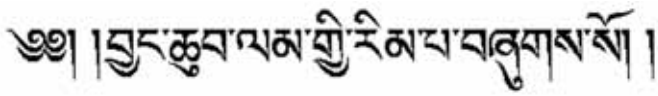


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## The Condensed Lam Rim



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Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As usual we can spend some time in meditation. To be able to meditate we need to sit in a comfortable and relaxed physical posture. Along with that comfortable and relaxed physical posture it is essential that we also try to adopt a calm and relaxed state of mind.

Meditation is a technique that allows one to familiarise oneself with a positive state of mind, which is what initiates what we call good conduct or good behaviour. That is something that meditation relates to.

So, to familiarise our mind with a positive way of thinking, or positive attitudes in relation to our thoughts, will initiate positive physical behaviour. That is the relationship between improving our state of mind to be in a positive way of thinking or a positive outlook in life. Our physical actions and our whole behaviour will naturally be in line with that. Positive good behaviour or good conduct comes with familiarity. The more we become more familiar with a positive way of thinking, the more it will naturally help to induce positive behaviour.

When we consider the reason or the need to familiarise one's mind and one's physical behaviour in a positive way we will see that this is because it will have a direct effect upon us as individuals. We all have a natural concern for our own well-being, what we call 'an individual person' or 'I'. We all have that personal identity that we call 'myself' or 'I'. We all possess that. It is because we have a personal identity that we have a concern for the well-being of that personal identity. That being the case, we can then go further into seeing the relationship between the personal 'I', one's mind and one's physical behaviour.

You could ask yourself the question, 'Does a positive state of mind and positive behaviour contribute to my well-being or not?' Then furthermore, 'When I have a negative way of thinking as well as poor behaviour and conduct, both on a physical and verbal level, does that have a detrimental effect and harm me, or not?'

When we analyse in this way it becomes clear that a positive way of thinking as well as good behaviour on a physical level, do contribute to our well-being as an individual. It definitely has a good effect. As well as having a positive effect on oneself, it contributes to one's well-being and there's benefit for one. Whereas when we have negative attitude or a negative state of mind and bad behaviour, it affects us in a negative way. So, the main point here is that when you can see that relationship between your state of mind and your behaviour as an individual, then you definitely need to try, if it is possible, to adopt a positive way of thinking and good

behaviour that will contribute to your well-being. That is something it is worthwhile for us to consider.

So, it becomes clear to us that a positive way of thinking, generating positive thoughts and good behaviour on a physical and verbal level, actually contribute to our well-being and benefits us. Once we recognise that clearly through our analysis then we will resolve that we definitely must pay attention to our thoughts and try to adopt a positive way of thinking and have good thoughts in our mind. We should also initiate good behaviour on a physical level. We definitely need to make an attempt to do that. That is something we need to take as a personal responsibility.

Once we begin to recognise the relationship between a positive state of mind and good behaviour and our personal well-being, we might then develop the initiative to adopt a positive way of thinking and good behaviour. However the question may arise, 'Is it possible for me to adopt a positive way of thinking because I have already developed many bad habits and I can't overcome my bad habits? My mind and my conduct is already formed with bad habits and the bad habits have already taken effect and I may not be able to change that.' Some may have that feeling.

The younger generation, of course, are at a stage where there has not been much time to form bad habits. So it is possible to adopt a more positive approach when you are quite young. That is why I encourage young people to be mindful and careful not to take up bad habits that will be hard to overcome later. Because one is still in the process of shaping one's life it is important for one to try not to give in to bad habits, and to try to familiarise oneself with good habits. That then becomes part of one's life and way of living.

Even for the older generation, however, if that question does arise we need to understand that it is definitely possible to change our mind. The negative states of mind or negative habits have formed because of a long familiarisation, as we have allowed ourselves to be influenced in that way. But if we were to resolve to overcome whatever bad habits we have, that is something that we can definitely achieve. It is possible for us to change and transform.

