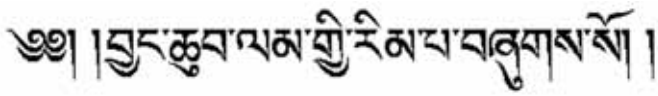

The Condensed Lam Rim



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As usual we can spend some time in meditation. First we sit in a comfortable and upright position. Then it is good to make sure that we are in a bright and clear state of mind. That will ensure that our practice of meditation becomes very meaningful. To practise meditation we need to focus on an object. A definition of contemplative or placement meditation would be: to familiarise our mind with a virtuous object by focusing on it single pointedly. This is how meditation needs to be conducted, however in reality we find that it is not too easy to maintain our focus on a virtuous object. The reason it is difficult to maintain our focus on a virtuous object is because our mind is normally influenced by the delusions. We are more familiar with focusing on objects that cause the delusions to arise rather than virtuous ones, thus we become distracted. So, to have a successful meditation, we need to reverse the situation, where we intentionally place our focus on virtuous objects. This is done by first withdrawing our attention from all non-virtuous objects and bringing our focus within. Then we apply our focus to a virtuous object and give it our full attention.

There are two specific tools to help us maintain our focus on a virtuous object, which are mindfulness and introspection. Mindfulness is: having chosen an appropriate object, to constantly bring that object to mind by remembering it. In other words, mindfulness is a state of mind that constantly reminds us to focus on the chosen object. This helps us to maintain a single-pointed focus on the object. While mindfulness serves as a tool to constantly remind us of the object that we need to be focusing on, in the event that our mind does wander off, introspection will help to take notice of that.

Thus, the state of mind that helps us to notice if our mind has wandered off and keeps a vigilant watch over our mind is called 'introspection'. Introspection is a state of mind that investigates whether we have maintained our single-pointed focus on the object or not. If our mind is single-pointedly focused on its object, then we just maintain that. With introspection when one notices that the mind has wandered off then we immediately bring our focus back upon the virtuous object. So, mindfulness is a constant remembrance of the object we want to focus on, while introspection has the function of investigating whether our mind has maintained that focus or not.

While mindfulness is a specific tool that helps us maintain our focus during meditation, the real significance of mindfulness is when it works as a tool for us to be mindful of our thoughts and actions in daily life, even outside of a meditation session. During a meditation

session we can definitely experience a positive effect; because when we apply mindfulness and maintain a single-pointed focus on a virtuous object there is no opportunity for the delusions to arise in our mind. So naturally, at that time the mind will be in a virtuous state. That is the effectiveness and benefit of meditation. It helps us to maintain a virtuous frame of mind. The stronger our mindfulness the more likely delusions will not arise in the mind. That is how it protects the mind from the delusions in our meditation sessions.

However when we come out of meditation it is very easy for our mind to be distracted again. As soon as we come into contact with sensual objects it is very easy for our mind to again be completely immersed in distractions and non-virtuous activity. The way to protect ourselves in daily life, when we are not formally meditating, is to maintain the mindfulness of thinking of virtue. The more we familiarise ourselves with applying mindfulness during our meditation session, the more likely we will be able to naturally apply mindfulness in whatever else we are doing. This is why we need to try to integrate it into our daily life.

We need to understand that the deeper significance of maintaining mindfulness in our daily life is to maintain a virtuous frame of mind. A virtuous frame of mind is essential for us to maintain a very basic sense of joy and happiness in our daily life and to be protected from being easily disturbed by external circumstances. If we don't do this we would notice that, in our daily life, sometimes it doesn't take much to disturb our mind. Even some very small, insignificant situation can immediately cause our mind to be disturbed and agitated or feel depressed. When we think about it, all of these unwanted disturbances usually arise in relation to something very small and insignificant.

The moment we don't apply mindfulness we are in effect allowing the smallest incident to disturb us, which is pitiful. That is why I emphasise again and again that it is essential that we try to apply the technique of mindfulness in our everyday life. It is crucial because it is a pity to allow insignificant external situations to become a cause to disturb our mind. If we are not mindful then from a normal perspective it may seem that external conditions are indeed the cause of our disturbances, and we habitually blame external circumstances for the disturbances that we experience. However when we pay closer attention, we will notice that how we interpret a situation and how it affects us, is dependent on the attitude we have and the state of mind we are in. So the ultimate cause for our disturbances lies within us rather than in external conditions. External situations are mere conditions but the real causes for these disturbance lie within our own mind.

