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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual we can spend some time in meditation. To do that, first of all we need to adopt a comfortable posture. As I regularly emphasise, the main purpose of engaging in the practice of meditation is that it is a means to protect one's mind. Meditation practice is an ultimate protection for one's mind as well as a means to bring about genuine peace in one's mind, or at the very least, to prevent our mind from engaging in the chaotic sorts of distractions that we are normally inclined towards.

In order to appreciate the results of the practice of meditation it is good to understand the advantages of protecting the mind. What are the advantages of protecting one's mind and the disadvantages of not protecting one's mind? When we talk about protection for the mind we are talking about protecting the mind from the influence of the delusions or the negative states of mind. The process of protecting one's mind from the influence of the delusions is to first minimise the influence of very strong delusions. At our present level it might not be possible to prevent delusions, such as attachment, anger, jealousy and pride, from arising in our mind all together; however we can definitely train our minds so that we are not influenced by extreme levels of delusion.

When we look into what causes problems in life, we will find that it is times when we are influenced by extreme levels of delusion, such as attachment, that we experience turmoil within. We can look into our own state of mind when we are influenced by extreme desire or attachment. Likewise when we are influenced by extreme anger it can turn into hatred. Even in our personal life we would have clearly noticed that at times of extreme levels of delusion in one's mind, it has only disadvantages for us, causing personal turmoil and leading to disastrous actions. If we honestly pay attention to our mind we will definitely notice that. These extreme levels of delusion are something we can definitely overcome; not allowing our mind to be under their influence or control.

In order to acknowledge the negative influence of strong or extreme delusions in one's mind it is good to look at particular instances. For example, we may be quite calm and relaxed but suddenly we might be hit by pangs of jealousy; as soon as the influence of strong jealousy arises in one's mind our peaceful and calm state of mind immediately becomes disturbed and we feel agitated, restless and uncomfortable. It can be the same with anger. We can be quite calm and peaceful but something may come to mind, and we feel extreme anger when our earlier calm and peaceful state of mind is completely

transformed into an agitated, uncomfortable state of mind and we feel turmoil within us.

When we look at these instances in our life we can clearly see that there is no immediate external reason or cause for one to feel disturbed. It is clearly because of a certain state of mind, in this case the delusion that arises in our mind. When we give in to the delusions rather than preventing it, we reach a state where we feel the negative affect and are completely disturbed. In instances like this there is clearly no one else who is harming us, hurting or criticising us. There may be no one else around and no immediate bad situation, but one feels completely disturbed. This is a clear indication that it is the delusions within one's mind that has caused that disturbance and turmoil. In extreme cases one can feel the unease and pang within one's own heart. This is clearly the ill-effect or disadvantage of not protecting one's mind but allowing one's mind to be influenced by the delusions.

We may not be in a position right now to completely avoid the delusions arising in our mind. We have not yet reached the level where we have completely overcome and eradicated delusions from our mind. So, of course, we naturally experience some of the delusions arising quite strongly. But when we give in to the extreme level of delusion, when we don't control our mind but allow the delusion to influence us, the disadvantage of not putting some restraint or control over one's own mind is clear. If however we apply some measure of restraint and prevent the delusions escalating to that extreme level, then we have protected our mind. That protection in turn protects the sanity, calmness and peace in one's mind. Whatever level of calm and peace one is experiencing will be maintained. Therefore we can clearly see the great advantage of protecting one's mind and that this protects the joy within oneself. Whereas, if we don't protect our mind then, as a consequence, we experience turmoil. So this is the reality.

The means to protect one's mind from extreme levels of delusion is simply reminding oneself of the disadvantages of giving in to this extreme level of delusion. For example, when one starts to feel jealous one can immediately think about the disadvantages of jealousy and that will help to minimise the intensity of jealousy. It is the same with anger or attachment. These states of mind work in the same way.

Being able to remind oneself requires clearly noticing the disadvantages of giving in to the delusions and the great advantages of controlling one's mind. Some people have confided in me that they have found it helpful in situations where they start feeling a little bit agitated and anger arising in their mind, and they remember my words and that actually helps them to keep calm and not give into anger. That is what they have confided in me and so it seems that they have found my advice helpful.

The main thing is to remind oneself of the disadvantages and to talk to oneself saying, 'Be careful here. If I allow my mind to be influenced by the intensity of the delusion of anger, or whatever other delusion is at hand, it will be disastrous for me. It would not be good for me.' Simply reminding oneself in that way would help reduce the intensity. This is how we will find a positive effect and it

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is how we apply the meditation technique of being mindful in our daily life. Helping to calm down one's mind is an essential part of meditation too. So we have clearly seen the advantages of protecting one's mind from the influence of delusions.

