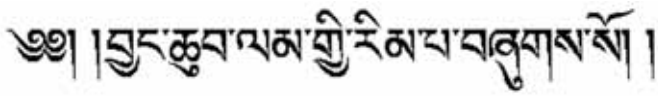


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## The Condensed Lam Rim



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. For that purpose, we will adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture.

Likewise we need to ensure that our state of mind is an appropriate one: that we have a clear, bright and, most importantly, virtuous state of mind.

Indeed, it is important for us to ensure that we always cultivate a virtuous state of mind at every moment. At the same time, we need to work at eliminating non-virtuous or negative states of mind. It would be really meaningful if we could try to make this an essential part of our daily life.

As beginners or ordinary beings, we need to engage in this practice; we need to consider the importance of cultivating a virtuous state of mind and trying eliminate negative states of mind. This is what the teachings mean when they explain how we need to adopt virtue and discard non-virtue; thus we need to understand which thoughts we need to adopt and which ones we need to discard.

Why do we need to try and acquire a virtuous state of mind at every moment, and try to prevent our mind being in a negative state? How is that relevant to one's well-being? If we were to really think about it and do a self-analysis, we would clearly notice that the moment a negative state of mind arises, it makes us feel disturbed and uncomfortable. Our sense of inner well-being, calm and peace is shattered. When a negative state of mind arises, it is not a comfortable feeling; we don't feel at ease. Whereas when our state of mind is virtuous and positive, that naturally brings about a general sense of inner well-being and ease. We need to contemplate these thoughts and take them into careful consideration so that we can recognise the need for us to adopt the practice.

As mentioned earlier, the practice of the Dharma is really about ensuring one's state of mind is virtuous and positive; if one notices that one's state of mind is negative or disturbed, one must try to overcome it. The need to engage in this practice is demonstrated through practical examples from one's life. In relation to the disturbing effect of negative states of mind, we can use the example of how a negative state of mind such as anger affects our relationship with a dear one, a close companion, or someone we live with. As soon as anger arises, how does it affect us? How does it affect our relationship with the other? The negative affect of anger when it arises in relation to someone close to us is obvious; it is not something obscure or subtle. It immediately brings

unease between you and the other, and your relationship is affected.

On the other hand, when one has a virtuous state of mind, such as compassion, and a feeling of genuine concern for the other, our behaviour, gestures and so forth become pleasant and soothing and our relationship with them feels comfortable and harmonious. That is the outcome of the positive, virtuous state of mind of compassion – it brings about a positive effect. As mentioned earlier, clearly these are not obscure or difficult points to understand.

Having understood this, we need to put it into practice. It is not sufficient to merely recognise these points as valid. We need to put them into practice by further cultivating the positive, virtuous states of mind, and discarding the negative states of mind. When the teachings explain that practice involves acquiring virtue and discarding non-virtue, this means that we need to further cultivate positive states of mind and discard negative states of mind. Thus, from contemplating our own life experiences, we need to understand this to be a fact, and engage in the daily practice of cultivating a positive state of mind. However we need to engage in the practice without expectations for a quick result. Rather one needs to have a realistic approach, understanding that true and lasting effects come about gradually. To expect an immediate transformation would be unrealistic. That is when we set ourselves up to be disappointed and give up on the practice. It should be a gradual process: day by day, week by week, month by month and year by year, we begin to slowly transform our attitude; our whole way of life will definitely transform in a positive way.

This is the approach adhered to by students who have engaged in practice over the years and have confided in me that, after several years, they began to really notice some transformation. That is a sign of positive, steady progress, rather than an immediate transformation, which some assume should be the result of starting practice. It is essential that we regard personal transformation in terms of progress taking place over many years, based on daily practice. If we engage in daily practice, progress will come, slowly but steadily. That is the best approach.