If we fail to understand this fact we will constantly be blaming external things and indeed it may seem those external conditions, such as people, work situations and so forth are disturbing us. If, however, we apply the mindfulness of maintaining a virtuous frame of mind and a positive attitude and try to not allow situations to disturb our mind, we will be able to maintain a happy state of mind regardless of external situations. This is, of

course, initially hard to do but through practice and familiarity we will find that external conditions will not disturb our mind to the extent that they used to. Then, slowly, slowly, we will be able to deal with situations much more effectively. This is how you will find the transformation and improvement taking place. So that is how we need to see the significance of mindfulness.

In our meditation practice now we are choosing our own breath as an object to focus on. The reason we choose the breath is because we are making an attempt to overcome the very distracted and discursive state of mind within us. Generally it is said in the teachings that we can choose any object for our meditation, but if we are employing meditation to overcome a specific disturbance within us then we need to choose a specific object for our meditation. It is said that the most appropriate object to focus on to overcome strong attachment and desire is the unattractive attributes of the object that one has attachment towards. Focusing on the unattractive attributes will help the mind to reduce strong attachment and desire for the object. Likewise, with anger the most appropriate object to focus on is compassion towards the object that one has aversion or anger towards. Meditating on compassion helps to reduce anger. A discursive mind is an overly excited and completely distracted with lots of conceptual thoughts. For such a mind the best object to focus on is one's own breath. The teachings describe these as the most effective objects to focus on for these specific purposes.

These objects that we focus on to overcome specific negative states of mind and disturbances in our mind are called definite objects. While generally one may focus on any meditation object, to overcome specific disturbances in the mind one has to focus on a definite object. It is called a definite object because it serves to overcome a particular delusion. For example, when an individual is disturbed by strong attachment, advising them to meditate on compassion will not help them to overcome attachment because compassion does not serve as an immediate antidote for overcoming attachment. But focusing on the unattractive features or attributes of the object that they are attached to will help reduce attachment. It is explained in the teachings that there is a definite object to overcome a specific delusion.

As mentioned, the object that we choose for our meditation now will be our own breath. So once again we adopt the appropriate posture for our meditation and remind ourselves to have a positive motivation for doing the practice. Then, in order for the meditation to be a genuine or authentic meditation practice, we need to be fully committed to the practice. For the purposes of our meditation, we need to withdraw our attention and focus from all other objects, whether they are thoughts, memories or external objects, regardless of whether they are pleasant or unpleasant. For the purpose of our meditation we withdraw 100% from all other forms of attention and bring our focus within ourselves. Then, having brought our focus within we commit ourselves to fully withdrawing from all forms of attention and place our entire focus upon the breath. So, in this way we maintain our focus on the breath for the next few minutes. *(Pause for meditation.)*

It would be good to apply meditation regularly in our daily life, just as we have attempted in our short session now.

- 4.2.2.1.2.3. The way to train the mind in the stages of the path of beings of the great scope
- 4.2.2.1.2.3.2. The actual paths
- 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2. How to develop an awakening mind
- 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1. The stages of training the awakening mind
- 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1. Training the mind in the pith instructions on the six causes and effect, which comes from the lineage traced to the great master Atisha
- 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2. Extensive explanation
- 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2. The actual training in the stages
- 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1. Training the mind to strive for the welfare of others
- 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1. Establishing the basis for that mind to arise
- 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.2. Establishing the appealing aspect of all
- 4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.2.2. Recalling their kindness

In the text that we are studying we have been explaining, in an earlier topic, that we first need to recognise that all beings are equal in having been our mother at one time or another. When we are able to establish through our meditation and logical reasoning that all living beings have equally been our mother in our past then they are also equal in having been kind to us.

The next significant point in the sequence for developing love and compassion for all living beings is to recognise and remember the kindness of all beings. The teachings meticulously and very systematically present ways to make all beings endearing to oneself and how to help one feel close to all sentient beings as the basis to develop genuine love and compassion for other beings. Without establishing this closeness to other beings we cannot feel a genuine sense of compassion toward them. So the teachings present these techniques to achieve this.

The first technique establishes how all creatures and beings are equal and have all been our mother at one time or another in the past because we have had countless past existences. When we are able to accept the fact that, considering the countless existences we have had in the past, all beings have equally been our mother then we will naturally come to be able to recognise that they have also been equally kind to us. As the text presents, recognising the kindness of all beings is based on remembering and recognising the kindness of our own mother of this life. So this is how this is presented in the following topic: To recognise the kindness of one's own mother in this life.

