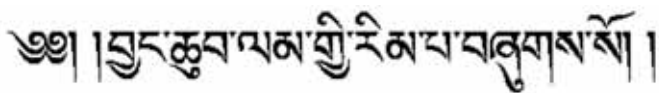


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## The Condensed Lam Rim



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Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As usual we can spend some time in meditation, where we sit in a comfortable relaxed posture. Likewise, it would be good to ensure a clear and bright state of mind, and if possible to also generate a positive motivation. Typically for meditation, we adopt a comfortable physical posture and a clear bright positive state of mind. If we can do that, then we have already accomplished what we need! Because that is what we are striving for - to be relaxed and comfortable both physically and mentally. What more do we need?

If there is no disturbance in our bodies on a physical level, we are comfortable. If our mind has no disturbances, then we are comfortable and calm also, and that is ultimately enough for our wellbeing.

However, we are mostly busy. Why we are so busy? Why we are constantly busy trying to achieve something? It is worthwhile to consider whether whatever we are doing actually contributes to our physical and mental wellbeing. How can we tell if it does? By observing our mental attitude, which will become increasingly positive if we are doing the right thing. If we can see some transformational improvement, then our activities are contributing to our wellbeing.

However, the primary check is our state of mind. As the great master Atisha said, the best advice is to check our mind. Our wellbeing is primarily related to our state of our mind. If our state of mind is positive and we have a good attitude, then that contributes to our overall wellbeing. A positive attitude is an essential part of our life.

Our wellbeing relies on whether our state of mind is positive or not. A positive state of mind gives us inner wellbeing and goodness, whereas a negative state of mind contributes to our problems, difficulties, frustrations, and anxieties. We need to constantly be aware of how we conduct ourselves on three levels of our existence - physically, verbally and mentally. Physical and verbal behaviour are primarily related to our state of our mind.

There are two tools - mindfulness and introspection – that we can use to check whether our mind is in a positive state or not. Mindfulness is an awareness of the state of our mind and introspection is the analyses of the state of our mind. These two tools of mindfulness and introspection are our best companions. So wherever we go, whatever we do, we are constantly vigilant in checking whether we are behaving positively so that we can contribute to our own wellbeing, or whether we are doing things which create problems for ourselves. The tools of mindfulness and introspection can protect us from problems. They are not like our external companions, but something that we can develop within ourselves.

Being mindful includes checking whether our state of mind is positive or not, and whether our physical and verbal behaviour is ethical or not. This is the type of mindfulness

that is referred to here, which is what we need to cultivate as a tool.

Mindfulness is the tool that is constantly vigilant of what we are doing and whether, physically, verbally and mentally, we are in a positive state or not. Introspection is a particular state of mind that analyses what we are doing. It is checking up to make sure that what we are doing is positive. It makes sure that on all three levels we are conducting ourselves in a most appropriate way.

The great master Atisha said the best quality is the wish to benefit others, and to have a mind that benefits others. Master Atisha is advising us that love and compassion and focusing on others are the best qualities that we can achieve.

People who are endowed with the essence of love and compassion, and have a genuine concern for the wellbeing of others, are naturally appreciated because of their positive attitudes, which have a soothing and calming effect. They themselves have that natural ease, a natural calmness about them too. Because their mind is imbued with love and compassion they themselves become extremely approachable and are calm and likeable. The great master Atisha said that people who exhibit love and compassion are people who are approachable and people who do good deeds. This is why I regularly emphasise that it is most important for us is to further cultivate love and compassion within our hearts. We all have the potential, there is no-one who does not have the seed of love and compassion within themselves. It is a matter of acknowledging that, and further developing and increasing compassion within us.

Whatever love and compassion we do have, we need to try to protect that. We need to also guard our mind so that our good qualities do not decrease, and that they naturally increase. We need to guard our minds so that we make sure our mind is not affected or infected by negative attitudes or faults. We try to increase our positive qualities and decrease our faults.

The technique of meditation helps us to increase our positive qualities while decreasing our faults. This is the essential purpose of meditation.

Meditation serves as one of the ultimate techniques to promote our positive states of mind, while protecting us from the negative states of mind. The technique involves focusing on a particular chosen object, which is a means to further develop mindfulness and introspection.

During meditation, we can use our breath to focus on. However, the ultimate aim for meditation is a virtuous object. For our regular meditation practice, we need to be mindful of our positive or virtuous state of mind. We also need to use introspection, which is a technique to analyse ourselves and make sure that our mind is in a virtuous state. We need to use introspection so that we become more and more familiar with the virtuous state of mind. When our mind is in a virtuous state it is naturally in a positive state as well.

