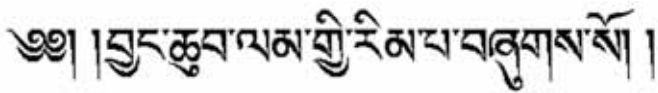


---

## The Condensed Lam Rim



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

8 February 2012

---

Firstly, I would like to express my great appreciation and joy in old friends and new friends gathering here again. The joy that we experience when we meet friends, or people that we associate with, is experienced as a result of the good connection that one has with others. It shows that there is a good connection.

From the Buddhist point of view, the wish to benefit others, which is such a precious thought, is actually a very practical way for making others happy as well as oneself. Making others happy with an attitude of wishing to benefit others has real benefits. If we are able to show pleasant facial gestures to others then that makes them happy. If the things that we say to others are pleasant then that makes them happy. When we do things in a nice pleasant way it makes others happy. So, the thought or attitude of benefiting others is definitely something we can consider to be precious.

So, when we think about the practical benefits that come from the wish of benefiting others, we can begin to acknowledge that this is something really worthwhile. If there is a benefit then it is something that we need in our life. Thinking in this way can inspire us to generate that attitude within oneself.

What I personally feel and acknowledge myself is that the attitude of wishing to benefit others, along with the pleasantness that it brings about in our speech and so forth, makes others happy because of the positive attitude and the positive outcome. I feel that it is a very precious attitude. In terms of qualities, it is one of the highest qualities that one can develop.

When we think about this in a practical way in relation to ourselves, we can see how valuable this attitude can be. We can reflect on our own feelings when someone says something pleasant to us or when someone shows us a nice gesture. Does it make us happy? Definitely, there is no doubt we feel a sense of joy when others are kind; saying nice things or showing us a pleasant facial gesture. So, to that extent, if we experience that sense of joy and happiness within ourselves then we find that this is something that we need, and something that we should develop. We need to have this attitude in our immediate relationships with those that we live with and those who surround us whether they are family, friends or colleagues. In any of these situations, this is something that we need.

The reason I emphasise the attitude of wishing to benefit others, and really checking whether one has that attitude or not, and then making sure that one develops and strengthens this attitude, is because we all actually have

the potential. They are qualities that we all possess but often don't recognise. We seem to focus more on the negative side or feel that we lack something. We don't seem to acknowledge the qualities that we already have, and thus we neglect them. We seem to go out of our way to search for something else, something extra or something different. But if we can just acknowledge the qualities that we already have within this attitude of kindness us, it becomes a way to further strengthen and really utilise these positive attitudes. It is a matter of looking within oneself and checking to what extent one has developed that quality. How to maintain and further develop it?

In my own case, and it may sound as if I am boasting or being pretentious, I spend most of my time just looking at my own mind and attitudes. I am not too concerned about material gains and so forth. Rather, I spend most of my time looking within, checking my attitudes and checking what attitudes are helpful for me or helpful for others, and what kinds of attitudes may harm me or others. I distinguish between these attitudes and when I notice positive attitudes I try to further develop and cultivate these in my regular practice. There is no other high level of practice that I can boast of. This is the small practice that I can share. I can say that I have this and that brings me solace and helps my mind. I find this to be a true and practical benefit. Again and again, it never fails. In fact the benefit of the attitude of kindness is something that does not have to be proven through logic or text. It is something that we can all experience. It is obvious and therefore it is not something obscure or something unfathomable. It is something we already possess and its value is very obvious. So, it is worthwhile for us to acknowledge this and further strengthen that attitude of kindness within us.

As simple as it may sound, this attitude of kindness is something that is obvious and positive for us. We should also understand and acknowledge that we have attitudes that are harmful. Certain attitudes are not constructive but are destructive. Briefly, those attitudes that oppose the attitude of kindness are negative attitudes that we may also have within us. The point that I am trying to emphasise here is that we need to be mindful and carefully check our own mind.

