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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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It would be appropriate to spend some time in meditation. So for that purpose we adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture. Likewise it is important to secure a relaxed state of mind, which means a calm and peaceful state of mind. The reason why I emphasise a “calm and peaceful state of mind” when I speak of a “relaxed state of mind” is because I feel that the term “relaxation” has a different connotation in general usage. I wonder how “a relaxed state of mind” is used in a Christian context, because it might also have a different connotation to being relaxed generally. However, in Buddhism a “relaxed state of mind” means a peaceful state of mind. So, to meditate, we need to have a relaxed body, which is basically a comfortable posture, coupled with a genuinely relaxed or a calm state of mind. We also need a state of mind that has a clear intention of why it is meditating. This means that the purpose of why we are meditating needs to be clear in our mind.

The purpose of meditation is to bring about a genuinely calm and peaceful state of mind, which is a mind that is not immersed in external distractions. Many people have experienced a genuinely calm, relaxed and peaceful state of mind by focusing their attention inward. However, many people have confided in me that they’ve had difficulty in keeping their focus inward. They have told me that having a relaxed and comfortable body is relatively easy, but keeping the mind focused on an inner object is extremely difficult. The difficulty they are having is because of habituation; from a very young age we have been used to focusing outward so to focus our mind inward is not natural for us and something that we wouldn’t normally do.

Now the benefit of adopting a regular practice of meditation is that it is a means to protect our mind: it protects the good qualities that we have within ourselves. We all have a natural calmness and peacefulness within us, and we all have the potential for a happy state of mind. This quality is something inborn. However, if we don’t protect our mind, it will become dominated by all kinds of distractions, which will destroy whatever level of happiness or peace that we have within ourselves. It is very easy to lose these basic good qualities that we have within ourselves, so protecting our mind is extremely important.

We seem to lack the knowledge of how to protect our mind, but we are very knowledgeable about how to protect our body. In fact we engage in ways to protect our body so that we experience good health. For example, we try not to consume foods, drinks or other substances that harm our health and we try to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

When we follow these measures we experience the positive result of good health. We are also capable of learning skills to protect our minds. If we lack the means to protect our mind, or if we don’t apply the skills to protect our mind, then our mind becomes distracted and we might encounter negative states of mind that are detrimental to our wellbeing and health. So we need to know what skills to use to protect the mind to experience positive results.

Equally important is our need to understand and identify what we need to protect our mind from. I regularly mention that we need to protect our minds from strong delusions. Strong delusions can be explained as strong negative emotions, such as anger, desire, jealousy and so on. When we are under the control of one of these delusions our mind is definitely affected and experiences ill effects, such as turmoil, frustration and anxiety. The mind becomes troubled when it is under the influence of a delusion and the more we pay attention to the delusion the more strength it gains in our minds; when we feed a delusion with attention it becomes stronger. As beginners we may not be able to completely protect our mind so that it is immune to delusions from arising at all; but we can practise meditation so that it helps to minimise strong delusion from arising in our mind. Practising meditation, even for a few minutes each day, protects the mind from being dominated or influenced by strong delusions.

The meditation method that we employ to protect our mind from delusions is to focus on an inner object, which can be identified as a virtuous object. By putting our full attention and focus on a virtuous object for a few minutes we don’t give the delusion an opportunity to control and dominate our mind. In effect, this focus releases our mind from the symptoms of a troubled mind, such as anxiety, and what we experience instead is a calm and peaceful mind. If we apply the technique properly this is what we experience, which is particularly so for beginners, who seem to experience a positive effect right away. However, if we take our meditation practice for granted we might lose that positive effect. This happens sometimes to older Dharma or meditation students. Maybe this is because beginners want to find a solution to their problems so their minds are fresh; whatever is presented to them really sinks in and they experience the positive effect. When older students are presented with information, it seems that some part of the advice goes into one ear, but the rest just goes out of the other! (*Laughter.*)

So if older Dharma or meditation students do not experience positive effects in their meditation practice, it is probably because they are not maintaining a consistent practice. Initially their practice of meditation provides positive results because their incentive and eagerness to find solutions to their problems enables them to take in advice readily and give it complete attention. However, as older meditation students become acquainted with their practice they may fall into a state where they seem focused, but their mind is actually distracted. When half the advice goes into these students’ ears and only some of that advice is used, then it relates to their commitment to their practice and their consistency in doing it. Therefore, the advice in the teachings to maintain a positive effect in your meditation practice is to meditate for a consistent

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duration on a continual basis so that your practice becomes better and not worse.

