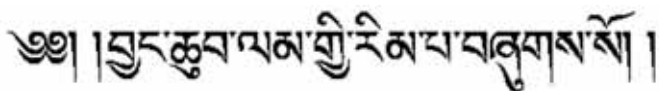


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## The Condensed Lam Rim



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 need to sit in a comfortable and relaxed posture. Meditation seems to be something really essential in one's life.

As I regularly emphasise, I believe that meditation is mostly a technique that helps to develop a genuinely kind and positive state of mind and cultivate positive attitudes within us. On the positive side it increases the positive qualities within us while on the other hand it decreases negative emotions and states of mind. When we adopt the meditation technique appropriately it works towards further developing and increasing one's positive states of mind as well as stabilising the positive qualities within us. The negativities or negative emotions begin to decrease as a consequence of that and one's mind naturally becomes genuinely more calm, happy and peaceful.

When we understand meditation to be a technique to develop positive qualities within us we can then decide that it is something that we need to work towards. It is definitely worth investing our time and energy in meditation and making it part of our daily life commitment. On a practical level, the reason why we need to practice meditation is the simple fact that we all have the utmost wish to be happy. That is something that we have at the very core of our existence; we have that instinctive wish to be happy. Now, of course, we do have concern for others, we wish others to be happy as well. We may wish for our friends or relatives to be well or, on a larger scale, others to be well. But, as an ordinary person, at the deepest level our priority is our own well being. That is the utmost concern that we have.

Now there are exceptional beings, those we call *noble* beings, whose priority at their very core is to help others. They don't just have concern for themselves; their utmost concern is others' well being and happiness. That is the exceptional nature of noble being's attitudes. But for us ordinary beings it is quite clear that our own well being and wish to be happy is of outmost importance. Thus this is something that we need to work towards. Since we all have that wish it is worth considering the proper way to gain a genuine sense of well being.

When we consider this to be a fact, then we would also have to agree that the well being of 'I', or 'me', is always at the forefront of our agenda. It is always 'me' and 'my' concerns. As the concern for 'I' or 'me' is a priority then naturally our preoccupation is with gaining well being mainly for ourselves. When we think about it, this is what seems to consume most of our time and energy.

When we begin to notice for ourselves that our primary concern is for our own well being, we will also see that things don't go too well for us because of this attitude. Some difficulties arise with that sort of attitude.

But when we resolve to put time and energy into increasing our positive states of mind with a genuine concern for

others, then we begin to gain a genuine sense of happiness and peace within oneself; this is the natural outcome. When the positive states of mind increase, the opposite, negative states of mind, naturally decrease. The means and methods to increase the positive states of mind within us, namely kindness and considerate attitudes, is where the meditation practice or technique comes in. We need to understand that the meditation technique serves to do that.

The reason we need to work towards increasing and making the positive attitudes within us firm is because if they are not stabilised then the opportunity for the negative attitudes to arise is greater. Therefore just as when the positive increases the negative decreases, if the positive is not stabilised and firm then it is much easier for negative attitudes to manifest.

We can give a clear example. When one has a loving attitude towards someone then the state of mind of anger towards that person would not be present. Even if there is some slight unease in one's mind, as the loving attitude towards the person increases the hateful or angry state of mind naturally decreases. However when the loving attitude towards someone is not very stable and begins to decrease one would notice that anger arises very easily. In fact, when the loving attitude towards someone is not really stable then, as soon as anger arises, the loving attitude will disappear, just like a rainbow disappears from the sky very quickly. It is the meditation technique that will allow one to increase the positive states of mind, make them stable and firm, and decrease the negative states of mind.

Having explained that is what the meditation technique does, we now need to ponder how it actually does that. The technique involves choosing an appropriate object and placing one's entire focus on that object. The very determination to focus on an appropriate object will divert our attention and focus away from the negativities. So, having diverted our focus we don't pay attention to the negativities and there's no room for them to arise within us. It is only when we pay attention to the negativities and give them focus and attention that they have a chance to arise and manifest. Therefore when we apply the technique properly during the time of meditation and are focused 100% on the virtuous object there is no opportunity for the negativities to manifest within us.

