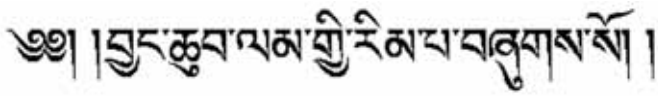

The Condensed Lam Rim



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As usual we can spend some time for meditation, so we adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture. We can also set a good motivation for doing the meditation practice. Whatever we do always starts with a motivation or an intention. So it is good from the outset to make sure that we have a good motivation before we start to do anything. It is also the same for meditation.

A good motivation for our meditation practice would be, for example, to think that the purpose for doing this practice is so that we can benefit and help other sentient beings. Generating this type of motivation brings us out of our self-centeredness. Normally, whatever activity we do is with the intention for our own well-being. Naturally this is based on self-centredness, with a self-centred motivation that benefits only us. But the moment we think about other sentient beings, we expand our mind. Already that is incredible.

When we train our mind to intentionally develop such a noble intention or motivation, then whatever we do, such as the practice of meditation, will become a cause to benefit others and to bring happiness to others, by the virtue of that motivation. When our mind gets acquainted with that intention, then it starts to become part of our everyday life. This increases the sense of our compassion and genuine concern for others. When we develop that noble intention, it increases our sense of genuine love and concern for others.

We develop compassion for others whenever we associate with them in the outside world. When we see someone who is deprived of happiness and joy, then we will naturally want to help them and bring some joy and happiness to their lives. And when we see that others are experiencing real suffering and discomfort, then we will naturally want to relieve them of their suffering. Even for beings who seem to be happy and may not be experiencing any suffering, we will still have a neutral mental state of not wishing to harm them. With that sort of mind, whenever we associate and go out in the world, when we adopt that in our everyday life, then because of the virtue of our being and our interaction with others in a positive way, others will appreciate and trust us. Having a positive motivation is worthwhile because we all want others to trust us. The best way to be liked and trusted by others is to cultivate a genuine sense of concern and well-being for them, wishing them to be well. When that compassion develops in our mind and is carried through to our everyday actions, people will naturally appreciate and trust us.

We need to remember that we have to associate with others in the world. That is part of our existence; we have

to deal with them. Since we cannot avoid dealing with others, it is worthwhile to learn how to deal with them in a positive way. The best way to associate with others is to engage in attitudes and behaviours that are appreciated by them. That is the best way to be accepted and trusted by others. With a compassionate attitude in our mind as a primary focus, "I will conduct myself so that it will be of a benefit and service to others, and at the very least not to hurt others," then anything we do will be an honest engagement. Whether it's a work environment or dealing with others in whatever way, there will be a true sense of honesty. Regardless of our status, whether we are a CEO in a big company or working as a public servant; whatever status we may have, it is our positive attitude that will ensure that others appreciate us.

So it doesn't really matter if we are famous or not, we can be genuinely content and happy in what we are doing because we have good friends around us, which contributes to our own well-being. Come to think of it, if we can gain one extra person as a friend that will be to our benefit. While having even one extra person who doesn't like us would be uncomfortable for us. Thus we need to try to adopt ways and manners so that even people we normally may consider as enemies, people who are not normally close to us, can be turned around and start to appreciate us. Even people that don't like us initially can turn around and start to appreciate us if we, from our side, make sure that we develop a good attitude. Leading back to the main point earlier, having a good attitude in our mind is dependent on having a good motivation.

This reminds me of incidents from my own life that I have shared with you in the past, when even so-called enemies have turned out to become very good friends. I can attest to that from my own experience in life.

Even our enemies or people we don't get along with will appreciate our good gestures. It is not as if we have sworn enemies that we are going out to try to vanquish. It is not as if we are like soldiers who are sent to war, where we have no choice but to destroy our enemies. That is not the case. We are not in that situation. In that case, of course, soldiers would not have any choice. It would basically be their duty to go out and kill. The main point here is that for those who are sent out to war, the way to vanquish and overcome enemies is by destroying them. They have to carry their guns and their weapons to overcome their enemies.

But that is not the case for us. The best way for us to subdue our enemies is by befriending them, by turning our enemies into friends. That is the best way to overcome our enemies. The way to turn our enemies into our friends is by showing genuinely kind gestures, and having good attitudes towards them. This goes to show how positive actions depend on our attitudes. When we have a positive attitude, then a seemingly difficult task can definitely be achieved with a positive attitude. Therefore we need to be mindful of what kind of attitudes we adopt. The teachings explain that there are certain things that we need to adopt and certain things that we need to discard. The essential instruction given in

the teachings is that we need to adopt positive things and discard negative things from our life.