This advice can also be applied in everyday situations, such as maintaining a good relationship with your partner. Specifically, the mutual feelings you have when you are first acquainted with your partner are very positive and prompt you to be together and enjoy each other's company. This joyous feeling – irrespective of whether it is a form of attachment – is the factor that initially brings you together. If that joyous feeling is maintained on a regular basis then it will secure a long and lasting relationship for you both. This is a practical application of the advice given for practising meditation. I feel that if you applied this advice to your relationships you could definitely learn from it.

Going back to the main point; the benefit of meditation is that it is a technique that protects our mind from delusions. To help our meditation practice protect our mind from delusions, we need to think again and again about the disadvantages of the delusions. We can remind ourselves how we completely lose our clear and positive mind and our sense of integrity when we give in to the negativities. We need to tell ourselves, "I must protect my mind from the delusions. I must not give the delusions the upper hand and allow myself to be under the control of the delusions." We can use our own experience to remind ourselves how our mind is affected negatively when it is dominated by delusions. If, for example, we look at our experience of anger and how it affected our mind, we can see that our mind was obviously not happy or joyous while it was angry. Instead it became agitated the moment that anger took root.

The destruction that anger causes can be immense – destructive to the point where a person can take their own life; even though life is incredibly precious and dear to all. To understand the ill effects of anger we need to analyse what happens when we are under the influence of anger. We need to know and understand through our personal experience of being angry what happens to our thoughts, behaviour and speech. We can then see that when we are under the influence of anger we are irrational. We can then use the knowledge from our personal experience of anger to understand others, especially one's partner. If your partner is angry and says inappropriate things, you'll be able to understand that they are under the influence of anger so you can try to be tolerant and patient with them; what they say in anger doesn't need to be taken personally by you because you understand that they don't generally have negative feelings towards you. In reality, they care about you, but are influenced by anger so are saying things that they don't mean. If you have this understanding you can avoid retaliating with similar inappropriate gestures and speech, and instead generate a bit more patience and tolerance. That would be really appreciated by your partner and will help maintain a good relationship.

When we apply meditation techniques we experience the positive effects of the practice and we can see a great transformation take place within ourselves. That transformation comes about by gaining a profound inner wisdom which is referred to in the teachings as analytical

wisdom. This profound wisdom that we gain is the wisdom to recognise and distinguish negative states of mind from positive states of mind. This wisdom further enables us to adopt positive states of mind. Prior to familiarising ourselves with and gaining this analytical wisdom, we may have thought that anger was something positive because it occurs when we want to protect ourselves. This feeling may arise when someone says something inappropriate to us. We may want to respond in anger towards them and feel justified in our anger. We may even think that our retaliation serves a purpose because we feel their ill remarks need to be returned. In this way we may have adopted anger as a useful tool, which would be to see anger as a virtue. However, if we see anger as a positive quality there is no way for us to overcome it because if as long as we harbour anger, we nurture it within ourselves.

With the practise and familiarity of meditation we will begin to gain the profound wisdom of being able to clearly understand and distinguish between positive and negative mental states of mind. We will then begin to adopt the understanding that anger is a state of mind which is detrimental to our wellbeing. So instead of retaliating with anger when others make remarks that we don't like, we will learn how to transform and accept those remarks with understanding and patience; we will try to completely avoid and eradicate an angry state of mind rather than nourish it. This is how we recognise that the real enemies lie within us as the delusions. A delusion is rightly called an enemy because the function of an enemy is to intentionally harm, hurt and destroy our happiness; an enemy is someone or something that brings about the suffering and unease we don't want and destroys the happiness and joy we wish for. And this exactly what the delusions does to us; it destroys any happiness that we have and brings about immense suffering for oneself and others. Thus, when we recognise that the delusions are the internal enemies, we will do everything possible to try to overcome them when they arise.