The way that we can resolve that it is possible to go through a transformation and have a positive way of living with positive thoughts and behaviour is at the level of the mind. It is part of the nature of one's mind that it is possible to familiarise oneself with a positive way of thinking. It is the nature of the mind that it has the potential to adopt whatever it familiarises itself with. That means if we make our mind familiar with positive attitudes, it has the potential to adopt that. That is something we need to understand.

Thus it is good for us to start paying attention and trying to analyse how we become familiar with negative behaviours and negative conduct and, on the contrary, how we become familiar with positive ways of thinking. When we analyse how we become familiar with negative ways of thinking, we find negative attitudes and conduct and so forth arise when we allow ourselves to follow the

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distractions. These distractions become habituated into a negative way of thinking and poor behaviour.

To be more precise, our situation now is that we are under the influence of our mind and the mind itself is under the influence of the delusions such as anger, desire, pride and jealousy. Our mind gets persuaded by the distractions to follow the negative emotions of anger, attachment or desire, pride and jealousy and so forth. So, in this way, the distractions themselves become a way or mode for us to adopt that negative state of mind, which then in turn disturbs us. So that is how it actually works.

When the mind is influenced by the distractions it causes the negative state of mind to arise. That is how we are affected by the delusions. I am explaining all of this in a systematic way so that it is easy to understand. It is not that complex. The process itself is that when we are influenced by the distractions the mind gets disturbed and we experienced discomfort.

When we don't have control over our mind and thoughts and we allow our mind and thoughts to follow any form of distraction that may arise (the distractions may, of course, present themselves in different ways) then we are completely under the dominance of our mind which in turn is under the dominance of the delusions, and that is what causes our mind to become disturbed. We are then in a troubled state and we have all the emotional ill-effects of that. So, this is something that we need to recognise.

If we consider adopting the meditation technique the question may arise, 'How does the meditation technique help us to overcome the situation where the mind is troubled and influenced by the delusions?' The answer is, 'The meditation technique involves a commitment not to allow our mind to follow the distractions and to completely withdraw from all forms of distraction and to keep its focus entirely on the chosen object of meditation'.

In this process we intentionally withdraw from all forms of distraction and place our focus on a particular object. Then, because of that process of not allowing our mind to be influenced and controlled by distractions, we are taking control of the mind and placing its entire focus and attention on a particular object. From that process we then get the immediate benefit of a calm and tranquil mind. Along with the mind becoming more tranquil and calm, it also becomes clearer, and brighter; in that way the real potential and qualities of the mind begin to develop. As a result, we experience a genuine sense of calmness and well-being within us. This is the systematic way the meditation technique helps us to completely counteract a disturbed state of mind. That brings about the positive result of a calm mind.

When we understand the meditation technique in its fullest, the systematic way in which it actually works, then we begin to see the real benefit of the practice of meditation. That understanding comes from our own analysis. As we adopt the meditation practice and we experience the benefits, then that it is a self-confirmation from our own experience that the meditation technique actually works; it really does benefit us. If we find out the validity of meditation through our analysis and experience, it becomes very stable and firm. Then the

resolve to engage in the practice of meditation becomes a personal choice from our own confirmation, and not just because someone else claims it to be good. In that way it becomes very stable.

This technique also presents us with ways of learning about many other practical things in life. It gives us a good way of reasoning to find out many other things in life.

So we should resolve to analyse the benefits of meditation and then, after having analysed and found some reason for it to be true or beneficial, adopt it. That is a proper way to adopt the practice.

As I regularly emphasise, it is important that we develop some sort of inner wisdom to be able to make decisions in our life. This inner wisdom comes from a thorough analysis or investigation of what is worth adopting and what needs to be discarded. When we do a thorough analysis and the decisions that we make are based upon our analysis, then they are a profound and good decisions based upon sound intelligence and wisdom. This becomes a good measure and a good way to lead our life. Whether it's in spiritual matters or worldly concerns, we are faced with having to make many decisions in our life. So it is worthwhile that we develop the tools for making good decisions.

