of energy or a real cause to withstand difficulties in one's life. In the event that we do face difficulties, because we are able to maintain a positive frame of mind, they will not disrupt one's life to the point where one feels hopeless, incompetent, loses self-esteem and so forth. The right positive attitude is very much related to

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the attitude we maintain in our every-day life. If, when things are going well for ourselves on the surface, we take that as a sign that everything is fine. That is a false attitude to maintain if when something does goes wrong slightly, one completely falls apart and can't deal with the situation. Not being able to deal with the situation is due to having maintained a false idea, a false perception, that everything is fine and one does not need to worry about anything. When things are going relatively well, it is a time for us to uphold the possibility of things going wrong and how to deal with it. One of the great masters has advised, 'Willingly taking upon a difficult situation, is the best remedy to overcome a difficult situation'. This is very true in the sense that willingly taking upon the difficulties itself becomes a remedy to deal with a difficult situation.

Willingly taking upon a difficult situation does not mean one just allows the difficult situation to completely overwhelm and destroy us. What it means is to willingly accept that it is a difficult situation. Then, with an attitude of, 'OK, this is a difficult situation happening now' and accepting it one will find the means to try to overcome it. If, rather, one falls into a state of despair, 'Oh, this is a difficult situation' and one is not prepared for it, one feels totally incompetent and may be hopeless and shattered. That is when someone may sit in a corner and sulk and feel completely depressed.

With that state of mind one will definitely not be able to overcome a difficult situation. It just becomes worse and worse and one thinks about it more and more. But the more we think about it the more we find it becomes a hopeless situation. If we can willingly take upon this difficult situation, accept it, and face it, then we will find a way to solve it. In fact the way to solve a problem comes about as a result of a problem. If there is no problem, how can we find the solution? There is no way of thinking about finding a solution to a problem when there is no problem, right? So, in fact, it is in the very existence of a problem that we find the solution to solve the problem.

Coming back to the basis of having the right attitude in our mind, we would come to notice in our daily life that when a certain attitude dominates our mind and our way of thinking then everything seems impossible. Everything seems difficult. But when we adopt a different kind of attitude then things seem more manageable. Things are brighter again, aren't they? These attitudes are something that are within us.

If, for example, when we are faced with a grave illness it may be a difficult situation on a physical level but if we allow our mind to become depressed then that is an extra problem. If as we suffer physically we allow our mind to become depressed then that is an extra problem that can cause even more damage to our health. Whereas if we can willingly accept the physical discomfort and pain and try to maintain a positive attitude, then that can actually help. Even though we may still be suffering physically our mind will not be affected if we maintain a positive state of mind.

I have a story to tell that relates to this. It concerns a geshe who I knew. He has since passed away. This was

during the time that we escaped from Tibet. During our escape this senior monk had some students with him.

As we escaped the rations we carried became less and less as we reached India. The other geshe was starting to become quite worried, because he was also responsible for others. He was saying, 'Our *tsampa* (barley flour) is beginning to run out. What should we do? Where can we get more food?' He seemed to be quite worried about that. He had a student with him called Pemba. Pemba told his teacher, Geshe Kachen that he shouldn't be worrying and said, 'We will be ending up in a country where there are people and they would have some food to consume. Whatever they eat, we will get some of that as well. So there is no need to worry.'

Geshe Kachen commented later that what his student mentioned was very helpful. As soon as we arrived in India the Indian officials welcomed us and the first food staple that we were given was rice and lentils. We did get something to eat. They also gave us clothing. The first clothes we were given were trousers and some shirts. We had to wear those, as we didn't have any other clothes - our own clothes were worn out.

The point that I have been making from this anecdote is that how we interpret a situation is dependent on our attitude. Maintaining some sort of attitudes cause worries and trouble for a person but changing that attitude can make things seem more possible and lighter.

There are many more anecdotes that I could share, however we have run out of time [*much laughter*].

Before we conclude for the evening we can again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time we focus on the sound of the mantra Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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