During the time of meditation our mind is cleared and this enhances the potential of our mind and our mental ability is increased. We are acquainting ourselves with the positive abilities and potentials we have within our own mind. That comes about during the practice of meditation.

Now the long-term benefit of the meditation practice comes when one has engaged in frequent meditation practice. The more one becomes familiar with the meditation practice, the more our mind becomes acquainted with focusing on positive states of mind and not allowing itself to be distracted by negativities. When we come out of meditation practice and engage in daily life interacting with others then, due to the positive habits and acquaintances we have during the meditation, even if there are some conditions for negativities to arise we will be able to immediately avert that. We will be able to detect that there is an opportunity and conditions for negativities to arise and divert our mind. That is the natural consequence and positive value of the practice. This is how a meditation session has a positive effect in our everyday life and this is how we need to understand the long-term benefit of meditation.

As a result of adopting the meditation practice in our daily life we can then apply that technique in many other

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situations as well, overcoming other negativities within us. The meditation that we practice here is developing a focused mind by focusing on the breath. Familiarising ourselves with that technique and mastering it will also help us to develop techniques to overcome other states of mind such as anger. That is through the meditation on compassion. When we have understood how to apply the meditation technique, we can then apply it to develop compassion within us. As compassion increases within us anger naturally decreases. In this way we can develop a state of mind where we have less anger and our mind is not controlled by anger. We can all acknowledge and understand how wonderful that would be.

The reason we can immediately recognise the benefits of a mind devoid of anger is because we can all quite easily recognise the ill effects or disadvantages of anger. It is not something that is too subtle for us to understand. That is because when anger arises, we immediately experience the ill effect of being agitated, uncomfortable and unsettled. Others around us also feel the ill effect because the face of the person who is angry is quite unpleasant to look at. Their nice, smiling face is replaced by a face that is unpleasant to look at. Their words won't be pleasant either. So, in this way, anger is very obviously seen as something which is unpleasant. The ill effects are quite well recognised by even ordinary people.

This is unlike another negative state of mind called attachment. Attachment is not as easily seen as having ill effects. Unlike anger, when attachment is expressed the facial gestures and words may be pleasant. Actually, in most cases they are pleasant. You might have nice, pleasant facial expressions. Your words might be pleasant. Even if one has only about 50% attraction to the other person you would express yourself as if you were 100% attracted to them. Therefore this exaggerates one's facial expressions and pleasant words to the point where they seem very pleasant and nice. In a way, of course, you are very cunningly trying to deceive the other to make them believe that you are very attracted to them or that you are really fond of them.

When, however, those nice gestures are based mainly on attachment, then the ill effects can only be seen much later. The ill effects of attachment, where there is no genuine concern or love, will only be noticed much later. Therefore this is something that is not obvious. However, both anger and attachment disturb our mind and have ill effects and disadvantages. The method to overcome these negative states of mind is the practice of meditation. As we acquaint ourselves with the proper technique of meditation we will gradually experience the positive results of overcoming the negative states of mind. So, that is how we should understand meditation.

The practical way of working towards our transformation and to derive the benefit of our practice of meditation is to analyse our mind and detect what kind of attitude or negative emotion is causing us the most distress and disturbance. What do we find is the most difficult challenge to overcome? In other words, what is at the forefront of our mind? Is it an issue of anger that we have? Or attachment? What is it that causes us the most disturbances? We need to honestly investigate within ourselves and once we detect what it is that is disturbing us the most, then that is the first thing that we need to tackle. We need to tailor our practice to overcome the most predominant or overwhelming negative emotion or attitude within us first. By overcoming that, then gradually we can work towards other issues within us. That is something we need to be mindful of from the very

beginning, rather than ignoring and leaving aside the most difficult emotion that we have and thinking that we can deal with it later. That is the very emotion, the very negative state of mind or attitude that we need to bring to the forefront and begin to work on overcoming.

