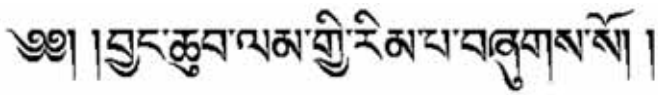


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## The Condensed Lam Rim



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As usual, we can spend some time for meditation, sitting in a comfortable relaxed posture.

As I regularly explain, the benefits of meditation are practical. First of all, we can consider the fact that we have ‘a mind’, which goes with us wherever we go. Wherever we are, our mind is with us. It is part of our identity or being; it affects us in whatever we do. Our state of mind affects us as a person. Thus, we need to ensure that our state of mind is a positive state of mind, and one that is not affected by negativity.

Wherever we go, our mind is like a companion. We have our mind with us. When our mind is in a disturbed state, then the result is that we are in turmoil or lose direction in life. There is a significant relationship between our mind and ourselves; this is very clear.

To make sure that we are in a calm state, we need to protect the state of our mind from negative influences. We need to make sure that our mind is in a happy state. And this is what I emphasise regularly, again and again—we need to make sure that we are in a happy state of mind. When we are in a happy state of mind, then whatever we are doing becomes much more meaningful. A happy state of mind is the main factor for our well-being.

Initially, we will definitely find it difficult to secure a happy state of mind. This is because we are acquainted with negative influences that cause us anxiety and distress. Basically, when we lack a sense of a kind and compassionate mind that contributes to an unhappy state of mind, and we might find it difficult to secure positive states of mind. However, with practice and familiarity, we will find that it becomes much easier to be in a positive state of mind and thus a happy state of mind; it comes with familiarity. As we engage in the practice gradually, our mind will become more and more in tune with securing a more positive and happy state of mind. And as I emphasise again and again, a happy state of mind is our best companion. As far as friendships or companions go, a happy state of mind is our best companion. It is our best friend because a happy state of mind can only contribute to our well-being, and does not cause us any harm.

An Indian lady I know, I think she is from Burma, used to comment about how I seem to be always happy and joyful. When I would go out to have tea she used to ask, “How come you seem to be in a very happy and joyous state of being? What do you attribute that to?” And my initial reply was, “Well, in my early days I lost everything: my country, my possessions, my hometown—I had to leave behind everything. I could attribute it to that.” Initially she was surprised to hear that comment. Then she seemed to make the connection and said, “Oh, I think I understand. It is because you have developed non-attachment to all of that. You are in a more joyous and happy state of mind.” So she

seemed to have gained some understanding from the point I was making.

Indeed, when we secure a happy state of mind then, particularly in times of difficulties, regardless of what is happening outside, regardless of our difficult external situations, internally, because we have secured a happy state of mind, we are able to withstand any kind of difficulty or adverse situation; and we can maintain our well-being. This is something that I can confirm due to some experience of my own. I have myself found the benefit of a happy state of mind contributes to my well-being, thus I emphasise it again and again to you.

Of course, I am not claiming that I have been a happy, joyous saint from the early start of my life. Actually, in the early part of my life I was known to have a bit of a rough personality—I engaged in a few fights with other kids of my own age and seemed a bit short-tempered and so forth in my youth. However, even though I don’t particularly relate to an evil state of mind, I was known for having a rough personality. With my own experience, I can attest to a gradual transformation taking place. With determination and commitment a positive transformation can definitely take place in our life.

Also, another point is that our well-being needs to be secured within our own mind, rather than relying on external conditions. Because if we merely focus on external conditions for our well-being, for example feeling relaxed and content when things are going well externally, and we only relate to those external conditions, then we may feel that everything is fine. But when the slightest thing goes wrong, it might cause so much turmoil within us; it might cause us to be anxious and agitated. If we find that this is happening, that when things are seemingly going well and everything seems fine, we feel relaxed and happy, but when the conditions change and things go slightly wrong, we immediately feel anxiety and fear and so forth. This is a clear sign that our seeming well-being was only related to the external conditions and therefore was not very secure and stable. Whereas if we had developed well-being for ourselves from within our own mind, then from that positive state of mind within ourselves, regardless of external situations, that well-being is much more stable and much more firm.