We have looked into some examples and instances from one's personal life showing how the mind is affected by the delusions. By using these personal instances and examples one can clearly see the advantages of protecting one's mind and the disadvantages of not protecting one's mind. When one comes to clearly recognise that it is the lack of internal protection that causes turmoil, unhappiness and agitation in one's mind, then one can also begin to understand why even the best external conditions do not necessarily serve as a means for someone to be happy and joyful all the time. This relates the query many people have about why is it that while certain individuals have good external conditions—they may have wealth, family and relatives—it seems everything is going well in their life, yet they are unhappy and miserable. I hear this question quite a lot. 'Why? What could the reason be when they have everything in their life but they are unhappy, miserable or experiencing some disturbance in their life? Why could that be?'

When we recognise what it is that brings about internal happiness and peace and that it is not dependent on external conditions, and that the causes for both peace and turmoil are within the mind, then one can clearly understand that situation. One will find the answer to that question from understanding that it is not external conditions that ultimately contribute to the peace and happiness of the mind; in fact, it may even be a cause for more turmoil. When you have wealth, affluence and fame, those very things may actually become the cause of one not being content and happy. If, in getting all those external resources, one doesn't pay attention to one's inner development then external conditions may become a condition for one to feel turmoil. Rather than contributing to peace and happiness they might contribute to more agony and turmoil. Such people may feel isolated from others and may feel a very extreme sense of loneliness. So, when external conditions are not utilised properly they can even become a condition for one's turmoil and agony. One will clearly be able to recognise this kind of situation for oneself and understand why this happens in other's lives too.

Some people feel pangs of loneliness. That, again, is an uncontrolled state of mind that contributes to a notion of loneliness and feel the suffering of loneliness. Whereas if one's mind is controlled, at peace with a sense of contentment and joy, then one does not allow the mind to be influenced by the suffering of loneliness. Regardless of one's external situation, whether one is with others or not, in fact particularly when one is alone, one can feel a great sense of joy. There is, apparently, no words that can express that kind of joy. It is an inexpressible joy that one can experience.

There is a contemporary analogy for something that is inexpressible; which is the sweetness of sugar. When you are asked to describe the experience of tasting it you will say, 'Well, it is sweet'. What does that mean? How do you

describe sweet? Basically you come to a point where you can't describe it. It is a personal experience but you can't put it in words. That is just a contemporary example.

The joy that one experiences is a sense of heightened joy, being very at ease within one's mind, and having a sense of real contentment within oneself. Even when external conditions are not so good, not having sufficient clothing, shelter and food, yet a sense of joy and contentment can be experienced.

I am not, of course, in any way trying to claim that I have reached the level of experiencing such heightened joy perpetually. However I can safely say that I have some experience of it. At particularly difficult times in my life I have been able to maintain a sense of joy that has kept me going. Even to this day I can safely say that I am at least definitely maintaining a sense of joy in my practice. I have shared previously how I do that in a very practical way. At the very first instance that I notice that a negative state of mind is about to surface I talk to myself and say, 'Geshe Doga, be careful. A negative mind is about to surface; be careful here Geshe Doga.'

By saying that to myself I find that I am immediately able to overcome that negative mind and it does not surface or manifest. I try as much as I can in my daily life to put into practice in this way. Of course, the constant advice that His Holiness the Dalai Lama gives about how to lead a happy life with the practice of meditation, is a very good reminder. As a result of having put some effort in my daily life I find that even at times when I am alone I feel a great sense of joy. Practically I am mostly alone in my room by myself; however there is no sense of angst or loneliness or feeling that I am missing out on something. Rather I feel a sense of real contentment and joy. So, based on the limited experience that I have I can confidently share that there is a definitely a possibility of experiencing such joy within one's mind.

Having explained a bit about the advantages of applying meditation as a means to protect one's mind, we can now spend some time in meditation ourselves. For that purpose we again readjust our physical posture to adopt a comfortable, relaxed but appropriate posture for meditation. Then we try to generate a clear and bright state of mind. Internally we try to brighten oneself up, even if it initially is superficial, we try to imagine a clear and bright state of mind; with that comes a sense of joy within oneself.

Within that frame of mind, it is then good to generate an appropriate intention or good motivation for the practice. On a personal level it is good to remind oneself that applying this meditation practice and engaging in it sincerely will be the ultimate means for one to have a clear and bright state of mind and a sense of joy within oneself. When one has developed that within oneself then, as I emphasise again and again, that is the most valuable and priceless thing to have within one. It is the best aid or companion at all times. By naturally having a calm and peaceful state of mind with a bright and clear state of mind, it will contribute to the well-being of others as well. Therefore it is good to remind oneself again and again that the whole purpose of practising meditation is

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to be able to induce a clear bright state of mind, complemented with a joyous and happy state of mind.