The text says that it is wise to begin the meditation with the mother of this life. We should begin by remembering the kindness of our mother of this life. This relates not only to the kindness she has shown us in this life but her kindness when she was our mother in past lives as well. If we base the memory of the kindness of our own mother not only on this life but we recall the times she has also been kind in previous lifetimes then the sense of

gratitude becomes even greater, much more profound and much stronger. If we base our memory of kindness on one individual that we can relate to, our own mother, then we can easily transfer that to other beings as well.

We can relate a practical example of this. When we refer to someone as a friend or someone who has been kind to us it is usually the case that they have been kind to us many times over. When we recall their kindness or when we talk about their kindness we usually say, 'They have come to my aid and been helpful not once or twice, but many times. In fact I can't recall how many times—there have been numberless times that they have helped me'. When we relate to their kindness that has been shown to us numberless times then the impact of how kind they really are is much stronger in our mind. So one cultivates the remembrance of the kindness.

Geshe Potawa had said that after you have recognised that all living beings have been your mother, you will quickly recognise their kindness if you cultivate remembering the kindness of your mother of this lifetime. So the meditation that is presented here is to imagine your own mother clearly in front of you. Even if someone's mother may have passed away it is still possible to have a recollection of her. Because we are familiar with the image of our mother we can immediately bring up that image in front of us. So, as a form of meditation, let's imagine our mother in front of us. Then we think the following numerous times, 'Not only she has been my mother in this life but she has been so an inconceivable number of times through beginningless cyclic existence.' We then continue thinking, 'As my mother, she has protected me from all harm and provided me with all benefit and happiness.' Having brought up the image of our mother in front of us, we think about how she has been kind and protected us from all harm and provided all the benefit and happiness she could. She has always attempted to make me happy and benefited me in every way.

If we spend some time reflecting upon that fact that our mother would have been committed to our best interests and, to the best of her capacity, only wanting to help and benefit us and didn't want us to experience any kind of harm, there is no way for us to feel any hostility towards our mother. How can we feel hostile to our mother when we genuinely feel that to the best of her capacity, she only wanted to help and benefit us? And, as mentioned previously, this is not only once or twice in this lifetime but in fact numerous times in uncountable past lifetimes she had always provided help and benefit.

We then come in the text to the more specific acts of kindness that our mother provided us in this lifetime; how she nurtured and cared for us in this lifetime. As the teaching explains, in this lifetime she carried you for a long time in her womb. Normally it said to be 9 months and 10 days. What we need to reflect upon is that we are alive now as a direct result of our mother having cared and nurtured us from the moment that we began forming in her womb. That is what caused us now to be alive and who we are. For mothers the natural care that they give to protect their child goes to the extremes of giving up their own bad habits of eating and so forth. She would start to

eat in accordance with how it will nurture and benefit the child and even put aside her own safety if someone were to threaten harm to her child. For example, if someone were to cast a stone at us we would immediately cover our head to protect ourselves, but a mother's hands would instinctively go to her tummy to protect the child so that it will not be harmed. That is the extent to which a mother cares.

The labour pains in the process of giving birth are, as many would know, apparently extremely excruciating. However a mother willingly endures that pain and is mentally willing to accept it. Apparently labour pains can go on for hours in some instances. In other instances it seems like an easier birth but the pain that is associated with labour is still apparently really excruciating.

After being born, as you may have seen, we are like a lump of flesh. This is not really very attractive, but the mother holds the child as dearly as if she is holding a precious jewel to her heart. That is the extent to which a mother cares for us without any sense of disgust but rather a sense of great joy. After the infant has been born its mother, without any sense of disgust, cares for and nurtures the child to the extent of even cleaning the mucus and the snot from the nose with her own mouth, cleaning the faeces with her own hands, holding the child and always carrying it near to herself. She feeds the baby constantly to make sure that it has been fed well. The baby can urinate or pass faeces at any time but the mother never hesitates to clean it up and to make sure the baby is hygienic and clean. There are times when the baby does not sleep well and its mother will stay up for hours on end trying to sooth the child so that it can go to sleep. After the baby does go to sleep the mother tries makes an attempt to go bed herself but might be wakened again by the cries of the baby. She might get up and tend to the baby many times during the night.

Don't cry, don't cry, baby. Mother is here. Why, why, what is wrong? (*Geshe-la sings.*)

Even if the baby doesn't cry again a mother might wake up anyway after a while to check what could be wrong. Why isn't the baby making any noise? So she wakes up regardless of whether the baby is crying or not. When we really think about it in detail we can see the extent to which a mother goes to care for her child. Long hours every day as the baby slowly begins to mature.

