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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, we will spend sometime in meditation. For that purpose we will sit in an upright relaxed posture. Likewise it is important to set a good motivation, a motivation that is imbued with thoughts of wishing to benefit other beings. The motivation that is imbued with the wish to benefit other beings is like making a determination to bring about happiness for other beings and bring about the means to alleviate the sufferings of other sentient beings. It is for that purpose that we engage in the practice of meditation. So this sort of motivation would be highly beneficial.

Besides generating this motivation now for the practice of meditation it is important that we regularly familiarise ourselves with the wish to benefit others in our daily lives. The mere wish that we have for others to be happy is what is called 'love' in Buddhism and the wish for others to be free from suffering is called 'compassion' in Buddhism. As we can all agree, love and compassion are the most essential thoughts or wishes to have in our mind.

We may question whether we do have these positive thoughts of love and compassion in our mind. But if we look within ourselves and investigate we will find there is the basis of love and compassion within us. The extent may differ between individuals, but each individual, has a genuine sense of concern for others, no matter how limited it may be. There are certain individuals that have genuine care and concern for others, wishing them to be happy and free from suffering. So we definitely all have love and compassion within us.

Love and compassion is an essential tool. When we have a genuine concern for others it is due to our love and compassion that we are actually able to do something practical to benefit them. It is based on having that attitude of love and compassion that we are able to do something to benefit others.

We can understand how love and compassion can benefit others by relating it to ourselves. When, for whatever reasons, we are in a distressed and difficult situation we are in the most need love and compassion from others. This is something that we can relate to ourselves. When one investigates one can see that it is in our most difficult situations that we would need help from others.

If we question who is it that helps us in a difficult situation, it is obviously whoever has genuine love and compassion for us. That is clear. This is very obvious. At the time of our greatest need it is those who have genuine love and compassion for us who will help us.

The reason someone who has genuine concern for us would help us in a difficult situation is because they would feel and understand our suffering and wish us to be free from suffering. Understanding that we are deprived of happiness and well-being, they would want us to be happy and joyful. That is what they would extend to us. If we question what it is that makes them to want us to be free from suffering and wish us to be happy, the answer is love and compassion. It is those who have love and compassion that would have that attitude towards one. Therefore, it becomes very clear that whoever genuinely has love and compassion has that wish to help others.

What I am discussing is something that is essential in your life. It is not just some petty talk but something that is really essential and most beneficial in your entire life.

In order for others to have genuine love and compassion towards one, one needs from one's own side, to have generated love and compassion within one's own heart as well. If one lacks love and compassion within oneself, how can we expect others to feel that towards one?

When we investigate what is it that we strive for in our life, one of the most essential things that we need, along with all the necessary conditions for our survival, is companionship and a feeling of closeness with others. That is something that we definitely need in our life. When we lack that sense of closeness and companionship with others we experience the sufferings of loneliness and so forth. Therefore we definitely need that sense of closeness and companionship with others. Since that is something that we naturally wish for we need to look into how to bring about a genuine sense of closeness and companionship with others that is based on love and compassion.

The point that I am emphasising here is the very essence of spiritual practice or religion, whether it is Buddhism or any other tradition or religious faith. What I am relating here is the very essence of all of that. The very essence of Dharma or spiritual practice is developing that sense of love and compassion within oneself. It is definitely not to be taken lightly as some simple thing, but rather something that is essential. When one understands that this is the most essential point of any tradition or religion, and when we look into ourselves and identify that we do have the basis of love and compassion within us, then it becomes a great source of inspiration and encouragement. That is one of the main points that I am making.

When one begins to recognise that love and compassion is the essence of all practices, the essence of basically everything including one's own essence, we need to take this to heart and undertake to further develop love and compassion within oneself and try to maintain that sense of love and compassion that we already have within us. A practical way to do this is by trying to develop this attitude: 'I will definitely do whatever I can to make others comfortable. Whoever I associate with, whether it is my friends, especially my close and dear ones, but hopefully strangers, I will do whatever I can to make them feel comfortable and be at ease, and I will not harm them'. We also benefit from that attitude because it makes

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others feel at ease around us and it makes our mind really joyful and happy. It also contributes to one's health. Even one's health becomes sound and well. There is definitely a benefit for our well-being.