Whenever one is facing a difficulty or problem we need to acquaint ourselves with the habit of immediately looking within and trying to detect what kind of attitude could be causing this problem, rather than allowing ourselves to fall into the habit of blaming some external situation as the cause. As I regularly emphasise, we already have the habit of blaming something external whenever things go wrong. For as long we believe that the main causes of our problems are external, to that extent, we will never resolve to overcome our problems and difficulties. That is not to say that external conditions do not contribute to our well being at all. There are external conditions that serve as minor causes for us to feel comfortable or uncomfortable at times. However the main cause for any difficulty and problem that we experience lies within us. So this is something that we really need to take the initiative to try to understand and accept.

We have all had the experience ourselves, or have seen in others, that under certain circumstances when things are not going well and there's a problem we may feel a little bit low and a little bit grumpy. Whatever the situation may be, it is causing us to feel a little down or on edge. At that time we don't really want to have a conversation with others. We'd rather not face others and talk with them because it forces us to smile and be nice but we don't really want to smile and be nice to others. In the worst case we lose our appetite and don't want to eat. Even sleeping is uncomfortable. When we try to sleep we can't sleep well. So, in this way, that initial unease within us can destroy every sense of pleasure that we normally have, the pleasures of interacting with others, of smiling and being nice to others, of eating and sleeping. There is normally definitely some joy and pleasure in engaging in these things. But all of that is lost when we are victim to our own negative states of mind and emotions.

Therefore, we need to try to understand this and see how that is caused by the negative states of mind and attitudes within us. Our specific negative attitudes and negative states of mind are something for us to detect for ourselves. We can overcome whatever is causing the distress within us and it can be replaced with a sense of joy and happiness in whatever we do; conversing with others, interacting with others, enjoying a meal and so forth. There is the possibility of having a true sense of joy and happiness. We need to restore our sense of true joy and happiness within us and try to conduct ourselves with that sense of joy and happiness in whatever we do.

We need to do the self-analysis and evaluate the positive effects of meditation and the ill effects or disadvantages of not engaging in the practice of mindfulness. We need to equate those two and resolve that if we were to employ the meditation practice, the practice of mindfulness, it will really help to promote positiveness within us. By having a clear and bright state of mind we can further develop the positive qualities of kindness, genuine consideration and compassion and so forth. All the positive qualities within us increase gradually and the negativities, the ill effects, will decrease. Otherwise, if we just let ourselves be in our normal state of mind and allow our distractions to overwhelm and overpower us it will be like revolving in that negativity and

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promoting low self-esteem and all the neurotic states of mind that we normally face.

The way to evaluate our own practice and to see its positive results is not done on an immediate evaluation from day to day. But if we look back over several months, or several years, we will notice for ourselves that there has definitely been some increase of positiveness and that there has been some positive transformation taking place within ourselves. When we detect that it has been a gradual process then it is firmer and more stable. We can feel happy about that gradual process because it is a more stable transformation taking place. That is how we evaluate the practice of meditation.

Thus, in brief, the practice involves looking within us and honestly analysing ourselves. We need to ask ourselves, 'If I were to adopt the technique of meditation, of mindfulness, what benefit would it have for me? What positive results would I derive from the practice?' Asking these questions will allow one to find the positive answers. On the other hand, 'If I allow myself to be in a negative state of mind, allow myself to be overwhelmed with negative attitudes and don't take any initiative to transform my state of mind, what kind of ill effects would I experience? What would be the negative consequences for me?' Again, the answers would be clear. This is how we need to take the personal responsibility and initiative to create the proper conditions for our own well being.

I can share a very simple, but profound advice, given by the great master Atisha. He said, 'When alone, check one's state of mind. And when with others, check one's speech'. This is incredibly profound. I find this advice moves my heart with its practicality and profundity. This is not obscure and difficult for us to understand. It is very practical advice. When one is alone, not associating with others, one needs to deal with one's own state of mind. If we are preoccupied with positive, kind and nice thoughts then that is great. We don't need to worry too much. For most of us, as ordinary beings, we would find that when we are alone our mind starts to speculate and have all kinds of daydreams that are acquainted with worldly concerns. That's at the forefront of our mind. These are things that promote negativities within us such as anger, attachment and so forth. If one finds one's mind preoccupied with these states of mind it is something that we need to be mindful of and work to overcome.