On the one hand it seems simple but on the other hand there is lot to think about. There is a lot to consider and one can spend lots of time in meditation detecting what's going on within one's own mind. To look within oneself, analyse and develop the wisdom that makes a clear distinction between what is beneficial for oneself and what is harmful is not just a beginner's level practice, but is, in fact, a quite profound practice.

If we don't develop that ability to discern clearly what is harmful and beneficial for us we might end up discarding those things that are useful and beneficial and adopting those that are harmful. If we are not clear and careful we might be spending time and energy cultivating things that are actually harmful to us. And, as it harms us, it harms others too. By detecting attitudes and states of mind that are harmful to us we realise what we need to do is to discard them. The beneficial attitudes such as

---

---

loving kindness are those that we need to further develop and strengthen within us. So we discard that which brings harm and we adopt that which brings benefit. In relations to others, we discard those attitudes that are harmful to others and we adopt the attitudes that are conducive to helping others. So, in this way, we use our intelligence to analyse and check our mind. What I am mentioning here is something that we need to try to do. I am laying out the foundation, the basis, for something that we need to see as a long term goal in our life. It is a practice that we need to implement in our regular, everyday life and as a long term goal.

The point to be emphasised here is that we need to acknowledge that this way of checking one's mind and trying to slowly improve one's state of mind is necessary for any transformation to take place. We need to have a realistic view that it will take time. It is not something that will happen overnight. It is something that will take time. So that is why we need to have a broad long-term view as this is a lifetime's work.

In my own case, I have shared with you in the past the story of my own life's experiences. I have admitted that in my earlier years I was not considered as having a gentle character. In fact I was quite temperamental and got into fights. When I look back those early youthful years are not something that I am proud of. However, over time I have seen that slowly, slowly a transformation has taken place.

In emphasising that we need to have a broad view and a long term goal for ourselves, what in fact is really being emphasised is that we need to maintain continuity and a consistency in practice. Continuity is the key thing. If we start something and leave it off unfinished and then go onto something else and then leave that as well, it becomes a bad habit in itself. Leaving things unfinished along the way we never really seem to accomplish anything meaningful for ourselves. Now this is, of course, one hundred per cent the case in spiritual practise but even when we look into our normal worldly activities or education we can see that this is very true. If we start our studies but don't finish them, then we never accomplish that goal. With work if we start something and we don't see it through and finish it off then unfinished work is left behind and nothing substantial is achieved.

So here I would like to emphasise, as I do regularly, that young people have a special responsibility or privilege, so to speak, for acting on the good potential that we have. I see young people as having great potential. It is as if their state of mind is like a budding shoot. When a plant is coming out of the soil and shooting up it is the time when it has the most potential energy to grow into a big bush or tree or a flower that is about to blossom. That is the most beautiful time. It is like the core of potential takes place at that time. Therefore what I am emphasising is that young people should acknowledge that they have this great potential and not waste it. They should take full opportunity of the potential of their state of heightened intelligence and fresh mind and utilise it to take their study and education seriously.

Of course that is not to say that young people don't need to have friends and to go out once in awhile to have a

good time. That's fine, once in a while. But it is most important to have one's education as one's primary goal and not prioritise having friends and partying. When I look around I can see there's a huge difference in someone who has pursued a good education in the early part of his or her life. When they get a job, those who have completed a proper education engage in the job in a more complete way. The job is done more efficiently. Whereas if someone who hasn't had an education does the same job it is very clear that the work that they do is not very efficient. Those who haven't done that specific education lack the skills to be efficient at the job. That very clearly shows that there is a great difference and advantage to having initially completed their education. Thus, leading back to the issue of continuity for those young people engaged in study, it is really good to see it through, and work towards the fulfilling your education.

In having earlier emphasised the importance of academic education especially for young people we also need be mindful of the importance of education to develop a calm mind. That education is also something we definitely need to pay attention to. While we are doing our academic education we also need to educate ourselves to develop a genuinely relaxed and calm mind.

