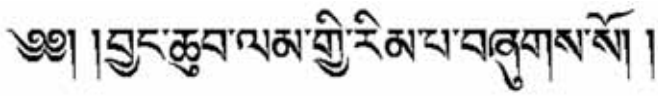

The Condensed Lam Rim



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

9 February 2011

It's been six weeks that we've not seen each other, so to meet again after this period of time makes me glad and happy. I wish you happy greetings again, Tashi Delek!

If I were to relate some of my experiences over the last six weeks, there are many good things and difficult things that I can talk about.

During the last week of the teaching break, I had an opportunity to really relax and have a good time. I was in a place which was calm and peaceful, very quiet. It was a good and quiet time for me.

I was able to have a steady routine without any disruptions. I was waking up at about four o'clock each morning and after a cup of coffee, I would meditate and do other practices until about seven. After having a break around seven, I'd have my breakfast. Then maybe at a quarter past or twenty past seven I would go back into my room and then continue doing my daily practices up until about lunchtime. I had time to concentrate just on my practices. At ten o'clock I had a break for morning tea. I felt it was a good excuse to come out and have a bit of a chat with others and have a tea.

The place where I was staying was quiet and peaceful. The only sound I could hear was the sound of the birds and the distant sound of the waves of the ocean. But besides that, there was no other distraction, no other sounds. In the morning, I would hear a cockatoo trying to get some attention, trying to get some food maybe. The kookaburras like meat, so it was difficult to feed them. There were a lot of rosellas as well. Having bought some seeds to feed them, it was a good opportunity to make contact and befriend these birds. Koala bears were also there. The brief time that I spent there was meaningful and a good opportunity to have a virtuous state of mind and being able to accumulate some merit.

Before that, I had a two-week trip to India to attend the teachings of the Dalai Lama. Going to India and seeing the Dalai Lama and so many ordained monks and nuns, what we call sangha, and to be in the presence of so many sangha, was an incredible opportunity. It was a good time. About 9000 ordained sangha were gathered there.

Even though that in itself was a really incredible opportunity and a wondrous, virtuous time, personally I had some difficulties with my health. The weather outside seemed to be unusually cold and chilly and I started to get a fever. I also got chills. It was hard to sleep at night. My mind started to get a little foggy. My head seemed light-headed and foggy. It was an awkward time.

Even though physically I was not well, my mind remained happy and joyous, regardless of my physical

difficulties and illness. That's something that I was happy about.

The positive outcome of maintaining a joyous and happy mind was that, even with my physical illness, it didn't obstruct my practices. I was able to continue with my practice. And that was a great source of comfort.

The main reason I am relating my experiences to you now is to point out that from my own experience, having a happy and joyous state of mind seems to be the ultimate benefit; it is a great advantage in every circumstance.

This is of course a point that I regularly talk about in my teachings. I emphasise again and again that the main purpose of our life is to strive towards reaching a state of genuine sense of joyousness, a happy state of mind imbued with kindness. Having a kind mind, coupled with a joyous and happy mind is the most precious, prized possession that we can ever have.

Having these qualities within ourselves—a happy, joyous mind imbued with kindness—these qualities seem to withstand any circumstances, even when external circumstances are difficult. When we have these inner qualities, which give us a happy, joyous state of mind, then this proves beneficial when there are difficult situations around us.

The main point that I wish to emphasise here is the correlation between a happy state of mind and kindness. If we investigate and look into ourselves, we would slowly begin to notice the obvious connection between a kind mind and a happy mind. If we looked into the causes of a joyous and happy mind, we would find out that it comes from kindness. If we work towards having a kind mind and maintaining our kindness, then the result is that we will experience a joyous and happy mind. In contrast, if our mind is negative and disturbed, having a selfish mind, then that will consequently result in a disturbed and unhappy mind. This correlation is something that we need to pay attention to.

To give specific examples of how a selfish and negative mind results in having a disturbed and unhappy mind, we can look at an obvious example—anger. Anger is defined as a negative state of mind. It's also a partly selfish state of mind because we get upset and angry when things don't go "my" way. As a result, we notice for ourselves the moment that we get angry and upset, our mind becomes unhappy. There is a direct connection. There is no-one in their right state of mind who could honestly claim that being angry makes them feel happier and more at peace. It is a universal experience that as soon as anger arises in the mind, as soon as the mind is upset, it starts to feel uncomfortable and disturbed. This is not just a philosophy, but an actual experience. If we pay attention, we notice this clearly. When we come to acknowledge that and accept that as being the reality, then for our own sake, to secure our mind in a happy state, it is worthwhile that we look into applying antidotes for overcoming anger.

One of the main virtues that opposes anger is patience. The great advantage to practicing patience becomes clear when we can see the result, which is a happy and joyous state of mind. When we begin to understand that from

our own experience, we will begin to appreciate the virtue of patience and the need to overcome anger. This is important and we need to pay attention to that.

Accepting this as a reality is not based upon having faith in a certain kind of religion. Whether someone considers themselves religious or not, the reality of how anger generates an unhappy and disturbed mind can be confirmed through our own experience. Therefore we don't need to be spiritual or religious to understand and accept these points. It is just based on the reality of our experiences. Regardless of whether we follow a religion or not, we have the right to work towards having a happy and peaceful mind.