However when one is associating with others we need to be careful of our speech because we get very easily influenced by gossip and slander and all sort of other negativities may arise in relation to one's speech. Therefore, when one is dealing with others one needs to be very mindful of one's speech. This is very practical advice in every walk of life. We find that this is very true. Thus it is good for us to pay heed to this advice that Atisha gave.

In relation to the advice of checking one's own mind, one needs to take the initiative to check one's thoughts and focus on not allowing one to be distracted by other things. One needs time to look within one's mind and ask, 'What is happening in my mind?' The process of withdrawing our mind from other distractions and bringing our focus within and checking one's mind is something that we will derive great benefit from because what's going through our mind will become very clear and vivid. So this is a very valued practice.

I got carried away again, blathering about many things. So I have to ask you to excuse me and I apologise because we are meant to be doing meditation practice! (*laughter*) Now we

can come to the meditation. For meditation practice we adjust our physical posture so that it is not too rigid or stiff but more relaxed. The object to focus on in this meditation is our own breath. That is something that you are already familiar with.

To focus on our breath we intentionally withdraw 100% of our attention from all other thoughts and distractions. Having withdrawn our attention and focus from all other forms of thought and distractions we place our attention and focus on the breath itself. During the next few minutes our focus and attention needs to be on the breath itself and nothing but the breath. In that way we develop our single-pointed concentration. For the next few minutes, that is what we need to resolve to do. We try to maintain our focus and attention on the breath itself. (*Pause for meditation.*)

Since we don't have much time left for the session I might leave it for questions. One or two good questions?

*Question:* I was wondering how Buddhism defines 'time'? There are many interpretations from the Western point of view. Some say that time is linear; others say that past, present and future exist all at the same time. Yet some others say that time is an illusion?

*Answer:* From the Buddhist perspective time, like anything else, is dependent on many factors. Buddhism doesn't go beyond the conventional, so conventionally there is future, which is a result that is bound to happen but which has not happened yet. The present is something that we experience at this very moment, that's what is defined as present. What we can recollect from memory is what we consider as the past.

Now if we go on a more subtle level time can be also be defined upon the factors of 'momentariness', the previous moment, the present moment and the future moment. I'm wondering what the big deal about time is? (*laughter*)

Conventionally, of course we can find further ways of defining time such as 'winter time', 'summer time', 'autumn time'. If there was not winter, summer, spring and autumn, then that goes beyond our obvious experience. With regard to some people saying that time is an illusion, if it is something that can be experienced and something that we can perceive directly then to say it is an illusion would be going against obvious perception. That's why we cannot simply say that, 'it's an illusion'. Thus it is said that the Buddhist teachings are based upon conventionality. They do not go against conventionality. Leaving convention as it is, Buddhism then attempts to define phenomena further based upon the reality of conventionality.

So, if you were to ask the Buddha if the four seasons exist? Does winter time exist? He would definitely say, 'Yes, there is winter time'. (*Geshe-la laughs*) 'Are there 3 months which are divided for winter time?' 'Yes, there are 3 months for winter, 3 months for summer, autumn and spring and so forth.'

In the monasteries there are debates about whether the 3 times are the same moment or separate moments and so forth. But that is all done to define subtler points about time.

There is also the query in context of people who have clairvoyance. It is said that those who have clairvoyance can know the past, present and future in one moment, at one time. Thus the debate arises if whether all three times - past, present and future, can exist at one time? The way to explain that is that those with clairvoyance can *know* past, future and present events at the same time but it does not mean that the past, present and future actually exist at the same time. At

present time to know that things have existed in the past and will exist in the future, is different to things of the three times all existing now at the same time.

For example we would all conventionally have to agree that today is Wednesday, right? While we all accept that today is Wednesday, at the same time we will all have a notion of the Monday and Tuesday that have passed and the Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday that are yet to come. We all have a sense of that existing. We all know that does exist, has existed and will exist. But just because we know of the seven days of the week today, right now, it doesn't mean that that all the seven days of the week are occurring at this moment, right? So that's another example in relation to our own understanding.

In relation to the seven days of the week, today is Wednesday. So in relation to today, Tuesday is in the past and Thursday is in the future. This is how we conventionally function when we ask, 'What day is it today?' The answer is in relation to what day it was yesterday. Also in relation to what day it is today, we know what day it will be tomorrow.