If we lack education about developing a calm mind when young then the consequence I see is that at a later stage of life one might have had a very good education, got a good degree, got a good job and having worked for a certain amount of time, the job seems to get boring and tiring. Even though one is getting a certain amount of money at a certain point one feels like it's just too much and one wants to quit the job. So whilst they had a good job in an attempt to get more leisure time or not wanting life to be too taxing they give up their paid job. And after a while they start feeling bored again. That's why I always make this joke or tease people saying, 'It is an ironic situation where you give up a paid job and later, out of boredom, choose to do work without pay'. Of course there is a nice name for this, it is 'volunteer' work, but basically it's work without pay.

Giving up your good job happens because you can't stand the boredom and the sense of lacking something happens because you have not paid attention to the development of the mind. There has been no education about developing a calm mind. If those who have worked to develop a calm mind reached a point of wanting to give up their job and retire they would have the inner resources to continue with life in a calm state of mind. That fills the vacuum, the sense of emptiness, loneliness or boredom. So, with a long term vision and goal, we need to work towards the later stage in our life where we may not be physically capable of working but our mind will be very calm and relaxed. That indicates that we have to prepare ourselves for that the time now. Thus the main point is that learning how to develop a calm mind is something that would be really useful in one's life.

What I have been relating so far are very practical ways for us to consider what is of benefit and useful in our life. Sometimes we need to come down to the practical approach and really acknowledge that and try to encourage ourselves to work towards that. To summarise

---

the essence of what I am relating here, we can all acknowledge and understand each individual here wishes to be happy. We can summarise what we wish for in one word—happiness. We want happiness. And we can summarise what we don't wish for is suffering. None of us wish to voluntarily experience any kind of misery or suffering.

This fact and reality is true regardless of one's situation, whether one considers oneself religious or not. In fact whether someone calls themselves religious or not their main goal is to be happy and not to experience suffering. If you ask someone who does not believe in any particular religion or does not follow any particular path, what they wish for it would be happiness and what they do not wish to experience is suffering. So, in that regard, we are all the same and have that same ultimate wish.

We can all acknowledge the fact and reality that we are all equal, religiously alike or not, spiritually alike or not. We are all equal in wanting happiness and not wanting to experience suffering. That is a fact. From a Buddhist point of view what we would say is the happiness that we seek comes from benefitting and not harming others. While the suffering that we experience comes from harming others.

So the main point is that we all wish to experience happiness. But how do we experience happiness? What do we gain? What are the real methods to gain happiness? That is something that we need to consider. We may all have common wishes and share the same goal but how do we achieve that? We need to be mindful, we need to be skilful, and we need to find the right way for developing happiness within us. The attitude of loving kindness is the core essence, the main cause, of gaining happiness for oneself. That means mentally, physically and verbally engaging in ways of benefitting others, helping other selflessly without an ulterior motive. That becomes the way, the method, the real resource of gaining happiness for oneself. If we intentionally have harmful thoughts and engage in harmful deeds, actions and speech towards others then that becomes the main way for us to experience unhappiness, unpleasantness and suffering. If we can acknowledge and understand this point then we have touched the real source or the key for our happiness. That is something we need to understand.

Therefore I emphasise, again and again, that we need to develop a kind attitude and generate a happy state of mind and really nourish that kind attitude and happy mind within ourselves. We always need to recognise its preciousness and really maintain it within ourselves.

We need to be really mindful of the fact that a happy mind can decline. If one loses a happy mind or it begins to wane then that will be a great loss for oneself. It is like losing one's most valuable possession. Like the happy mind, the attitude of kindness, love and compassion towards others is also extremely valuable. So to lose that would be a great loss. That is something that we need to consider again and again. We need to contemplate the inner conditions to further protect that happy state of mind and the love and compassion within us.