Initially this requires a bit of effort, and we intentionally have to place our mind in a virtuous state because, unfortunately, it doesn't come about naturally. Instead, it seems that most of the time we are naturally inclined to think about non-virtuous objects; we are too preoccupied and familiar with non-virtuous objects. In our mind's natural state, it seems that we are constantly going from one non-virtuous state of mind or object to another. For example, rather than cultivating a state of mind of non-attachment, we

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seem to be constantly preoccupied with objects of attachment, and this causes us distress. When we are feeling settled and calm we notice that the moment we think about an object that causes us strong desire or attachment, our mind starts to become agitated, and immediately gets disturbed and overly excited. We are mentally disturbed, as soon as strong desire or attachment arises. This is why it is called a non-virtuous state of mind, because it disturbs our inner calm and peace. Therefore we need to train our mind to focus on objects of non-attachment and non-anger.

When we choose a virtuous object for our meditation, we need to be dedicated and make a commitment to ourselves to keep that object in our mind constantly. And to be mindful of that object and check out whether our mind is focussed on it or not.

To share some anecdotes from earlier times of my life, there are some examples of mindfulness, which can distract us from our study. When we have a particular thing in mind that becomes a priority, then we don't think of anything else. For example, when I joined the monastery a very young age, of course my teachers encouraged me to study and memorise the text. When my mum came to visit me, I would get excited and happy. However when she left I would really miss her. When she left, I would only think about her. There would be nothing else that came to my mind except her. My whole focus was on her so much that I wouldn't think about studies; I even didn't think about eating. So that is an example of how preoccupied the mind can become with an object. If the mind is placed on a particular object, then everything else subsides and becomes irrelevant. If we use that mindfulness to focus on a positive object, then all negativities of the mind will completely subside and be irrelevant to our mind.

Now we will engage in meditation practice for a few minutes. We again re-adjust our physical posture so we can be relaxed and comfortable. Then, most importantly, ensure that our mind is focussed. We intentionally withdraw from all other forms of distractions, which include any kinds of memories or thoughts. We need to completely withdraw from all of that and completely bring our focus inward where we are not preoccupied with any other thoughts. So within that focussed state of mind, we place our focus on the breath and maintain that focus on the breath for the next few minutes. (*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

###### 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2. The actual training in the stages

###### 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1. Training the mind to strive for the welfare of others

###### 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1. Establishing the basis for that mind to arise

###### 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.1. Establishing a balanced attitude towards sentient beings

###### 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.1.2. The way to cultivate equanimity

###### 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.1.2.4. How to cultivate a mind that can combat attachment and aversion

We covered in our last session the way to develop equanimity, and our attitudes towards others. We first use strangers as an object to focus on, developing a state of mind of equanimity. When we easily develop that with strangers, then we develop equanimity with our friends and relatives, the people close to us. Then we move on to developing equanimity towards our enemies.

The fourth subdivision under the topic of developing equanimity is how to cultivate a mind that can combat attachment and aversion. That is, to overcome attachment and aversion by developing equanimity. All living beings equally want happiness and do not want to suffer, so it is inappropriate to hold some close and help them, while keeping others distant, either harming or not helping them. This is an essential point for us to contemplate and then further meditate on.

Every living being, in every situation, all equally want to be happy and do not wish to experience any kind of suffering. This is a fact and reality. So it is inappropriate for us to consider some people as being close and only help them to be happy, while keeping others at a distance, thinking of them as enemies or wishing to harm them, or being indifferent towards strangers. It is not fair when all people equally want to be happy and do not want to experience suffering. Contemplating this again and again becomes a good basis for us to feel real love and compassion for others. A good meditation technique is to contemplate and think about this presentation on equanimity, first with reasoning and then focus.

Having presented the viewpoint of other sentient beings, the text then explains how to meditate on this. Initially we meditate on the first point by contemplating why everyone equally wants happiness and does not wish to experience any kind of suffering. It follows that holding some people close and having attachment towards them, and holding others distant and having aversion to them is not reasonable. This contemplation is the method or technique to overcoming attachment to some and aversion to others. Meditating on equanimity overcomes attachment and aversion within us.