It is not as if the teachings are referring to specific individuals who have been given this task of adopting positive things. They actually relate to us. We need to investigate within ourselves to identify the positive attitudes within us that need to be nourished, further strengthened and developed. And what are the negative attitudes within us that need to be abandoned? So if we take this advice on a personal level, then that is what we need to keep in mind.

A positive motivation is achieved by first developing a good motivation for a practice such as meditation. Then we assess our physical posture so that it is relaxed and that our state of mind is clear.

A relaxed physical posture and a relaxed mind are important for meditation, because they contribute to conditions conducive to the practice of meditation. The combination of a relaxed body and a relaxed state of mind are the most conducive conditions for achieving a focused mind. The meditation technique itself involves cultivating a focused mind. Therefore in order to have a focused mind, we need to have the good conditions for the mind to be able to focus.

If the body is not relaxed, with aches and pains and is uncomfortable, then that can be a distraction for the mind. Likewise, if the mind is not relaxed, it can't focus. What does it mean for the mind to be relaxed? It means to have a state of mind that is free from all the disturbing and distracting thoughts that normally preoccupy our minds. We are constantly following one thought to the next, being completely immersed in our roving thoughts. We need to withdraw from that, and try to bring about a settled mind first. When we intentionally withdraw from all forms of distractions—thoughts and memories and so forth—and centre our focus within, then that becomes a conducive state of mind for allowing our mind to single-pointedly focus on the chosen object of our meditation. This combination of a relaxed body and mind is essential for the practice.

After settling down our mind by intentionally withdrawing from all whimsical thoughts and distractions, we bring our mind within and then place it upon the chosen object, which in this case is our breath. In order for our meditation to be an authentic focussed practice, we need to ensure that our mind is completely placed upon the breath and nothing else. From the very onset, if we don't ensure that our mind is focused on the breath, then we might fall into the habit where the mind is seemingly focused on the breath, where one part of us thinks, "yes, I'm in meditation, I am focusing on my breath". But then there's another part of our mind that is still dwelling on certain thoughts or ideas or being distracted by memories and so on. If we don't pay attention on the breath, then that itself becomes a habit where our mind is never really focused on the chosen object. There's always one thought that keeps being influenced by the distractions. So we need to make a complete, full commitment, "For the few minutes of meditation, I will be vigilant and use every ounce of my energy to focus entirely on the breath itself". As I

regularly stress, keep 100% focus on the breath. In this way, we can experience the real benefits of the practice of meditation. *[Breathing meditation]*

In attempting to apply the meditation technique ourselves, even for a few minutes, we begin to get a deeper understanding of the process. As mentioned previously, the meditation technique is a way for us to first of all have a focused mind, then we get a settled mind. We get an understanding that meditation is a technique to settle down the mind. And to also make the mind serviceable; a mind that is completely distracted and a mind whose energy is dispersed can be centred through meditation, which anchors that energy to make it serviceable. The meditation technique is a way to control our mind, preventing it from being completely distracted and being overwhelmed with different anxieties and worries. The meditation technique is also a technique to protect the mind. All of these strategies become clearer when we engage in the meditation practice. When we hear about the technique and hear about its benefits, then it is up to us to apply it and see for ourselves the value of the technique.

We need to protect our mind from a dull state, an unclear state of mind, an unhappy mind. This means protecting a clear state of mind, which is coupled with a joyous and happy mind. This becomes an essential reason for meditation. Ultimately our well-being depends on our having a clear, bright and happy mind. If we can secure and protect these qualities, then this naturally brings about a happy life. We need to recognise this as a positive outcome of meditation.

The literal meaning of 'meditation' in the Tibetan is to acquaint our mind with positivity. We can see that when we focus on a chosen object, we are acquainting ourselves with an object that does not cause disturbance in our mind. The more that we acquaint ourselves with this object by focusing on it, the more we can see how this brings about a positive effect. Our attitude becomes naturally more positive. Many of the things that we do in life, a lot of decisions we make, and a lot of the interactions that we have with people are very much affected by the attitudes we have in our minds. When we have a positive attitude, things go better. Our decisions are better, and our relationships with others are much better. Thus we must definitely recognise how ultimately the meditation technique is developing positive attitudes within ourselves. It strengthens whatever positive attitudes we have and further develops them.