When a negative state of mind, such as anger, arises it destroys whatever happiness, joy or wellbeing we are experiencing and replaces it with an agitated, uncomfortable and uneasy mind. We can see that anger brings about something that we don't want and destroys what we wish for. Therefore, it is appropriate to consider anger as the real enemy – an enemy that we harbour and that lies within us, which no one else can overcome for us. We can hide from an external enemy, but the inner enemy is something that we carry with us at all times unless we recognise it for what it is. The crucial point is that we need to avert this internal enemy.

The reason why I share these ideas with you is because I think they will help you to understand the purpose of meditation. The ultimate reason why we meditate is to work on our mind. That is the real purpose of meditation. If its purpose was to sit quietly for a few minutes and observe the breath, then that is something that we might all easily do. If we did only that as our meditation and we were not certain about what we were trying to achieve, then the presentation of the meditation technique may not really bring much benefit. So when we practise

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meditation what we need to understand is that ultimately it is a means to destroy our inner enemies, which are the delusions. It is appropriate that we work towards destroying these inner enemies because they are what destroy our real happiness.

This is opposed to the worldly approach of wiping out enemies. The conventional way of getting rid of external enemies for peace would be to eradicate them. However, it is questionable whether destroying an external enemy brings peace, particularly lasting peace. Even on a personal level, if you think that the way to gain peace and happiness is by annihilating external enemies, you would be missing the point, but if you vanquish and overcome your inner enemies, you will definitely experience happiness and joy, and your inner peace will be guaranteed.

Indeed those who try to overcome external enemies are constantly worried about them and do not seem to lead calm and peaceful lives. Instead they always have angst about where their enemies might be and how to better protect themselves. A person who is always occupied in overcoming the external enemy and anxious about the enemy attacking is not a peaceful and happy person, but a person who has worked towards vanquishing the inner enemies of delusion is genuinely joyful, calm and peaceful.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has mentioned an example of this outside our Buddhist tradition. The Dalai Lama heard of a monk in Spain, who had been in retreat for six years. The monk had lived a very simple life, with simple food and clothing, just like the meditators in Tibet, who also live a very simple life with simple food in a cave. So when the Dalai Lama was in Spain the monk wanted to meet the Dalai Lama, and the Dalai Lama wanted to meet the monk. When they came face to face, one of the first things the Dalai Lama asked the monk was what he meditated on. The monk replied that he had meditated on love. The Dalai Lama said that when the monk said this he could see that the very mention of love brought a serene and calm composure on the monk's face. The monk's six-year meditation on love definitely showed in his serenity and calmness. In the Buddhist tradition meditating on love is the antidote for overcoming anger. It was clear to the Dalai Lama that the monk had subdued anger by meditating on love, and the positive effect was that he was a very calm and serene person. Examples such as these of people who have vanquished their inner enemy and have gained genuine calm and peace are inspiring.

I'm sharing this information with the intention that it will serve as a guide for you in your life. Contemplating the positive ways of thinking in your everyday activities is important because it makes sure that you don't fall victim to negative states of mind. If our thinking patterns are affected by the delusions then we will make ineffective choices in our lives, which is detrimental to our wellbeing. If we use wisdom to prevent delusions from arising in our minds we are more capable of making effective choices, which are conducive for our wellbeing. Now that we've talked about the benefits and purpose of

practising meditation we can spend some time meditating.