We must never give up on our practice. On a daily basis, we need to remind ourselves of the value of Dharma practice, and be mindful of the practice of adopting virtue and discarding negativity. Then, as transformation takes place, the nature of our very being will become positive. This will bring about real benefit, not only for oneself but for those around us. Through our relationships and our participation in society, we will positively affect others. We all have to live with others. Our very nature as a human being means we depend upon others. When real transformation takes place within us, we will relate to others in a more positive way. This in turn will have a positive effect upon others in society. When we imagine such practitioners in a society, their presence is bound to bring about natural harmony and a peaceful feeling within that group of people. As individuals, our daily practice is really the best contribution we can make to a

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peaceful society. That is a far-sighted goal that we need to keep in mind.

In reality, practice involves an internal transformation, or development of one's mind. The practice that contributes to well-being, peace and harmony is not something external; rather it's something that has to be initiated within one's own mind. When we understand that virtue is that which contributes to our own and others' well-being, we are left with no alternative than to cultivate virtue. Likewise, when we recognise negative states of mind as that which causes disharmony and problems for oneself and others, we are again left with no choice but to discard them. We need to consider the negative attitudes within one's mind as an internal enemy, which needs to be discarded at all costs. On the other hand, we should consider virtuous thoughts and a positive state of mind as our best companion, our most valuable asset. One should try to always cultivate virtue, maintain whatever virtue one has cultivated, and further develop it. This should be the way we approach our practice. All religions would unanimously agree that this is the very essence of practice: to discard negativity and adopt a positive state of mind or virtue.

How do we cultivate virtuous states of mind? The answer is by acquainting ourselves with virtue. The way to adopt virtuous states of mind is to become familiar with virtue by contemplating their qualities again and again. We need to think about the advantages and become familiar with virtuous or positive states of mind. On the other hand, we need to view negative, non-virtuous states of mind as our inner enemies and avoid acquainting ourselves with them by keeping a distance. In other words, we need to adopt a practice that is opposite of what we are doing now. At the moment, we are more familiar with non-virtuous states of mind, and not too familiar with virtuous ones. We need to adopt habits that are opposite to our present ones by voluntarily acquainting ourselves with virtue and lessening our familiarity with non-virtue. This is where the relevance of meditation comes in. Meditation is none other than the practice of familiarising ourselves with virtue and lessening our familiarity with non-virtuous, negative states of mind. That is why meditation practice is an essential part of one's life.

We can now take some time to adopt the meditation technique. First, we readjust our physical posture to be upright and comfortable. Then, in order to distance ourselves from non-virtuous states of mind, we need to completely withdraw from all forms of distraction and bring the entire focus of our attention completely within.

Having brought our focus within; we place it upon the breath, which is the meditation object. This means having our entire focus on the breath, and not being concerned about any other objects or thoughts. Thus, for the next few minutes place your focus entirely on the breath. *(Pause for meditation)*

That should be sufficient meditation for now. Just as we have attempted in our short session now, it would be good to try to adopt this meditation practice in one's daily life, keeping in mind the purpose that I mentioned earlier. We need to think about those points and take the

initiative of applying meditation practice in one's daily life.

It would be good to go through a few lines from the text unless there are some questions. If you have any questions you may raise your hand.

*Question:* I seem to have no control over the negative mind. Before I realise it, I have already been affected by negative states of mind. So how can I stop the negative mind from arising?

*Answer:* Indeed, as beginners, we cannot expect to be able to immediately detect and overcome a negative state of mind. That would be unrealistic. As beginners, especially, we should not expect that of ourselves. Rather, the point we mentioned just now is to be aware of a negative state of mind for what it is. Even if initially you are not able to recognise it the moment it arises, if you reflect on it afterwards, you can understand that it was a negative state of mind; you can see that the ill-effects were there. Later, at a time when the negative state of mind is not present, one can contemplate it. Again and again, one can contemplate its disadvantages and try to combat it. The teachings mention that as beginners we may not be able to completely overcome it at once, but the positive effect of such contemplation would be that when the negative thought does arise next time, it might not be as intense and its duration will be shorter. That itself is a great positive effect.