As we become more familiar with the positive states of mind such as kindness and securing a clear state of mind, these become the real main factors for our well-being, and we can withstand any difficulties that occur around us. These qualities, in summary, are a kind attitude, a genuine kindness within us, and developing a kind heart and a clear mind. When we fail to put energy and effort into developing these qualities within us, a genuine kindness and clarity within our mind, then when the conditions are seemingly OK we may assume that we are OK. We don’t get upset easily or we are kind and generous, but as soon as things go wrong, we might seemingly lose all those qualities. This happens because we have not put in a genuine effort into stabilising and making the positive qualities of kindness and clarity firm and stable within our mind.

If we can begin to understand the real significance and value of stabilising kindness and clarity within ourselves, then through practice and thorough familiarity, these qualities will become stable. The more we put time and energy into developing kindness and clarity, and the more familiarity we have with them, then the more stable they become within us. Even when adverse and difficult situations arise in our

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mind, we will not be disturbed and we will be able to maintain these qualities, which then become our real companion.

What I am trying to say is that kindness and clarity become valuable qualities for us. When I say 'valuable' I am not indicating that having these qualities will increase our wealth or our financial status. By the same token I am not saying that we should completely neglect working, accumulating wealth and so forth, as we do need money to support ourselves. But the main value of having kindness and clarity is that they will maintain an internal well-being and stability within us.

The opposite of a happy and joyous mind is of course the unhappy state of mind. An unhappy state of mind can occur for various reasons. If we are not mindful, if we are not prepared for it, then an unhappy mind can take us by surprise and cause us turmoil. I often use the following illustration to explain a point. This is a story that I have shared in the past many times about a lady who used to come and see me often, whom I had a close acquaintance with. She was known to be very jovial and happy. Indeed, she was mostly really happy.

However, one particular time she came to see me, she burst into tears. When I enquired into why she was feeling sad and what caused her to cry, she said, "Well, my husband has left me", to which I commented, "Actually, that's a good thing."

I made the comment that if your husband or partner leaves you, then you need not feel sad and unhappy because you can consider them as a piece of rubbish going out of your life. To that immediate comment she lightened up and reacted, "Oh, maybe there is some point there." And she actually came out of her misery, and felt a little bit heartened again. In particular, I mentioned that she "has not actually lost anything precious. You have not lost but gained your independence and freedom. Rather than losing anything, you have actually gained your own freedom and independence." She replied, "That's a good point. I think I can agree with that." However, she felt that the comment about her partner leaving her, being similar to discarding a piece of rubbish, was perhaps a little bit too harsh. But I insisted that that was the case; that him leaving was like losing a piece of rubbish. So then we both just started laughing. However, I was not making a light comment. There was a reason why I was saying that.

She needed to get out of a state of mind of strong sorrow and sadness about someone leaving her. When someone turns their back on you and leaves you with harsh feelings, there is no point in trying to go after them when they have turned their back to you. It would only cause more sorrow, more unhappiness in the mind. But if you can adopt an attitude of, "If they turn their back against me and walk away, I can maintain my own composure and remain firm and steady within myself. I need not run after the person."

I also mentioned that if you turn your head around and look another way, you might even see someone else and meet other friends. "Is it really true?" she said. Of course we all need companions and friendship in our life. The sorrow and sadness felt when someone seemingly turns their back away and leaves you is of course painful. However, the prospect that there could be someone else to have a friendship with, can also lighten us up. Therefore, again the main point that I am emphasising with this example, is that it's just a matter of changing our attitude. Sometimes when are in a state of real sadness and sorrow, we might just be dwelling in that

and this causes us more and more sorrow and sadness, which can just bring us down and make us feel depressed. But if we just change our way of thinking slightly, even a slight change in our attitude can change the whole atmosphere. With a new perspective, we can lighten up again.

These examples all point to the significance of meditation, which is a technique to train our mind to focus on a positive object, particularly to overcome those objects or situations that cause us distress and an unsettled mind. We use meditation to divert our attention away from that and bring it upon the positive object of our meditation. With that familiarity we will naturally gain a release from the objects that cause us sorrow and an unhappy state of mind. Our mind normally, when faced with an object or situation that causes us distress, pays more and more attention to that, and we spend more and more time and energy just dwelling on that.