It is really important that we consider these factors. Just as the benefits are true for love and compassion it is also important for us to consider the disadvantages when one's love and compassion decline. When we look into the disadvantages of a decline of love and compassion with, for example, one's friend or partner we see that when love and compassion declines angst, hostility or anger arises.

So it is quite important for us to scrutinise our state of mind. As much as it is inspirational to understand and feel that we have those positive thoughts in our mind, we must also be wary of the negative thoughts that can replace these positive thoughts. Our state of mind is such that our very noble and good thoughts and attitudes can, with the slightest change of conditions, be replaced with hostility, negativity or anger and so forth. Therefore we must be wary and careful of our own state of mind.

The causes for us to feel angst and anger towards others, even one's own close ones and companions and so forth, lie within one's own mind. There are, of course, circumstances where external conditions can cause agitation and anger to arise but, if we were honest with ourselves, we would find that in most cases it is not the external situation. The external situation may be more or less the same, but because of our superstitious mind we have a lot of doubts and lots of worries in our mind, and these cause anger to arise towards others.

We can see that when we have high anxiety and worries it immediately causes one to feel unsettled. There is a sequence of how one attitude leads to another. First we may be in a state of anxiety and worry that causes unease in the mind. When there is unease in our mind that causes anger to arise within one. When there's anger it is focussed towards one's close and dear ones, and they don't look very appealing and attractive anymore. Anger can change our perception of someone who normally is dear and appealing to one. This is how it all follows from our state of mind.

Coming back to the practice of meditation, we can now adopt a relaxed physical posture. It is essential to have a relaxed posture because if we don't have a relaxed posture that can cause unease in the mind, which is not conducive for our meditation. When we have an upright, relaxed posture we can, as mentioned previously, set our mind at ease with a good motivation. The positive motivation is an appropriate condition for us to meditate.

What meditation actually means is familiarising our mind with a chosen object of focus. The object that we use to focus on is an internal object. That means that we familiarise ourselves with whatever object that we are meditating on and then bring up an image of that object and focus on that. Focussing means we place our complete focus and attention on the object. We familiarise ourselves with placing our complete attention on the object and familiarise our mind with that object again and again. That is the actual meditation.

The object that we adopt here for our focus is our own breath. In order to bring our full attention and focus to our breath we also need to make a commitment to distance ourselves and not allow our mind to be influenced by other distractions. That basically means that we make a mental decision that, 'For the duration of my meditation I will not to allow my mind to be influenced by the distractions.'

The mind that we are referring to here is the 'unruly mind', the mind that normally just goes off in every direction and follows any whims or thoughts that arise. This heightened, excited state of mind is referred to as an 'unruly mind'. This mind causes the agitation within oneself. To get a grip of this 'unruly mind' involves using another part of our intelligence or mind to make a decision not to allow the mind to go in every direction and be distracted in that way. That means we intentionally discipline our mind to focus it on the breath. When we do that we will notice for ourselves that the mere fact of maintaining a hundred percent focus on the object, which is the breath, actually settles the mind and with that settling the 'unruly mind' settles and we experience a sense of great ease and calmness within us. That sense of calmness that we experience, that blissful feeling, is what is referred to in the teachings as the 'boon of bliss'. It is actually a blissful state that one experiences. We can definitely experience that positive effect.

With that determination to not allow the mind to be distracted by any external distractions or thoughts we bring our focus inwards. As we bring our focus inwards we place our full attention upon the breath. For the next few minutes we just try to maintain that focus and this is how we engage in meditation. (*Pause for meditation*).

That will be sufficient for now. It would be very beneficial if, just as we have attempted now, we were to regularly spend sometime practising meditation in our daily lives. It is advised to start with short sessions of meditation and then, as it becomes familiar and the quality of our meditation improves, we can gradually increase the time. This is something that it is good to be mindful of. Regular practice is most effective for us.

Someone recently told me 'meditation definitely seems to help me'. This was just last Thursday. On a Thursday I regularly go to the St Kilda Sea Baths and so I met someone in the changing room who was Asian. I thought he might have been Chinese. He was quite elderly and when he noticed me he started speaking in Chinese and I had to explain that I am not Chinese. When I explained that I am not Chinese but Tibetan, he seemed to understand and said, 'Okay. Are you a Lama?' I said I was.