In fact, it is because negative states of mind arise that we take the initiative to try to adopt an appropriate antidote. If a negative thought didn't arise, we wouldn't have to think about applying an antidote. When a negative thought arises, at that moment, we should try to be aware of it and apply the most effective antidote for overcoming it. If there were no negative states of mind arising, or we didn't feel their effects, there would be no incentive for us to work on applying the antidotes.

The approach of the great masters of the past, the lineage of practitioners known as the Kadampas, was to always be wary and think, "I am going to be vigilant and lie in wait for the enemy – the negative state of mind – to arise. When this negative mind is intense, I will apply even more strongly the measures to overcome it. If it relaxes a little, I'll also relax." That is the approach we need to take with the negative states of mind.

There is a verse in *The Eight Verses of Mind Training* by the great Kadampa master, Geshe Langri Tangpa, which says: "by recognising that the disturbing attitudes harm myself and others, I will *immediately* overcome the negative state of mind as soon as it arises". The advice he has given is that, if one were to recognise the negative states of mind as harmful to oneself and others, then one would take the initiative and try to overcome them as soon as they arise.

Furthermore, as the great Indian master Vasubandhu mentioned in one of his works, delusions will definitely arise easily for us as beginners because of three factors. First, we have not abandoned or overcome the delusions; this means the seed and imprint of the delusions are still in our mental continuum. The second factor is being in close proximity to the objects that cause delusions to arise

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– objects of attachment and so forth. The third factor is that when we are in close proximity to an object that causes the delusion to arise, then the state of mind called improper attention begins to exaggerate the qualities of the object; thus the delusions such as attachment and anger arise. So, every delusion arises because of these three conditions being present.

*Question:* It seems that a negative state of mind can be a warning sign to make us cautious of a potentially harmful person, such as in a relationship with someone. So, could a negative state of mind be useful under some circumstances?

*Answer:* Whenever a warning sign arises to be wary and cautious, as in the example you gave of a relationship, that caution and wariness is not considered a negative state of mind in Buddhism. Rather it is considered to be a discriminating wisdom. Actually wisdom is a positive thing. If you use your wisdom in detecting whether there is something wrong with your relationship, that is not a negative mind. Rather it is trying to be aware of what is factual, what is reality.

You might argue that anger could be useful too, because it makes you keep distance from others. (*Geshe-la laughs*) If you didn't want to be with the other, then anger might help you! (*Laughter*)

Another great Indian master called Aryadeva mentioned in one of his works that anger becomes a cause to make your relationship with others more distant, whereas attachment seemingly makes your relationship with others closer. Therefore, as I share with you regularly, we may be in a paradoxical relationship with another where, when there is attachment, we start to feel close to the other. When that attachment wanes and is replaced with anger, one starts to feel distant. Thus the relationship is in a constant state of flux, sometimes feeling close, sometimes distant.

What the great Indian master Aryadeva is pointing out is that because attachment can cause us to feel closer to the other, resulting in some sort of enjoyment or pleasure, it is much harder for us to see the faults of attachment. Whereas the very moment anger arises, it serves as a condition to make you feel distant from the other and feel hostility towards them. It is much easier to see the negative consequences or ill-effects of anger.

*Question:* I like to perform well in my job, however I notice that it is my attachment to my image that drives me to do well. What other effective ways can there be to do a good job, but without attachment to the outcome?

*Answer:* Of course, according to the Mahayana point of view, the best way to ensure that one does a good job without being attached to a personal outcome is to have a genuinely good motivation to begin with. That good motivation is one that has as its primary concern for the well-being of others, rather than just one's own success or how well others would regard one if the job went well.

When the focus is on 'me' all the time, although initially it may seem as a motivator and the impetus to do the work, even if one were to gain some success, one might suffer intensely were there is any hint of failure, because one has engaged in the work with the focus on doing well for

oneself. There are those who may be very successful in their business or work, but when they fall or lose their status, it brings much misery and pain. That pain and misery comes from having a primary motivation of achieving success for oneself alone, one's own personal gain; this causes one to experience pain when there is a downfall.