Of course, the more we familiarise ourselves with something that causes us distress, naturally we will be affected by it in a negative way. That is natural. If we familiarise ourselves with objects or situations that cause us distress, then we can come to a point where we feel that there is no sense of meaning in our life. We go about with a heavy mind, where whatever we do doesn't seem enjoyable. There is no pleasure in eating anymore, no pleasure in socialising and no pleasure in working. And we begin to feel a sense of loss of direction or purpose in life. This is an unfortunate state to be in. If that carries on further, it can be disastrous to our own health and well-being.

In particular situations it is difficult not to feel distressed and distraught. There were a lot of problems in one couple's relationship and finally they had to break-up. The lady who came to confide in me about the situation was depressed and unhappy about the whole situation. The break-up involved so many bitter conflicts and difficulties in the relationship. Understanding that it was not an easy situation to come out of, I said, "Yes, it is a difficult situation and you will rightly feel sad and distressed about it. However, it's not the end of your happiness and your well-being. Things will be restored back to you and you will become normal again after some time. It might take as long as three years, but gradually you will come out of it."

After a span of three years, she confided in me, "As you have said Geshe-la, it was very true. I have now come to a point where it doesn't disturb me any more. That situation does not cause me any distress any more. I am completely free from it and over it." So, in certain situations it may take time. However, the point is that we can come out of any difficulty or distressed situation; we can get over it. And the technique that can help us come out of it more firmly, more stably, is the practise of meditation.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama comments often about his own source of strength in his life, saying it comes from the difficulties and hardships that he had to face in his life. As he explains, it is by facing difficulties and hardships in our life that we take the initiative to overcome them, and to try to develop endurance and patience in dealing with hardships and difficulties. This makes us much stronger in our mind. Whenever we face a difficulty, if we allow ourselves to succumb to it or the hardships that make us feel depressed, then the hardships and difficulties completely influence us in a negative way. We give into them and lose hope in life. However, with determination we can commit ourselves to endure hardships and difficulties. With that

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endurance, willingly taking upon it as a learning opportunity and a way to make us stronger, it can. Difficulties can definitely make us stronger and develop our qualities of mental stamina and strength even further. This is definitely possible.

When we develop an attitude to willingly endure hardships and difficulties in life, it will naturally not cause us distress and we will not be affected by those difficulties and hardships. This is because we willingly accept them. This is a form of patience. Within the different types of patience, there is the type of patience called 'the patience of willingly enduring hardships and difficulties'. This form of endurance and patience is a mental attitude. It's a matter of developing that attitude in our mind.

I have many stories about people who have practiced endurance in facing difficulties and hardships, particularly in relation to my early part of life when I had to escape from Tibet, and took the hard journey of walking into India, we went through hardships along the way, and after coming into India, we went through tremendous difficulties and hardships. However, practising endurance and having an acceptance of the situation benefited and helped many people to not succumb to those situations. Instead made them much stronger. People have commented that these stories I tell of those times have been really inspiring and good stories. However I might not go through those stories this evening again because we need some time for meditation. If we don't make some time for meditation, I will not be keeping my word!

For meditation, let us again re-adjust our posture to be relaxed and comfortable. We need to choose an appropriate object for our meditation. Here we use our own breath.

The definition of meditation is to familiarise ourselves with an object. Having chosen an object, we place our entire attention and focus on that object, and we familiarise ourselves with it, which in this case is the breath. We need to keep our focus and attention entirely on the breath itself; we do not to allow our mind to wander off, but keep it on the breath.

For maximum benefit, we need to set our heart to the practice and do it with a full commitment in our mind. We need to first of all commit to not allowing our mind to be distracted with other thoughts or feelings. We need to bring our whole attention and focus on to the object. We need to withdraw from all other forms of distractions, including thoughts of any external objects. We completely withdraw from all of that and bring our entire attention and focus on the breath itself.

For the next few minutes during our meditation session, we will be constantly mindful of the breath itself, our natural in-breath and out-breath, just focusing on that. Bring that to mind and do not allow any other thing to distract us from the breath itself. This is how the meditation becomes a proper technique, and a genuine practice of meditation.