What causes the mind to be in turmoil, and destroys its calmness and peace, is the worldly distractions we allow our mind to follow. In order for our practice of meditation to become effective and have a positive result we must make the commitment to discipline our mind. We must not allow the mind to follow external distractions, or thoughts and ideas about worldly concerns; instead we must completely withdraw from these external matters and bring our attention and focus inward. Then, having brought our focus within ourselves, we can place it upon the meditation object that we choose. For now, we will use our breath. When we focus our attention on our natural and regular breathing pattern, we imagine the breath going in and the breath coming out; we do not pay attention to anything else. For the next few minutes we will commit ourselves to having a one hundred per cent focus on the breath. (*Pause for meditation.*)

We don't have too much time left to study the text so we could use the rest of the session for questions instead. Please raise your hand if you have question.

*Question:* I was wondering what the difference is between "forbearance" and "patience"?

*Answer:* If forbearance means to willingly endure hardship then the difference between patience and forbearance is in the definition of patience. Buddhist texts have classifications of patience. There is a specific type of patience that willingly endures hardship, which is differentiated from the type of patience where one willingly accepts the harm caused by others, like when someone intentionally harms you. So willingly enduring hardships, or willingly enduring the difficulties and suffering that is experienced, is a specific type of patience according to Buddhist texts; it is patience, but a particular type of patience.

The Buddhist definition of patience classifies it into three types: i) the patience of accepting the harm which is inflicted by other individual beings; ii) the patience of enduring hardship and difficulties; and iii) the patience that thinks definitely about the Dharma. So that's the three different classifications of patience, which are all part of the nature of patience, but in different aspects. Anyway this is something you can further explore.

*Question:* My name is Sujata.... Can I sing a classic short melody?

*Answer:* We are here for the purpose of spiritual practice, so if the words of your song contain a spiritual message then it should be fine.

*(Sujata sings and the audience claps.)*

*Geshe-la:* Your contribution has made people happy so we thank you. One definition of virtue, is to make others happy. When you make others happy you benefit them and that is virtuous – a real spiritual practice that we called Dharma.

*Question:* I read in the Tara Institute newsletter about basic gestures like smiling and being kind. You seem to always be smiling. However, I find that if when I smile at

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people they sometimes don't smile back. Even some people who have been Buddhists for many years don't seem to smile much. Why is that?

*Answer.* Yes, that's true – sometimes people do not smile. You may have noticed that some Buddhists do not smile very much, which might be because they are reflecting on their own suffering. Just because we practise Buddhism doesn't mean that we are immune to suffering; we may overcome some suffering, but we continue to suffer, so our expression may reflect whatever troubles or problems we have within. While engaging in practise there can still be suffering at the same time so it can be hard to have genuine smile at times. There also may be times when people, regardless of their practice or spiritual faith, have memories that are uncomfortable and unpleasant. At the moment of having an unpleasant memory it is hard to smile. Some people have confided in me that when they are in places that bring up pleasant memories, like a place where they might have had an enjoyable time with their partner, then there is a sort of longing for that joy again. Or, if some kind of separation has taken place with the partner, then they may have an uncomfortable feeling because the pleasant memory brings a sense of sadness to their mind.

You commented on my smiling. In the past, someone in India asked me, "How come you are smiling all the time? You always seem joyous." My response was, "I have lost everything. I've lost my family, my country, my belongings, my possessions; everything." When I gave that response he was initially a bit shocked, but then he recovered from his surprise to say, "Oh! What you are implying is that you have given up your attachment to all of those things and that makes you happy and joyous. Is that correct?"

I regularly go down to the St Kilda Sea Baths and there are some kids there who have occasionally noticed me. Later their parents have said, "The children are asking after you. They ask, 'When will the person who always smiles come again?'" And the parents tell the children, "Well, he comes on Thursdays." (*Laughter.*) However, the parents have told me that those children aren't at the baths this year because they have started school so I don't see them any more. A genuine smile comes from a happy mind and that is what I normally share because it is something that is really beneficial; it useful for me as well as for others.

So before we conclude for the evening, we'll spend another few minutes in meditation. This time the object of our focus can be the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we hear the recitation, we can keep our entire focus on the sound of the mantra and, when it subsides, we can maintain that focus for a short while, which will complete the meditation.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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