Another practical and important reason for developing one's own inner wisdom to make the right decisions in one's life is to prevent one falling victim to the influence of others. Others may claim to be friends but may influence us in a negative way. If we have developed some clear wisdom and intelligence then we are not at risk of being influenced by others in a negative way.

This reminds me that just a few days ago I met some old friend's who conveyed to me that their children are growing up and that they are quite good children. They are very happy with the general conduct and behaviour of their children. But the one worry they have, is their concern that when they go out with other kids they might be influenced in a negative way. It seems to be the priority and concern of parents that their children will be influenced in a negative way. That is a genuine concern because there are cases where children are misled and influenced in a negative way and their behaviour can be tainted. That is why I try to advise young people, whenever I can, to develop the inner wisdom where they can make the right choices. When there are outside influences they need to make their own decisions and not to follow. It becomes a personal choice. So this is something essential. If children can, from their side, take the initiative to make the right decision then there will be less worry for the parents as well.

Even though it may not be entirely in my place to give advice to youngsters when they have their own parents, nevertheless when it is appropriate I like to take the initiative to share my concerns and advice. Some parents later on make comments that, 'Oh, my children have developed a quite clear conscience and are able to understand and make good decisions, so we are not worried about this particular child'. That is a good sign.

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To summarise, the point emphasised earlier is that the main purpose of meditation is as a technique to familiarise one's mind with positive thoughts and attitudes and this can create positive patterns for our physical behaviour and pleasant-meaningful speech. We need to resolve upon this as being the main purpose of meditation and that it is worthwhile for us to spend some time and energy in adopting and familiarising ourselves with this technique. As we can clearly see if we reason with ourselves, if one has a negative behaviour and is influenced by bad habits then it actually harms us. There is no real benefit for us. Furthermore it also harms others. So if there is no benefit for us or others, isn't it worthwhile that we try to adopt the technique to overcome that negative behaviour. Thus we need to take the initiative to change our negative way of thinking, poor behaviour and try to adopt a positive way of thinking and positive behaviour. This then has a benefit for oneself and others.

We will now take some time to engage in a meditation practice. We adjust our physical posture to be upright and comfortable and then try to adopt a positive attitude and motivation; a motivation that is based upon a sense of genuine love and compassion for others. We develop a strong determination that, 'At the very best, may all my positive thoughts and actions in my practice of meditation become a means to benefit others; at the very least, may it become a cause for me not to hurt or harm others in any way'. This combines the essential purpose of our lives.

When we cultivate this positive motivation in our mind, it is called a 'virtuous state of mind'. Within that positive and virtuous state of mind we now bring our whole focus and attention inwards. This means we withdraw from all forms of distraction, any thoughts that relate to external or internal distractions. We just bring our entire focus inwards within us and then place it upon our breath which is the object we will focus on now. So, for the next few minutes, we place our full attention and focus just on the breath itself, while you breathe in and out naturally. *(Pause for meditation)*

Since we don't have too much time left for our session, we might address a few questions if you have any.

*Question:* Geshe-la, last week in your teaching, you mentioned how being too attached to loved ones can be a distraction to one's practice. I was wondering if the opposite would be true, that if we are too attached to one's practice could that become a cause to neglect one's loved ones? In other words could one's practice become an extreme?

*Answer:* If it is a genuine practice, then there's no such thing as an extreme practice. However what I emphasise regularly is that one needs to be very certain and careful about one's ambition and so forth. If one is not in a proper state of mind or motivation then it may be a case that one might neglect family members. I always remind people that engaging in one's practice or interest in Buddhism should, in itself, be a way to further develop a genuine concern for one's family members or partners rather than neglecting them. If one were to be entirely

obsessed with one's practice and actually neglect the welfare of one's family members or partner, then in fact one may end up with nothing. On one hand, you may lose the bond with your family members and on the other hand you may not gain the result of your practice either; so one is left with no substantial results.