Again, to stress the need to protect our mind, in this case particularly protecting our happiness is essential. We cannot buy happiness with money. It is not as if we can go out and purchase happiness in the supermarket. There is no store that sells happiness. If that were the case, if we could buy happiness, then by default the wealthiest person would be the happiest person because they have all the money to be able to buy as much happiness as they wanted. Happiness is something that has to be developed within; it is a personal responsibility; it is something that is developed internally. And once it is developed, happiness is something that we need to recognise as

essential for our well-being and at all costs we must try to protect that.

Furthermore, both our happiness and our suffering have to be experienced entirely by us. They cannot be shared with others. If happiness could be shared, that would be a good thing because you would want to see your relatives or other friends and companions to be happy. So you could perhaps share some of your own happiness and give it to others to make them happy. If happiness could be shared then indeed I would definitely like to share mine it with others.

The one thing that I can boast about is my happiness, so sharing it would be good for me. The sense of joy and happiness sometimes seem to be bubbling within me. I find it even quite amusing myself. However, unfortunately it is not something which can be shared. The most we can do for someone else is to soothe them, for example, stroke their hand if they're feeling unhappy; ask them if they would like to have some tea or go out for a walk. And just comfort them. That, of course, to some extent can make others feel a little bit joyful and happy. But it is not as if we are giving our happiness to them. It is not as if we are implanting our own happiness into them. It is serving as a condition for them to be a little bit more joyful.

Likewise, suffering cannot be shared. If suffering could be shared, that also might be a good thing. When we are experiencing some misery or an unhappy state of mind, if there is some heavy load of suffering that we are experiencing, and it could be shared then we could go around to our friends and say, "Could you take a bit of my suffering?" If it is shared, then suffering would not be heavy for anyone in particular, because the nature of sharing means that everyone gets a small bit. So that means that no one has to suffer too much because you can share it with others. However, that cannot be done.

The point that is being made here is that happiness and suffering is something that is experienced entirely on our own. Thus it's our responsibility to generate a happy state of mind. Likewise it is our responsibility to overcome any kind of suffering or misery that we might be experiencing. It is entirely up to us; we need to take that initiative to be happy, to take on that responsibility for ourselves. And whatever happiness we have generated needs to be protected. This is where the meditation technique is useful.

Unless there are some good questions that you may have, it may good to go through the text a bit because we have not followed it for the past few weeks. When I mention 'good questions', I mean questions that won't give me a hard time!

Question: Did you feel anger towards the Chinese soldiers when you had to escape from Tibet?

Answer: There was not even time to be angry. We were in fear for our lives. It was fear rather than anger. You might recall from your own experience, when someone really overpowering is in front of you, because of the fear you have for that person at that moment there is no way of getting angry because you are overwhelmed with fear rather than anger.

When I reflect back on that time, I was in my early twenties so I was very young. So I am not sure if it was because of my young, naïve state of mind, but I don't recall getting angry with the Chinese, even when they were bombing the monastery where we were staying—a mortar destroyed a room just next to mine and I could see the dust flying from the impact. I don't remember feeling angry. When I reflect back, it is amusing that I didn't even think about getting angry. It was just the fact that, "OK, we have to leave. It's not a good time to stay."

If I had allowed myself to become angry at that time, I might not be able to say right now that I am bursting with happiness. Because I might have lost any sense of joy and happiness I might have achieved up until then; it might have been completely destroyed because of the anger.

Even though it was a difficult time—the Chinese coming to Tibet and bombing and destroying the monasteries—the one thing the Chinese were not able to destroy was my own sense of joy and happiness. This is what helped me all the way through the escape route and coming to India, a country that I had no familiarity with. I didn't even know the language or the culture. I'd never been there before; it was a completely new place that I suddenly had to be in.

What assisted me that time, those seemingly difficult times, was that sense of joy and happiness within myself. The difficult times included the climate, which was completely different—very, very hot and humid. I had sores on my body because of the change of weather. And then the food was not easy to digest; we had a lot of diarrhoea from mainly eating pumpkin. Even with those difficulties, we had a good place to stay and things were taken care of. This was also due to the kindness of the Dalai Lama. We first settled down in northern India, which was a hot climate area, Assam, near the Brahmaputra River. Many of the Tibetan refugees at the time became ill with 'high fever'. I didn't get that, but I got a lot of sores on my body. But many Tibetan refugees actually died from high fever.