Some older students have confided in me that they have, as advised in the teachings, implemented this in their daily life and have found it very beneficial, particularly in times of difficulties. They found it very useful and beneficial for them. If that is the case, it is good that they have found from their own experience that meditation practice is worthwhile. It is good for all of us to remind ourselves of this and generate a good intention in one's mind for the meditation.

Having adopted the appropriate physical posture and mental frame of mind we then need to commit ourselves to withdraw our mind from all forms of distractions. As mentioned previously, it is allowing our mind to be influenced by the distractions that causes us all our turmoil, anxiety, disturbance and so forth. Therefore we need to remind ourselves that there is no benefit, there is only disadvantage, in following the distractions. In our meditation practice we withdraw our mind, 100%, from the distractions and bring our focus inwards within ourselves. We then place our focus and attention on the breath itself. We need to put 100% focus and attention on the breath. In this way we will derive the benefit of the practice of meditation. For the next few minutes we will engage in meditation in this way. (*Pause for meditation.*)

#### 4.2.2.1.2. The actual way to take the essence

##### 4.2.2.1.2.3. The way to train the mind in the stages of the path of beings of the great scope

###### 4.2.2.1.2.3.2. The actual paths

###### 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2. How to develop an awakening mind

###### 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1. The stages of training the awakening mind

###### 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1. Training the mind in the pith instructions on the six causes and effect, which comes from the lineage traced to the great master Atisha

###### 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2. Extensive explanation

###### 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.1. Developing certainty in the stages

###### 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.1.1. Showing compassion to be the root of the Mahayana path

###### 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.3. The importance of compassion at the end

###### 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.3.2. Specifically, the instruction to treat bodhichitta as the core instruction

###### 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.3.2.1. The need to treat it as an essential practice

We can now cover a few passages from the text. The topic at present is the importance of compassion, particularly how compassion is important at the beginning, the middle and the end. In relation to the third it was explained that this has two subdivisions, the *Actual* and *Specific instructions to treat bodhichitta as the core instruction*. We have covered the first, *the Actual*, in two subdivisions —*the difference between buddhas and the hearers* and *the three-part analogy from the external world*.

We covered in our last session the external analogy of how there are three things that are important for a harvest. In the beginning the seed is important, in the middle watering the seed is important and at the end the ripening of the seed is important. In this external analogy there are three different things at three different times

that are important. These are the seed in the beginning, the water in the middle and the ripening at the end. In relation to achieving the ultimate goal the harvest of enlightenment, it just one thing that is important at all three times. And that is compassion, which is important at the beginning, the middle and the end.

So we have come to the second subdivision of explaining that compassion is essential at the end. The second subdivision is *Specifically, the instruction to treat bodhichitta or the awakened mind as the core instruction*. For some who are not familiar with the word 'bodhichitta', or even the literal translation 'awakening mind', it is good to clarify what it stands for. The main criteria of the state of mind called bodhichitta, or the awakening mind, is benefiting others. It is a state of mind that is an altruistic mind of wishing to benefit others. That is the main point. So what is being explained here is importance of developing that state of mind of awakening or the wish to benefit others as a core instruction and always keeping it in one's heart as the main instruction.

This again is subdivided in three subdivisions. The first is, *The need to treat it as an essential practice*. The text gives an account of an earlier instance involving a great Kadampa master of the past. This master apparently sought advice from his own main teacher, the great master Atisha. The text reads,

The teacher Shan-na-chung said, "Even though I asked for instruction from the Great Elder - Atisha, he said nothing except, 'Renounce the world and cultivate the spirit of enlightenment'. Upon hearing this, Geshe Dromtonpa, was embarrassed for him and said, 'You received the great elder's ultimate instruction'. Geshe Dromtonpa understood the core of the teaching.

What is being explained in these passages is that when the Kadampa master was seeking advice from the master, Atisha, he was expecting an elaborate and profound instruction. When he was told, 'Renounce this world and cultivate the awakening mind.' it seemed as if it was simple advice. But Geshe Dromtonpa, another great master who was the main disciple of Atisha, understood that instruction as the core instruction. This seemingly simple instruction incorporates the essence of the Buddha's teaching, which is to renounce the world and cultivate bodhichitta. The core of the Buddha's teaching is said to be presenting the means to benefit other sentient beings. The whole purpose for achieving enlightenment is to benefit other sentient beings. Therefore this instruction, as claimed by Dromtonpa, was a really a great and profound instruction. Atisha gave this to his disciples, but it is also an instruction for us to implement in our life. We need to also understand that as the essence of the Buddha's teaching.