Even if we were to consider it as a job, is not an easy job. It is a job that requires 24-hour vigilance. It is not something that we can take in shifts and share with others. Usually the mother is always there and caring for the child at all times, 24 hours a day. However, as some mothers have related to me, while it may be physically draining and hard mentally it is really joyous. They don't see it as a big task. They always feel great joy in caring for the child.

When a baby is disturbed and crying its mother picks it up and holds it next to her and you can see that the child generally soothes down, becomes very quiet and seems to be really comfortable in the bosom of its mother. The mother likewise seems to have a very warm feeling as well. You can see the difference between just anyone holding the baby and its mother. When the mother holds

the baby it immediately seems to relax. Of course that might be related to the baby wanting to have milk but even without drinking milk you can see that it is quite comfortable and sometimes sleeps. When it has its milk, of course, it seems even more relaxed. You can see its legs gently kicking a bit, a sign of being very comfortable. We can see when a mother is caring for her child that there is an incredible bond between the mother and child. That is a significant point apparently, something that is beyond any other normal kind of bond. Going back to the main point here, when we think about all these ways a mother cares for her child we can remember how she has cared for us and in that way remember the kindness of our mother.

We could go into great detail of how our mother has cared for us as an infant and as we grow up. Her care for us has been on a continuous basis from the very beginning, teaching us how to walk, to eat and to go to the toilet. As we grow up she teaches us how to wear our own clothes, to put on shoes, then supports us to go to school and helps us through the school years, all the time feeding and nurturing us and encouraging us. Then, when the time comes that their child gets married the parents, both mother and father, will even lay down whatever savings they may have for their children. They have already spent a significant amount for their education but when the time comes to be married they will also lay down their savings to support them to have a good life. In this way we can see how, from the very beginning of our life all the way through, our parents have supported, nurtured and cared for us.

Parents care to the extent that most parents would very gladly give up their own life for the sake of their child. In an instance where there is an actual threat to life many mothers would say, 'Take my life instead of the child.' These instances really occur and we can see how a mother can be willing to sacrifice her own life in order to protect her child. This is not only true for humans but also occurs in the animal realm. When we look around we can see the extent to which mothers care for their offspring, their young ones. I have heard many such stories. Mother and father birds go out to find food for their chicks and sometimes they have to go great distances. The chicks are waiting and as soon as they hear their mother coming back they start to make a noise in the nest and wait eagerly with their mouths open.

Observing how mother and father penguins go out to sea to get food it occurred to me that there might be times the mother and father go to sea but are not able to return because of some disaster taking place. Thinking in that way, I imagined how much sorrow, how much sadness, how much suffering, the chicks would feel if their parents didn't return. Reflecting in that way was really another reminder of the great plight that we have in samsara where so much suffering is experienced. So, for my mind it was a way to think about not only the great kindness of the parents but also the great suffering that can be experience in the process as well. The main point that is presented in the teachings is that when we reflect upon the kindness of our own mother in this detailed way and meditate on that we can then apply that to others and

understand the kindness of other beings as well. This is the main point.

It is said that thinking about the kindness of your mother in this detailed way helps the mind to not only reflect upon the kindness of one's own mother of this life but also helps the mind to relate to others and their great kindness as well. Reflecting upon other situations can also help one to remember the kindness of mothers in general.

I can relate another account of kindness. Once when I was in Tasmania I went on retreat to a place that was about two hours from Devonport. I was staying in a small hut and there was another small house that served as a small shrine. That is where I did my meditation. The owners would bring food over to me and I would go over and shower at their house. The toilet was quite far away and exposed to the elements, and it was quite windy sometimes. [*Geshe-la chuckles.*]

The owners had a peacock, a peahen and her offspring. I noticed that as soon as the mother peacock saw that there was an eagle soaring above she immediately covered her offspring. The chicks flowed under her wings so she completely protected them and exposed herself to the eagle. It was astonishing to see how in order to protect her young she covered them with her own body and exposed herself in the event of the eagle attacking. The eagle swooped down but didn't seem to really do anything at the time that I was there.

There are more points about this in the text, but we will leave those for our next session. Before we end our session for this evening we can again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time we can focus on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. We maintain our focus on the sound and as the recitation subsides we try to just maintain our focus on the residue of that sound for a while. In this way it is a placement or contemplative meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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