When I asked him where he was from he said Hong Kong. He mentioned that he has been here for fourteen years. When he asked me how long I have been here I explained that I also have been here for a long time. He asked if I am an Australian citizen and I said 'Yes I am'. He commented that's very good because, 'This is a nice country, isn't it?'

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When he started querying where I was staying I tried to explain that I was living in Brighton. I am not sure if my pronunciation was that clear enough for him to understand what I meant but he then asked, 'Do you stay in a Buddhist centre?' I said 'Yes I live in a Buddhist Institute'. He went on to explain that he is a Buddhist himself. Then he asked, 'Do you have a swimming pool in the Institute?' (*laughter*). I said 'No, we don't have a swimming pool'. And he said 'Do you have lessons on kung fu?' I said 'No, we don't have kung fu lesson, mainly meditation. We conduct meditation and Buddhist philosophy teachings.' As soon as I mentioned that we conduct meditation sessions he immediately responded, 'Oh, that's very good'.

He went on to explain that he has a very severe allergy to pollen and at certain times he gets sinus attacks, lots of runny nose and sneezing. He explained that these severe symptoms were cured when he took up meditation. He was relating the practical benefits that he found for himself from meditation and how he was cured from all these ailments. Though he was quite elderly he looked quite fit for his age, even though he was carrying a cane. The main thing you noticed about him was he looked quite bright and lustrous. He seemed to be quite a joyful person too. And as he left he said, 'We might meet again' with a good smile.

This is just one account, a recent account, of someone relating to me how meditation was very beneficial. Many others have also related how meditation is beneficial and has helped them in their lives. Rather than me always talking about the benefits of meditation, which makes me appear presumptuous, it is best to relate other's accounts. When others tell me about the benefits of their meditation I feel that this is a good way to introduce meditation, and I don't hesitate to explaining others' experience of the benefits of meditation. I feel that is much more appropriate.

If I were to talk about the benefits of meditation for myself it may sound as if I am meditating a lot and experiencing great benefits myself, which would be inappropriate and presumptuous.

To consider applying the meditation technique in a practical way in one's life one needs to consider that, first of all, it doesn't cost anything to meditate, it's free. The next thing is that it doesn't require much time, as the advice is to only meditate for a short time. It doesn't take up too much time. Now there are, of course, some who complain that they do not have enough time but I have told some that I associate directly with that it's best not to bring up that excuse anymore, because you seem to have time to watch your movies and TV serials on a regular basis. You never seem to miss a show in a week. So you definitely have time for that. Maybe you could spend five minutes meditating and miss five minutes of that show if you feel you don't have any other time. It is worthwhile to invest some time, however short, in one's meditation because of the great benefit that it has.

The main thing to remind oneself, is that the purpose of meditation is to protect one's mind. One regularly needs to consider the importance of protecting one's mind. That is what meditation is all about.

One wonders what it is that one needs to protect one's mind from—it is what is referred to in Buddhism as the 'delusions' or negative emotions or thoughts in our mind. That is what we need to protect ourselves from. As ordinary people it would again be presumptuous, or expecting too much, not to have any delusions arise in our mind. Of course there are times when we will have attachment, or desire or sometimes a little bit of anger and so forth. Even though we may not be able to entirely prevent negative states of mind arising one can protect oneself from the delusions escalating. When a delusion arises we can see it for what it is, and not allow it to increase and not allow the consequences, which will harm oneself and harm others, to arise. That is how we can protect ourselves. In this way meditation makes the mind more serviceable and at ease.

We may not yet be able to really understand the ramifications or the subtleties of the delusions. There are many subtle delusions in our mind. As we may not be able to pinpoint and understand the whole range of them, we might ask how we can protect ourselves from all the different negative states of mind. What I would like to emphasise is that we need to be wary of a state of mind that makes us feel depressed and unhappy as soon it arises. There are certain thoughts and states of mind that, as soon as they arise, they make us feel sad and depressed. They immobilise us and prevent us from doing things. Whether it is spiritual practice or a normal activity like work or associating with others we are immobilised.