We do not need to have a belief in religious dogma or faith in order to accept the fact that negative states of mind such as anger disturb us. Regardless of whether we have a belief in a religion, when anyone gets angry the immediate effect is that their mind becomes disturbed and unhappy. Everybody experiences this, regardless of whether they are religious minded or not. Likewise, whether someone believes in a certain religion or not, the positive effect of overcoming anger and experiencing a relatively calm and peaceful mind can also be appreciated by everyone.

Anyone who has experienced anger disturbing their peace and happiness, will appreciate that overcoming anger will contribute to a happy and calm state of mind. This is a logical and practical way of thinking about it, rather than a purely spiritual approach. The way to overcome an angry state of mind is to familiarise ourselves with the mind that is the opposite of anger. The way to do that is to contemplate again and again the benefits of overcoming anger and acquainting ourselves with a positive mind such as patience. This process of analysing our own state of mind and looking within ourselves becomes a meaningful thing to do.

To emphasise the point even further, we are able to recognise from our own experience, regardless of whether we believe in a certain religion or not, when anger arises it disturbs our mind. It completely opposes a calm and peaceful state of mind. As much as that is in our experience, we can also begin to appreciate the fact that the more we acquaint ourselves with a state of mind that opposes anger—it could be cultivating patience, or any object that does not cause anger to arise in our mind—we regain some calmness.

The deepest experience of overcoming anger comes about only with meditation. However, even though we may not have meditated for long periods of time, it is still within our scope to have an experience where intense anger can be reduced, by diverting our attention from anger. For example, when we get angry towards an object, for as long as we have that object in mind, for as long as we are obsessed with that object and think about it, it's going to cause us to feel disturbed, angry and uncomfortable. While we are in that intensely angry state of mind, if something else temporarily distracts us, the earlier angry state of mind will naturally subside. This level of experience is something we can relate to.

As long as we focus on the object of anger it is going to create more conditions for us to be angry. But if we divert

ourselves and focus on a different object, an object that does not cause anger to arise, that particular instance of anger will subside. This sort of experience should be a sign for us to feel encouraged to further familiarise ourselves with an object that does not cause anger to arise in the mind. In other words, it is appropriate for us to spend some time and energy in familiarising ourselves with positive objects, objects that do not cause anger to arise in the mind. This is something important to consider.

To summarise the main points that I am trying to emphasise—it is our natural right and befitting for us as an individual to acquire a happy and joyous state of mind. But how do we achieve that? If we can try to have a little bit of a kind mind, generate a kind attitude and a genuine concern for others, then that will contribute to a calmer and more peaceful mind. This combination of a happy mind with a sense of kindness definitely benefits us. This will also naturally contribute towards benefiting others around us.

It is obvious that someone who is genuinely content and happy has a positive energy that others around them feel comfortable in their presence. Conversely, if someone is agitated and disturbed, then there's no possibility that they can help others. How could someone possibly help others when they are completely disturbed and agitated themselves?

Therefore, in order to help others we need to begin by helping ourselves in securing a genuine sense of a happy and joyous state of mind within us, along with a kind mind. When we exhibit a kind attitude, then others will naturally be drawn to us and will benefit from us. Not only humans, but we see that even animals appreciate that and respond to those who are kind to them.

Even recently I noticed on a show that scientists were talking about how animals have a great capacity to respond to kindness. Animals are intelligent and know a person who is kind to them and respond in a positive way. Even without scientific investigation, we can see their natural response. Many people have experienced how animals definitely respond to kindness. When even animals, who are considered to be less intelligent than humans, can respond to kindness, then there is no question about other human beings also being able to respond to a genuinely kind attitude from us. To summarise, a kind and happy mind will not only have an immediate benefit for us, but will also benefit others.

Another way of looking at the practical benefits of maintaining a joyful and happy mind imbued with kindness is that it becomes the main source of acquiring true companionship within our life. For those who already have companions, those companions will become more stable. The friendship you have with them will only blossom and grow even further because of your kind attitude towards them. But for those who do not have many friends yet, if you continuously exhibit genuine kindness and a positive state of mind, that will naturally become a source for acquiring more friends and companions over your life.

To have plenty of companions that we can relate to and share with, is a joyous thing. But if we find that our

companions are starting to dwindle and shy away, and if we find that we don't have many companions and we are feeling isolated and lonely, then it is necessary that we honestly look into the situation. What is happening? It might be easy to blame others for not paying attention to us. But could there be something missing from our own side? Could there be something within ourselves; an element that makes others shy away and distance themselves from us? This is a question that we need to ask ourselves.

We all know that we need companions in life. If we have good companions in our life, our life is enriched. But the question is how to get genuine companions. The answer is, with a positive attitude. That's how I see it. Again using the example of animals, if someone who is kind to animals and takes care of them and feeds them and is kind to them, then the animals will have a natural response of kinship to that person. But if a person who owns a pet is not very kind to their animal, then you can see definitely that there is a reaction from the animal—it is a little bit apprehensive around that person. Because they need food, of course they will have to accept the food from their owner. But then you can see that animals always look a little apprehensive and don't show any real fondness towards that person. Even though a meal is fed to the animal, because there is a lack of true kindness to the animal, the animal knows that and feels it.