Even during those difficult times, arriving in a completely new country, many of the others were trying to make the most of it by just enjoying themselves, even having small games among themselves. When I think back on it, I think that was the way to turn a bad situation into something more tolerable, by having games and trying to lighten the situation.

Even some of the Chinese army escaped with the Tibetans because they saw the opportunity. Some Tibetans might have every reason to become angry with them and could have even killed them. But there was one particular Chinese person who lived with the Tibetans in the settlement in south India. When the land was given to the Tibetans to settle down, there was one Chinese man who even adopted the Tibetan name of Tashi. He had strong admiration and faith in the Dalai Lama as well. I think he used to be a general in the army. When the Dalai Lama visited the settlement in south India, he used to also visit the Chinese general there. His Holiness would make comments that "He's my good friend." The Dalai Lama often makes that comment about the Chinese being

old friends, being neighbours of Tibet. That is how he refers to the Chinese.

Question: Geshe-la, I heard some news last week about French doctors who were abducted by the militants in Kenya near the border. There were guards who guarded the doctors, but it was very difficult work. They went to do the dangerous work to help a lot of people. I was just wondering, is there any way those guards that helped the doctors could be Buddhist?

Answer: I don't think they are particularly Buddhist; there's no reason to think that. It is, of course, natural that if there are people helping in your country to protect them so that they can do their good work. That seems to be natural in any country. Of course, it is not to say that they couldn't be Buddhist. But as a general rule I don't think we need to assume that they are Buddhist.

Their work is beneficial and they are doing it out of kindness. They are definitely doing a good deed out of kindness, and you don't have to be a Buddhist to do that. Anyone can adopt that kind state of mind to help others.

Question: Geshe-la, I was wondering if animals that have been cared by humans would have a better rebirth in their next life, such as being reborn as a human being?

Answer: We cannot assume as a general rule that every animal that has been taken care of by a human will have a human rebirth. There is no general rule like that. Nevertheless, animals definitely seem to respond to positive behaviour. Even though the nature of an animal's mind is more dull than a human's, it seems that when you make a particular connection with an animal, you can communicate with them on some level, where they seem to be able to understand on maybe a more subtle level.

Of course as a general description of an animal's state of mind, physically and mentally they are in a state where they don't have the capacity to make a spiritual distinction of what is right or wrong; they don't have that capacity from their side. That is a general description of the animal's state of being because of their physical and mental condition. However, there seem to be exceptions; there are always exceptions. There seem to be animals—in fact it's been mentioned in teachings—who have an ability to receive instructions.

There is an unusual case with a pet parrot that was kept by one of the previous Panchen Lamas. In one of his previous incarnations he apparently had a pet parrot. One day a bird of prey came down and snatched the parrot in its claws and flew away with it. When the parrot started to make some noise, the Panchen Lama noticed it being taken away and then he called out, "Bite on his claws! Bite on his claws!" And that's what the parrot did. And then he was released.

The Panchen Lama was very intelligent and knew immediately how the parrot could be released in that situation, instructing the parrot to bite the bigger bird's claws. Of course that was painful and naturally the parrot would immediately be released from the grip of the claws. This is an exceptional case of where a message got through to an animal and was understood. So, there are stories like this where animals do definitely have some

sort of awareness where they can connect with humans in a positive way.

Question: The other day I noticed that a spider had got into my car and I am quite distraught with the prospect that I could get a spider bite. How best can I deal with this situation?

Answer: I don't think it would be the case that the spider has to be in the car all the time. I think it might have been accidental that the spider got into the car. But it's not as if it was coming into the car intentionally trying to scare or hurt you. I think it might find its natural habitat sooner or later. So you do not have to worry too much about that. Maybe you can talk to it and let the spider know, "This isn't going to be very comfortable place for you to live in. During the day the car will be very hot, it may be quite uncomfortable for you". Just tell the spider, mentally or verbally, "Go somewhere else where it will be more comfortable for you. There's also nothing to eat in this car." It's good to relate to the spider in that way.

Before we conclude for the evening, let us spend a few minutes in meditation. The object of our meditation is the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra. Keep our full attention and focus on the sound of the mantra and maintain that focus for a while.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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