*Question:* Geshe-la, I am really driving someone crazy at the moment. They are constantly irritated with me. I am trying to strike a balance and I feel happy with myself because I'm working with my mind and feel so good about that. But I can't stop talking. I can tell that it's irritating this person. But from my side is a real desire to understand something, and we think very differently. It's driving him crazy. Is it okay to still be true to yourself and keep marching forward as long as you're not—do you know what I mean—doing something

that's negative in your own mind? But it is causing irritation in a big way.

*Answer:* Of course it depends what is really causing the agitation in the other person. If the other person is unhappy with themselves or have a negative state of mind from their own side, such as jealousy or something like that, then we need to remain positive ourselves in doing what is right, even if it does cause him to be unsettled. We have to be true to ourselves, so as far as that goes. We can continue with what we feel is right. However, at the same time, if this is a person that you have concern for, then of course you can do something or say something that can soothe their mind. There are certain ways of saying things or explaining things that can put them at rest. Then of course we might do that for the other person's benefit. If their mind is not affected by extreme jealousy and so forth, then your explanation can help them, can benefit them.

In our work environment with our colleagues, there can be times when it's also difficult. However, from our own side if we can maintain a positive mind, with the intention of trying at least to show a good gesture from our side. At the very least, say "good morning" when you greet people when you come to work. And when you leave, wish them good day or good evening. This type of gesture, when we do it with a good intention, can have a positive effect. Eventually, the other person may start to—even though they might have some hostile feeling towards us—if we continuously show them good gestures, then that will help change their attitude towards us. And if it is someone we work closely with and have a good relationship with, then once in a while we could invite them for tea or a meal.

If we have a long-term view about the situation, and if we maintain our own cool and try to display our good gestures, then a positive change can occur from the other person; maybe not right away, but over time.

As I regularly advise others in similar situations, where they have to go to work, the main purpose for going to work is to earn a living. We all have the right to earn a living. Our main temporary goal is to earn a livelihood. Bearing that in mind, if the other person seems annoyed with us, then we don't allow that to disturb our state of mind, or distract us from our main purpose. On top of making an earning, it is important to maintain our cool, and try to maintain a happy state of mind. That is our own responsibility.

Of course the very purpose of going work is to earn a living, so if we are rightly earning our living, then it is our responsibility not to let others distract us from that. If they get annoyed or upset, and as long as we are working and doing our job well, then try to maintain that. That is our own responsibility, regardless of what their attitude is. If we are adamant and keep on going with what we need to do, then things can change.

The point is, if we allow others to take over and disturb the situation, then that is our loss. But if we can be strong and maintain our attitude of doing the right things, then going to work will be beneficial for us.

In a situation where we are clear that, as far as we are concerned, we have no bad intentions and we are not wishing to cause trouble for this person, then we might try to be genuinely friendly with them. But even under those circumstances if the person is responding in a negative way and not taking our kind gestures into account and responding negatively, then this is a clear situation where the other person is a little bit disturbed. There is something

is disturbing their mind. They are not in a happy state of mind. So rather than being annoyed, which will have the same effect upon us, maybe we can develop a little bit of compassion for that person. Of course, it does affect us a bit as well. Some people have confided in me that they are doing mantras, and specially dedicating that “may the other person’s mind be blessed, may they be peaceful and calm”. And it seems to help. This is a good gesture, even when we do this on the level of good mental thoughts.

We don’t need to announce that we are saying mantras for them. But secretly we can recite mantras and make prayers that their mind becomes calm and peaceful. If we do that with a genuine attitude, then it is a great, great practice. It is a token of the goodness of being a Buddhist. Having followed and being interested in the Buddhist path, if we can adopt an attitude where, rather than retaliating and being annoyed and upset in response to someone being obnoxious, but instead if we can just pray for them “may their mind be peaceful” and dedicate our merits to them, then that is a real great practice. And, as mentioned earlier, it brings about a positive effect for the other person.

*Question:* Many people seem joyous and happy that Osama bin Laden was killed recently. How would you view that from a Buddhist perspective?