As I have emphasised previously, one needs to begin to develop love and compassion with those who are close to one. This really has a very sound meaning. The practical message is that if one is not able to develop a genuine sense of love and compassion for those who are closest and dearest then it is not really possible to assume that one can develop love and compassion towards others in an extensive way. So, one need to first develop love and compassion towards those who are close to one.

There is also a great purpose and meaning when the Buddha mentioned that liberation is possible even for a householder. There's definitely a great meaning in that.

Initially one may get a boost of energy and assume that one needs to leave behind everything, all one's worldly affairs, and go somewhere to practice by oneself. I usually advise those who mention that, or have any hint of that, 'Don't rush, take it easy', because the practice needs to be done on a firm foundation. I usually advise them, 'Don't make hasty decisions'.

It is not just people who are inclined to the spiritual path who may have those feelings. Even business people may think this way. As I have mentioned before, someone who was in a very successful business and quite influential in their work confessed to me that they would rather go to a place where there were no telephones, no computers, and no business meetings. They would like to be in a completely quiet and isolated place and have no concerns at all; that might really be a desirable way of living. But without the correct understanding of the Dharma and a firm foundation, changing one's external environment alone will not change anything inside.

*Question:* I still wonder if one's practice could harm one's family members?

*Answer:* Of course if one's conduct is actually harming others then, as the Buddha said, 'Harming others is non-virtue and is not Dharma'. If we pay heed to the Buddha's advice we find that he had gave very practical advice that is suitable to one's level. Even that comment 'harming others is not a virtue' carries a lot of weight in itself.

When the Buddha said that, 'Liberation is possible even for a householder', it shows that even though one may be living in a household with family and so forth, if one develops non-attachment and renunciation, then, because of that mental state, liberation is possible in that situation.

The Buddha gave that response directly to a king who sought advice from the Buddha. The king had said 'It seems quite difficult for me to completely leave my kingly duties and live in solitude. I am not able to do that, but I do have great admiration for the Mahayana path and I also cannot give up the teachings. So what advice can you give so I can try to combine them? Is there any method for me?'

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The Buddha advised the king, 'You can cultivate the bodhicitta attitude and aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all beings. When you develop that attitude and state of mind you will not give up the Mahayana teachings. Hence you don't need to give up your kingly duties.'

When the king, as a ruler, has developed the bodhicitta attitude then his subjects and the people who are under the rule of the king will all naturally receive great benefits as well. We can take that example and apply it on a small scale, such as the family. When one of the main family members, for example the father, actually practices according to the bodhisattva's attitude then the rest of the family will definitely benefit from that.

*Question:* I really appreciate your teachings and advice, however in certain situations I find that anger arises uncontrollably, erupting like an explosion. How can I deal with that?

*Answer:* There are, of course, various techniques to overcome anger. However at the initial level, where anger is very intense and arises very strongly, meditation on compassion and patience may not work right away. Thus the most effective technique is just focusing on your breath. Take some time to focus on your breath, try not to think of anything else, try to forget the object or situation that makes you angry. If you keep your entire focus on your breath it might then appease the mind.

It is explained that when anger is very intense, like a 'fireball', trying to meditate on compassion and patience will just not work. Even if others advise you to do that, it will not work at that point. But if, instead, one focuses on one's breath and one sincerely does that practice the mind will naturally calm down a bit. Then, as the mind calms down, one can remind oneself of all the other techniques that one may have become familiar with. One may then feel great gratitude to the practice of just focusing on one's breath and one may think, 'Thank goodness I am able to focus on the breath to protect me from such a disastrous situation'.

Before we conclude for the evening we can spend a few more minutes in meditation. This time our object of focus will be the recitation of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As you hear the sound of the mantra, try to place your entire focus on the sound itself and when the recitation subsides try to maintain your focus on the residue of the sound for a few moments. In that way that will be a complete meditation practice.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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Edited Version*

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