The next point the teaching presents is our own viewpoint. 'If I have continuously been reborn since beginningless time, then all beings have been my friends hundreds of times, some I am attached to, and others whom I am hostile towards'. This is an explanation given in one of the texts by an Indian master called *The Meditative States*. The logical reasoning here is that if we accept that we have former lives, that we have all have had continuous and numberless forms of lives and that we are a mere continuation from the past, then all beings at one time or another would have been close to us. Yet some who we considered close now may have been distant in the past, or even may have been our enemy. So to feel close to some people now and then feeling aversion or hostile to others would be irrational. This is how someone who believes in previous lifetimes would meditate.

We contemplate how all beings have been equally kind to us, and yet at other times they might be hostile to us; all of them are equal in that way. Contemplating in this way overcomes the attachment we feel to some, the indifference we feel to others, and feeling hostile to our enemies. We have attachment to those who we consider close because they have been done favours for us, they have been nice to us. So we develop a sense of feeling close to them and we develop attachment towards them. We categorise people as

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strangers, because they neither benefit nor harm us. We call people our enemies because we think they have been hostile towards us and have harmed us. Based on the attitudes, we have developed attachment, indifference or aversion.

However, when we consider that all people are equal – they all want to be happy and all want to avoid suffering - then we realise that there is no need to favour some and reject others; we are all equal. The text further quotes a discourse from the Buddha himself (which is called a sutra) ‘I killed all of you, and you have slashed and dismembered me. All of us have been mutual enemies and killed one another, so how could you be attached to some’. There have been many lifetimes in the past where we have killed others, and others have also killed us. For those people who we consider close right now, and have strong desire or attachment towards, when we consider that in former lifetimes we have killed them and they have killed us, how can we still have a strong attachment or desire towards them?

Earlier parts of the text talk about the fault of uncertainty, the shortcoming of uncertainty. So think about how all friends and enemies can quickly change, and how there is no certainty. Thinking in this way could stop hostility and attachment.

Another great master, the seventh Dalai Lama Gyalwa Kelsang Gyatso, said that considering someone as a friend or enemy is merely dependent on our attitude, which can change by applying an exaggeration to words we hear about them. Our attitude can change immediately. Someone who we think is our closest friend and companion one day, can be our worst enemy the next. So by considering this fact, we should overcome the five feelings of strong attachment to some people, and strong aversion towards others. This is an essential point.

The great Indian master Shantideva has also mentioned that leaving aside past lives, even in this life our category of friends or enemy or strangers can change from any moment. The term ‘changing from moment’ refers to when people are considered as an enemy one moment, at the next moment they can turn into a great friend. And someone considered our great friend or companion one moment could turn out to be our greatest enemy the next.

We have all experienced this. When we look back, these statements by the great master Shantideva have been very true for us. We can all recall a time when we considered certain close friends in the past that we might have lost contact with. Or even worse, consider people that we don’t associate with as enemies. People we might not get along with in the past may have this time round also become friends with us. So when we consider our own life, these words can be an impetus for us to be not to be overly concerned about categories of what we called being close to people who we have strong attachment towards, and others we consider as people we don’t associate with and keep distant.

The meditation of developing an unbiased attitude towards others, developing equanimity towards others, is really useful in our life. As we become familiar with this reality then we in turn will not be strongly affected when things do change naturally. For example, when a close companion for one reason or another starts to move away from us, then the agony of great loss will be lessened. We will not have that strong emotional sadness within ourselves because of the familiarity of accepting that things change in this way. The essential point emphasised here is even a close friend can

turn out to be an enemy, and even an enemy can turn out to be a friend. This is an essential point to consider.

As the great master Shantideva mentioned in his work, it is possible that a mere mention of someone’s name would have caused us fear at one time, but then later it turns out that we don’t even want to be separated from them. The points emphasised here are sound instructions. Our obsession with people we consider close friends or companions, and having excessive attachment towards them, leads to a lot of restlessness, a lot of unsettlement because of our strong attachment towards them, while having aversion towards others. This causes us agitation and to feel unrestful. It is because we have either exaggerated attachment or exaggerated aversion towards some and feeling indifferent towards others, that we experience constant inner turmoil. If we can sincerely develop an attitude of developing equanimity towards all, then this can really bring a real sense of balance within ourselves. This can be a real benefit for us because we can develop a positive and compassionate attitude. Initially we may not see the point of this, but if we consider it, we can find that it is practical and useful in our life to develop this attitude.

Before we conclude for the evening, re-adjust our posture so we are comfortable and relaxed. Keep our mind focussed on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni’s mantra, and just keep our mind focussed for a few minutes.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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