*Answer:* As a Buddhist practitioner, him being killed should not be a cause for joy, but rather compassion. Of course, those who may feel joy in him being killed would be under the impression that he as a person was evil and at fault. But when we think about it from the Buddhist view, it is not the actual person that is at fault, but their negative states of mind. Their delusions are influencing them to do negative deeds. It is unfortunate for the victims that he had killed and all the people that were harmed through his actions, but he has also been harmed himself. Just as the others are the victims, he himself is a victim of his own delusions, such as ignorance and anger. Whatever particular delusion was prevalent at the time when he made the decisions, it is those negative states of mind that caused all the problems.

When we think about the situation in more depth, from a really subtle point of view, then we can feel a sense of compassion that, having caused harm to so many others, he has ultimately caused harm upon himself. This is the end result of being powerful and influential. Later on in life, these people will be completely overtaken and completely overpowered. It was the same situation with Saddam Hussein.

As we all know, in his early days he had a lot of power and ruled others. However, when his regime was completely toppled, he had to go into hiding. And when images of him were shown finally coming out of hiding, his face and appearance looked so sad and so miserable. The whole situation for him was so miserable at that point, it was hard to feel joy in that. I felt much compassion for him as well. It is the same situation here. When we think about it, bin Laden’s death is the cause of feeling compassion rather than feeling joy.

The reason we feel compassion is—particularly in relation to people who we would normally label as being evil—that they have created huge negativity. Those very deeds that are what we call negative deeds and they are what we call in Buddhism creating negative karma. Creating negative karma from their actions is the cause for great compassion. As Buddhists, we understand that they are creating the causes for their own suffering in the future. Even from a general perspective, we naturally feel compassion when we see

someone suffering. According to the Buddhist explanation of karma, when we see someone engaged in negativity, then that will be a cause for us to feel compassion because they are creating the causes to experience much greater suffering in the future. This is why we have compassion for them. Of course, when we talk about it from conventional, worldly perspectives, it is completely contrary to how we would think from a Dharma or Buddhist perspective.

From the worldly perspective, people feel joyful and happy when something goes wrong for someone they don’t get along with or don’t like. And when something bad happens to someone that we like, then we feel sad. That is something from a very worldly, normal perspective; that is how it is. However, from a Buddhist point of view, this is not a proper way of looking at things. Feeling compassion when people are suffering—regardless of who they are—is something that we need to develop. This is contrary to the worldly perspective of feeling joy when something bad happens to someone who we dislike, and feeling unhappy when something bad happens to someone we like.

*Question:* I notice that, and I usually try to think of ways in which I can stop the thoughts. I’ll do a meditation on my breath or calm abiding to try to stop the thoughts. And it’s really, really hard. I was thinking this evening, listening that perhaps I should be going about it a different way. Perhaps when that stress comes from attachment, I should be meditating on love and compassion? But perhaps I should be meditating on the nature of attachment itself? What would you recommend? What meditation should we be doing when there is attachment?

*Answer:* Focusing on our breath would be an immediate remedy to overcome the manifest levels of attachment. But that is not an antidote for overcoming attachment.

An antidote for overcoming attachment is contemplating the faults of the object that we have attachment towards. When we contemplate on its natural faults, the unattractive attributes of the object, then that contemplation becomes the antidote for overcoming attachment. For someone who is affected by strong attachment, focusing on the faults of the object that they are attached to becomes their object of meditation for developing calm abiding.

As explained in the meditation texts, focusing on the breath is an effective meditation for those who are affected by a lot of thoughts and distractions in their mind. So for those who are affected by a lot of conceptual thoughts, and their mind is always busy, then focusing on the breath becomes one of the best remedies for overcoming that distracted mind. The particular antidote for overcoming anger is meditating on love and compassion. Overcoming attachment is by contemplating the faults of the object.

Before we conclude for the evening, we can spend a few minutes in meditation. We focus upon the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra. By focusing on that sound we are diverting our attention and withdrawing from all other distractions; we are instead placing our attention completely on the sound of the mantra. And when the sound recitations subside, try to maintain your focus for a short while afterwards.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Transcribed by Peter Boothby*

*Edit 1 by Cynthia Karena*

*Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe*

*Edited Version*

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