Now, we can spend some time in meditation. We will not go into the actual detail of the particular technique of the meditation for this evening. However I mentioned earlier what meditation really is, it is a technique to develop a genuinely calm and peaceful state of mind and a healthy attitude within oneself. What I presented earlier described those healthy attitudes. A healthy attitude is spending time thinking about the positive attitudes within oneself and trying to develop and cultivate those. It is far better to spend time contemplating the values of love and compassion and a peaceful state of mind than focusing on objects that cause desire or anger to arise in the mind.

We have already spent too much time in our lives dealing with objects of attachment and anger. It really is a waste of time and energy when you think about it. So rather than spending time exposing yourself to objects of attachment and anger that cause attachment and anger to arise, it is far better to contemplate and think about these really important values that we mentioned before. We all have this potential and we already possess those core values within us. So we should think about them, acknowledge them, and try to think of ways and means to further develop them. That, I feel, is really worthwhile. Then, based on that contemplation, we can to engage in meditation adopting a particular technique that further develops these positive attitudes within us.

We can now spend a few minutes in meditation. There are particular instructions about the physical posture that we can discuss in another session. For the time being, just be mindful that the main thing about the posture is to be relaxed so that one is not too tense or rigid but relaxed and comfortable. Then, having adopted a relaxed and comfortable posture, the next important thing is to pay attention to one's motivation or intention. Why are we doing this meditation? To be really clear about the positive reasons and motivation for doing the practice is very important. Then, thirdly, the technique of meditation involves focusing on a particular object. The object that we use here is our own breath.

The way to focus on our breath is to first make a commitment and determination to keep our mind focused on the breath. In doing this we need to actively and voluntarily decide not to follow the distractions, which means any other kinds of whimsical thoughts or imaginings we may have and that we would normally mindlessly follow. We specifically acknowledge that the distractions are meaningless chatter that goes on in our mind. They are the cause of the disturbance or turmoil within us.

Therefore we make the commitment that for the next few minutes we will not allow ourselves to follow these thoughts. Instead we will bring our full attention and focus within ourselves. Having brought our focus within we place it upon our object of meditation, which is the breath itself. Thus, for the next few minutes we just place our mind's focus entirely on the breath and just keep it there. (*Pause for meditation*).

That will be sufficient for now. It would be really worthwhile to consider adopting a regular meditation practice, just as we have attempted in our short session

---

now, in our daily life. When one actually begins to really start a meditation practice, to take it seriously and try to make an attempt to meditate for a short while one can reach a point where if one hasn't had the opportunity to meditate one feels a little bit uncomfortable and that something is missing. That would be a good sign (*laughter*).

We will, of course, continue with our regular sessions throughout the year. I would just like to mention here that I really cannot boast of being able to share any great excellence or values. I don't really have any great qualities to share and give to you. But what I can say with confidence is that I have is a good motivation, coupled with a happy mind. A happy mind is something that I feel that I possess. There is no other intention other than that whatever I share may be of some benefit for those listening. I feel that others seem to acknowledge that good motivation and happy mind. There are many who seem to be happy to see me when I'm out and about, going out for a meal etc. This seems to be attributed to my happy mind. Indeed if one can have a happy mind on a continuous basis which leads to a happy life, then why not have a happy mind? If one leads a happy life with a happy state of mind then that makes me feel that happiness will carry on to the next life too. It will be a guarantee for a happy life for the next life too. If we made a genuine attempt to have a happy mind today and have been successful it is most likely that this will influence one to be in a happy state of mind tomorrow too and, in fact, it does. If we have gone to bed with a happy state of mind it is most likely that we will wake up with a happy state of mind.

Before we conclude the session for the evening we can make another attempt to engage in meditation practice. This time the object to focus on is the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. When you hear the sound of the mantra just try to be committed to focusing on the sound of the mantra as we hear it. Then, when the recitation subsides, one has to try to just maintain one's awareness on the residue of the sound and focus on that just for a short while. In that way it becomes a full practise of concentration in itself.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Transcribed by Kim Foon Looi  
Edit 1 by John Burch  
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe  
Edited Version  
© Tara Institute*