Animals definitely respond to a genuine act of kindness. For humans, that is even more the case. When we look into our life and we want to be enriched with good companions, then it is worthwhile to invest our time and energy in seeking out the true causes of having genuine, good companionship. This is worthwhile to look into.

If we acknowledge the importance or advantages of having a happy and joyous mind imbued with kindness, then the next question is: if we find that we lack a true sense of joy and happiness and kindness in our mind, how do we acquire that? What are the means and techniques to increase our mental happiness? We already have the basis, but how do we increase a happy, joyous and a kind mind? This is where meditation comes in.

The practice of meditation is none other than a technique to further develop and increase the positive attitudes within our mind. Therefore, it is appropriate that we invest some of our time and energy in the practice of meditation. While meditation is a technique that serves to promote and further develop kindness and a happy state of mind, it also serves as a means to overcome the negative states of mind within us—anger and the other delusions. Meditation also minimises and eventually eradicates our negative states of mind.

It makes sense to spend some time and energy in the practice of meditation when we can see that it helps our mind to become more peaceful and calm. It doesn't make sense to familiarise ourselves with an angry state of mind, a negative state of mind. If we feel that a negative state of mind such as anger is spontaneous now, that is because of our familiarity with it in the past. If we clearly recognise the disadvantages and the shortcomings of the negative states of mind such as anger, then we need to resolve to not allowing ourselves to further familiarise

our minds with anger. The point I'm making is the importance and appropriateness of a meditation practice.

For many of you I have, in the past, related on many occasions stories from my own life experiences about the disadvantages of the negative states of mind such as anger and the great advantage of the positive states of mind of real kinship and companionship. When I was young, as a teenager and earlier, there were times when I would have fights with other kids. The fights were sometimes bad, where there would be blows with stones. And there would be injury and bloodshed. All of those painful experiences came about from hostility and anger.

However, later on when circumstances changed, I became friends with the person that I had fights with in my youth. We became close friends where we were able to share everything that we had. This positiveness came out of genuine caring and concern for each other. To have the disadvantages of one situation, which came from a negative state of mind, and the great advantages of having genuine companionship and sharing and all of that comes from another state of mind, which is a positive state of mind. Therefore, from my own experience, I would have to say that is definitely true, that it is the attitude within our mind can alter the immediate situation to be either a positive one or a negative and uncomfortable one. This why I share with you confidently that cultivating and generating positive states of mind is worthwhile. It's a good investment in our life.

It is important that we pay attention to how we lead our life. How do we want to spend the rest of our life? How do we want to lead it? If you want to lead a life of stability, relatively calm, then because our life has to be spent with others—we have to have relationships with others—it is really important that we look into how we relate with others. It is essential that we know how to relate to others: how to speak, what gestures to make, and how to relate to others' feelings. These are important tools in our life so we can relate to others in a positive way.

Having spent time explaining the benefits of meditation, it might be now appropriate to actually have some time for meditation. Physically, we adopt a relaxed and upright posture. And then within this relaxed posture, we can bring the attention and focus of our mind inward. Try not to let our mind be distracted with external distractions. Bring our full attention and focus inward and then place our focus upon the chosen object of the meditation, which is our own breath. Bring our focus onto the breath and—for the next few minutes—try to put our full attention, one hundred per cent attention and focus on the natural breath.

[pause for meditation]

Tonight I will conclude our session with the commitment to continue the teaching throughout the year. From my side I will commit myself to having the best motivation when imparting advice or teaching. From your side, for those who come, if you also come with a good intention for receiving the teachings, then through our mutual good intentions, the time that we spend together will be meaningful. We might only be spending just over an hour together, however that hour, because of the good

intentions on both sides, will definitely be meaningful and useful. This is something that we can keep in mind for our on-going sessions throughout the year - always try to have a good intention or good motivation in our mind.

When you come with a good intention and you participate in the meditation and teaching sessions, then when you go back home with a peaceful and happy attitude, your partners and friends will willingly and gladly encourage you to go back to meditation and the teachings. They will completely support you. It is good that we get the support from our partners or friends at home to continue with our practice.

I have heard that if people do not come to meditate or to the teachings and if they start to get a little bit on edge and a little bit agitated, then their partner starts to remind them, "I think it is time that you go back to your meditation."

Indeed, it is the positive results of meditation—when we have applied the appropriate technique—that is seen by others.

Before we end the session for the evening, we can again take the opportunity for a few more minutes of meditation. This time the meditation object will be to focus on the sound of the mantra recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we hear the sound of the mantra and as we recite it ourselves, try to keep our full attention and focus on that sound of the mantra. When the recitation stops, just remain quiet for a while and focus on the residue of the sound. This also becomes a good meditation.

When the recitation stops, don't immediately allow yourself to become distracted, but maintain your focus for just a while.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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