So that is the general description of how, from a Buddhist point of view, we would present that. Within the four schools of Buddhism there would be slightly different interpretations of time but this is an overall general explanation we would give from a Buddhist point of view.

*Question:* If we don't really know what the other is going through, how can we really feel compassion for them?

*Answer:* What you are saying is true. Without having an understanding of the other's experience it would be hard for us to feel sympathy or compassion. It is hard. Thus it is in relation to one's own experiences that one could infer what the other might be going through. If one notices that the other is going through a similar, or maybe even worse, experience to one that one has had oneself then this becomes an easy way for one to feel compassion for them. That is not to say that one has to have had *every* experience that they are going through.

For example, I have mentioned in the past that if one has never had an excruciating stomach ache then it is hard for us to really feel sympathy when others mention that they have a stomach ache. If one has had an excruciating stomach ache oneself then, when someone else mentions they have a stomach ache one can relate to the other more easily. It is true to that extent. We don't need, however, to know the fine detail of their experience. We can infer what they may be going through.

To give another example, someone who has served in the army from the very bottom level and has worked their way up through all of the hardships and difficulties to becoming a general has a much deeper sympathy for those coming from below. The way that they conduct themselves and oversee others is much more compassionate, calm and gentle because of having had the experience earlier hardships themselves.

Without having experienced something oneself, trying to fathom what someone else is going through is quite hard. So that would be the general explanation.

When we, at our level, feel compassion for someone else it is at a very basic level, mostly related to a common experience of suffering. According to Buddhism, when one sees others experiencing the suffering of suffering - the first level of suffering, it instills some sense of a compassionate attitude within us. However, according to the Buddhist teachings, as one's understanding of suffering becomes more profound

one sees that there are many more levels of suffering beyond the surface. There are more subtle levels of suffering. When one begins to have an understanding of that then it is possible to generate compassion for others even though they may not be experiencing the obvious level of the suffering of suffering. The sufferings that are bound to be experienced in the future could be much greater suffering than what is being experienced now, so thinking in that way can instil great compassion towards other beings.

Thanks for the questions. They were good questions. Thank you very much. Of course I am saying this because they were easy questions for me to give an answer to (*laughter*). So I have an advantage (*more laughter*).

When I was teaching previously with another interpreter Tsen-la, she was very fond of me and we got along very well. So, before she interpreted the question for me she would say, 'Geshe-la, this is a tricky question, prepare yourself!' (*laughter*)

Another interpreter Sonam, would sometimes dismiss the questions by saying, 'Oh, these are not appropriate questions for Geshe-la (*laughter*). I don't know what sort of questions they were but he wouldn't translate them. That would have been during the time I was in Bendigo.

Wayne would have been there at the time. Wayne has been coming to my teachings from the very beginning when I started to teach and would never have missed a teaching up to this time. Wayne is not someone who is wealthy, with a lot of money to afford all of the courses but he always makes time and makes sure that he comes to the courses. This is something where he has taken an initiative. So I would consider individuals like Wayne good old friends.

Then there is another individual, Alice, who is about 94 or 95 now. She considers me an old friend. When she refers to me, she refers to me as an old friend and indeed she was one of the first to make breakfast for me when I came to teach in Bendigo. The year before when she came here to see me she couldn't walk up the stairs so I came down and we met downstairs. Last year I went to visit her myself.

She seems to be having a really contented and enjoyable life. Even though she has a garden, she isn't able to work too much in the garden. But she seems to like to have a small garden. This year I was not able to go and visit her. However she sent me a card and she mentioned, 'my writing is becoming poorer, I can't write anymore'. (*laughter*)

So the combination of me taking the initiative to be a little bit clever in dealing with tricky questions and sometimes the translator taking the initiative of dealing with tricky questions seems to be quite effective. In some instances when tricky questions are given the interpreter might say, 'There is no time to answer that right now.' (*laughter*)

Before we end the session for the evening we can again take a few moments for meditation. This time the object of our focus will be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. As we hear the sound, we try to place our entire attention and focus on the sound. When the recitation subsides, we try to maintain our focus for a while longer. In that way it becomes a full practice of meditation, concentration.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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