The second subdivision is, *'As it is difficult to gain certainty, one must rely on accumulation, purification and the exalted discourses.'* What is being presented here is that the awakening mind is not easy to develop within one's own mind. Therefore, as an aid to develop the awakening mind within oneself, one needs to rely on accumulation. Accumulation refers to accumulating merit and purification refers to purifying one's negative deeds. Whatever negative deeds one may have committed in the

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past, one can purify them by engaging in purification practices. To rely on 'exalted discourses' means to rely on the treatises that explain the techniques and methods to develop the awakening mind.

In the ritual when one takes the bodhisattva vows, it is first preceded by verses that indicate accumulating merit, purifying negative karma and rejoicing in others good deeds. Based on that, one then takes the bodhichitta vows.

The text reads:

This conviction is very difficult to achieve. So you must seek a stable and certain knowledge by repeatedly clearing away sins, accumulating merit, and reading scripture such as the *Array of Stalks Sutra* and the commentaries. The Glorious Matreceta's *Praise in One Hundred and Fifty Verses* says:

Only you, O hero [Buddha], know your  
precious spirit,  
The seed of perfect enlightenment,  
To be the quintessence;  
No one else can reach this certainty.

This particularly renowned master and Indian scholar is known by many names, one of which, Matreceta, has a connotation of revering one's mother. Apparently this great master was, among his many attributes, renowned for having great respect and reverence for his mother. That was one of his attributes but he was known by many different names in relation to his qualities. He was also known as Lupon Pawo, meaning the glorious one or the great achiever. Apparently this great master was renowned for his expansive knowledge and deeds and his composition and so forth.

What is being explained in his quote is that the ultimate state of the awakening mind, which is the perfect enlightenment, is endowed only in the Buddha's mind and thus it is only Buddha himself who would know with certainty how great the awakening mind is. Ordinary beings who have not reached that stage themselves would not possibly be able to know in entirety or certainty about the qualities of awakening mind. Presenting the quality of the ultimate result of the awakening mind, which is actually the enlightened mind itself, is a way to inspire us to create the causes to achieve that state of mind ourselves. It is also a way of showing that the basis of that lies within us in the limited compassion that we have right now. Our compassion would be considered limited in relation to how it is expressed.

When we express our compassion as an ordinary being it would be quite biased. It would be biased in the sense that we would have strong compassion for someone that we regard as our friend. The wish to benefit others would be biased because it would be extended only to those that we consider our friends or relatives and so forth and would not extend to all other beings. However a limitless wish of benefiting others is extended indiscriminately towards all living beings. In order to achieve that limitless and unbiased wish of benefiting others we need to work on what we have got right now. The limited state of mind of wishing to benefit others that we have now is

the basis. We can slowly transform this limited and biased wish of benefiting others to a limitless and unbiased state of wishing to help all living beings indiscriminately. It is good to consider that and understand how we can work towards that.

Transforming our limited wish of benefiting others to a limitless and unbiased wish of benefiting other sentient beings is done through mental training, and then applying it in actual meditation. The first part of training the mind is to start to acknowledge that all beings, oneself included, equally have the wish to enjoy the experience of happiness and do not wish to experience any kind of suffering. Relating this to oneself, one has that instinctive and spontaneous wish to experience every type of joy and happiness and not to experience any kind of suffering. Likewise all other living beings have the exact same wish. They have a spontaneous wish to experience happiness and not experience any kind of suffering. The conclusion is that there is no difference between others and me in terms of our ultimate aspiration and what wish to achieve. There is no difference between oneself and others.

So it is not reasonable to discriminate between others and oneself and think 'my happiness is more important or getting rid of suffering is important only for me'. We need to overcome this distinction and not discriminate between others and see that everyone is equal. We need to stop distinguishing between friends or enemies but see that all beings are equal in that way. Once we have trained our mind to acknowledge and accept that reality then we apply that in actual meditation practice by first of all analysing it within oneself, thinking over and over again of how true this is, and then when one reaches a certain point of conclusion to keep one's mind focused on how wonderful it would be if all beings were to experience ultimate joy and happiness, and not experience any kind of suffering, and may I be able to work towards that happening. When one is focused, then focus on that wish and really develop it within one's mind and that becomes a profound meditation in itself. This is the way to train our mind.

We will conclude the teaching for this evening. This will be followed in our following sessions with more description of how to develop this awakening mind. The teachings give a very systematic and proper way of achieving that.

Before we conclude the session it will be good to again spend a few moments in meditation. This time our focus object is the sound of the Guru Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. While the mantra is being recited we try to withdraw our mind from all forms of distraction and place 100% of our focus on the sound itself. Then, when the recitation stops, we try to maintain our awareness and focus upon the residue of that sound and maintain that for short while. In this way our time, even a short time, becomes a proper technique of meditation itself.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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