Whereas if one's primary motivation is to help others, one will go about doing one's best but without too much expectation, realising that it is for others. If it works, fine. If it doesn't work, one has tried one's best. With that kind of attitude we will not have so much ego tied up with the outcome.

One may have the concern, "What about me? Don't I have to consider myself here?". Here we need to understand that, as explained in the teachings, when one's primary concern is for the well-being of others, one's own needs will be fulfilled as a by-product. In fact, one's needs will be fulfilled more firmly, with more stability. So when you give yourself whole-heartedly to the welfare of others, your own welfare will naturally or spontaneously be fulfilled in a more firm and stable way than the superficial sense of well-being you would experience from focusing on your own needs only.

As the teachings emphasise again and again, in whatever we do, we need to have the attitude, "May it be of benefit for the well-being of other sentient beings". The wish to benefit other beings is really precious because it serves to fulfil all aims.

I will give a mundane example that I have shared in the past to point out the obvious distinction between a self-centred attitude and an attitude concerned with the welfare of others. The example is the head of a household, such as a father with a few children. When he engages in work, he has the deep-seated attitude: "May my earnings, my work and the energy I put out now become a cause for my family to become strong and the well-being of my family to be good". Thus the dad's energy, the time he spent at work, his earnings and so forth will later benefit the family as a whole. His work actually helps to fulfil that wish. Because of his motivation in the beginning, he is working towards the end of strengthening the family as a whole.

On the other hand, he may have motivation from the beginning that, "I am going to try to work hard and earn a lot of money and maybe find a nice, young girlfriend". (*Lots of laughter*) When that is the actual motivation deep inside (*Geshe-la laughs*), he is not working for the well-being of his family but for his own interest, maybe finding a young girlfriend and having a good time with her! Then later he faces the prospect that even if he did make quite a bit of money, it is all gone. It didn't really help to maintain his family.

With this example, the outcome is that although the dad would have had a motivation for his own personal gain and enjoyment, the end result is that the money is wasted on pursuing pleasure. When his wife finds out, there will be disharmony, and the family breaks up. Ultimately, the dad may end up having much regret and feel uncomfortable and in distress. Such an obvious situation may occur again and again causing so much ill-will, so much misery and unease. Even with the prospect of

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finding a young girlfriend (*Geshe-la laughs*), she might have only become his girlfriend because of the wealth he had accumulated. Once that gets spent, the girlfriend might say “bye-bye” and leave. (*Laughter*) Therefore the father is left without a family, without his wife and without a girlfriend. It’s all lost.

Whereas, as mentioned earlier, if the underlying motivation is concern for others – in this example, the concern is for one’s own family – while some personal enjoyment and so forth might still be there, the main motivation extends beyond just one person. The motivation is concern of others, even though it is only one’s family. That is a good example where one’s efforts work out for the benefit of the whole. With that in mind, whenever we work, whatever we engage in, if we can try to secure an underlying motivation: “May whatever I do be of benefit, be of service to others”, that really will ultimately contribute to one’s own well-being.

To summarise the practice, as His Holiness the Dalai Lama mentions all the time, at best we need to be of service, of benefit to others. But if that’s not possible, at the very least, we must try not to harm them. Actually His Holiness the Dalai Lama says that we as Tibetans have this saying on our tongue all the time: “If I can’t help others, at least I’ll not hurt them”. Whether all Tibetans practice that or not, is another question! Nevertheless His Holiness the Dalai Lama says that we as Tibetans can boast of that as our motto. Indeed, to live by this motto, to lead one’s life following that motto, would indeed be a really worthwhile, meaningful way to live.

Maybe we can conclude here for the evening.

Before we conclude, we can again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time the object of focus is the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni’s mantra. As we hear the sound of the mantra being recited, we try to place our focus entirely on the mantra. As the mantra recitation subsides, we try to maintain our focus just for a few moments. In this way, it becomes a good practice for developing single-pointed concentration.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Transcribed by Peter Boothby  
Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine  
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe  
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