This is the situation where we might feel like sitting in a corner, doing nothing and feeling hopeless and a loss of self-esteem. That is really dangerous. The more we familiarise with that state of mind, the more it brings us down. We need to really combat that. As soon as a state of mind arises which makes us feel sad, depressed and hopeless, we need to recognise it and try to apply whatever antidote, meditation and so forth, as a means to try to overcome it. We must not to give in to it, because the more we give in to that state of mind, the more it overpowers us. When we give in we are actually empowering that state of mind to control us. That is something that we need to prevent.

We will be able to recognise this state of mind. The way to combat it is by scrutinising it. First of all we scrutinise what kind of thought it is. Where does it stem from? Does it stem from some sort of memory? Or does it stem from some sort of attitude that we have about ourselves? Where does it come from? When it arises how does it manifest within oneself? When we scrutinise and analyse in this way we will be able to recognise what it is.

The mere fact of recognising it for what it is, counteracts its control over us, and its effectiveness in immobilising us. By recognising what causes it to arise, what kind of condition or memory, we will know what is it that we need to divert our attention from in meditation. The very technique of meditation is focussing on an object that does not cause these sorts of memories and delusions to arise. The reason why we benefit from the practice of meditation is because it intentionally diverts us from all of the different causes and conditions that lead our mind

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to feel down and depressed. That is how meditation helps us. The more we familiarise ourselves with meditation the more the positive the effect we experience from it.

It seems that we have taken most of our session up already. However we may have some time for questions if you have any. If you have a question you can raise your hand.

*Question:* Geshe-la, you explained earlier that we need to maintain a happy mind and to be free of dislike, but it seems necessary to have an attitude of dislike for situations where others are causing harm to someone else?

*Answer:* Usually if we dislike a situation then naturally anger arises in our mind. We are not taking the example of when anger does not arise, because it is not always certain that anger arises from dislike. But we can use a situation where this anger does arise from dislike, as an example.

In the situation where anger arises because of a dislike for the situation or a person we need to protect ourselves from anger, because there is no value in anger itself. The great Master Shantideva says in the *Bodhicharyavatara* that if you can change the situation there's no need to feel dislike, because one can change it. If one cannot change the situation he asks what is the use of having dislike? So what he is saying is that if one can change the situation to prevent them from abusing or whatever harm is being inflicted then there's no need to get upset and angry. However if one cannot do anything, having dislike towards that will not help in any way. The question that you asked is answered by Shantideva in that verse. It is a relevant question because that's how we feel normally, but there is a remedy to it.

In a normal situation as ordinary beings it is quite usual that when we dislike anything then that is followed by a bit of anger. When we like something what follows is a bit of attachment. That is quite normal.

*Question:* It seems that attachment can be useful at times, such as when you care for others who you love.

*Answer:* Actually His Holiness the Dalai Lama has talked about that. In one of his teachings, he mentioned how scientifically they have proven how in ordinary times what we might call attachment of a mother for her child is mixed with a sense of nourishment and care from the mother's side. The care and nourishment the mother has towards the child, even when the baby is in the mother's womb, actually helps the development of the child. Even after the birth that process continues. In ordinary terms we call it 'attachment' but it is definitely mixed with a genuine sense of care as well.

It seems that even after the child's birth the affinity the mother has with the child helps the child's growth. Even physically it seems that they are able to grow faster and stronger as well. That sort of closeness seems essential for the upbringing and growth of the child.

This relates to the nourishment, the closeness and the care the mother would feel for the child. It definitely is dependent on the state of mind of the mother being happy. The mother has to be joyous and happy in order to express that for the child. This all relates to how a

happy state of mind is essential and useful in every circumstance, whatever we do in life.

The questions were very good. Thank you very much! The way the questions were asked shows how you have been thinking logically about it. That's why they are good questions.

Before we end the session for the evening we can spend a few minutes in meditation. This time the object that we focus on is the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. As we hear the sound of the mantra being recited, we maintain a hundred percent focus on the sound itself and as the recitation stops we try to maintain a focus on the residue of the sound for a few more minutes. We will conduct the meditation in that way.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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