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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga  
Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

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Please sit in a good physical posture as usual. It is said that through the force of listening, the mind acquires knowledge and becomes clear, and through the force of meditation, the mental afflictions lessen. I assume that that is something everybody would like to have – a clear mind with knowledge and fewer afflictions.

Initially one engages in listening to teachings, and through listening to teachings, one acquires new knowledge about what is positive and beneficial, and what is harmful.

So we come to recognise which actions are positive and beneficial, and which are harmful. We develop this discriminating awareness between right and wrong, between beneficial and harmful, and through that, the mind becomes clearer. Then what we have to do is to put that knowledge into practice through meditation: any type of harmful behaviour arises from the mental afflictions so, in order to eradicate harmful behaviour, we need to pacify the mental afflictions, and that is done through meditation.

By analysing the actions of one's body, speech and mind and by analysing which actions provide happiness and which provide suffering, one can identify the harmful actions and the beneficial ones. By looking in the mirror of the Dharma, one can identify harmful actions and generate regret for them, thinking that these are not appropriate actions to engage in, and then stop them.

The reason why we look in the mirror in the morning is to see whether there are imperfections in our face or whether there is any dirt or whatever. As soon as we see some dirt, we wash our face. Likewise, when we look into the mirror of the Dharma and see our own faulty actions, we should recognise them as faulty and we should immediately want to stop them and purify them.

We must always remember that harmful actions can be purified; we should never feel that we cannot purify or change the mind. The negative states of mind can be purified and beneficial states of the mind can be increased.

We need to always look after the mind, in the same way that we would look after a small child. A small child needs to be constantly looked after. For example, first thing in the morning, it is good if we just sit down and analyse the mind, especially if we feel there is some unhappiness there. As the great Atisha once said, the greatest practice is to watch one's own mind and the greatest quality is to have concern for the welfare of others.

For example if, after waking up in the morning, one doesn't feel happy, it is good to sit down and analyse what the actual problem is in the mind, what is creating the unhappiness, and then one can rectify whatever the problem is. Otherwise, if we just leave the mind unchecked, it will not become better by itself. It is only likely to get worse. Similarly, when we wake up in the morning and see that we have a dirty face, we will wash our face and not leave the dirt there.

The significance of analysing one's mind cannot be overstated, because there are many different states of the mind that can cause unhappiness. Sometimes, one's mind is unhappy because of anger, so one's whole experience is tainted because of this anger and the unhappiness it creates. At other times, our unhappiness is created by attachment and desire. Again, one's experience is pervaded by this suffering created by attachment and desire. There are other afflictions that generate mental unhappiness, such as jealousy and so forth.

We should analyse the mind whenever we find that it has fallen under the control of one of those afflictions; then we should rectify it.

We are reasonably adept at looking after the health of our bodies; we are usually very concerned with our physical health. Because of this concern for our physical health, we look after our body.

We should likewise be concerned about the health of the mind, because it happens that often the mind is unhappy because some kind of affliction has arisen within it. This does not mean necessarily that the person is mentally unhinged; rather, it means that certain harmful mental states have arisen in the mind that cause unhappiness.

To understand the significance of looking after the mind, one should analyse the importance of mental happiness and the impact of mental suffering. Is there more physical suffering or more mental suffering? This is important to analyse. Also, it is important to understand that, even though one might be physically healthy, if one lacks mental happiness, this physical health will not provide happiness. There are plenty of people who are perfectly healthy physically but lack mental happiness. So looking after the mind is very important.

The importance of looking after the mind cannot be overstated – it is important for everybody, regardless of whether that person considers themselves to be religious or not. It is a topic that concerns everybody equally – that one experiences unhappiness and suffering despite having good external conditions. Why? Because the internal conditions for happiness are lacking. Because the internal conditions for happiness are lacking, we don't experience inner happiness; good external conditions cannot create inner happiness.

As we have said, the problem arises because one does not look after one's mind, one does not protect one's mind. As mentioned in the text *The Treasury of Knowledge*, suffering is created by one's thoughts. For example, if we see the good fortune of others and are unable to rejoice in their good fortune then we are unable to bear it and generate jealousy. And this thought of jealousy creates

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unhappiness for us. There is no external person involved who could be at fault – it is our own thought that creates the suffering.

Likewise, with anger, if we see a person whom we dislike – or sometimes just remember a person we dislike and regenerate anger – this automatically creates unhappiness in the mind. Again, the unhappiness is generated through one's conceptual thoughts.

How is this possible? Because we did not look after the mind; we did not protect it. If we were to protect the mind and train it in single-pointed concentration – where the mind is single-pointedly fastened on a virtuous object – this problem would not arise. So, what we have to do is to gradually lessen the hold of anger, for example, over the mind by familiarising the mind more and more with a virtuous object that can act as the antidote to anger. In such a way, the mental affliction of anger is reduced.

By practising meditation, one protects the mind and looks after it. To protect oneself properly, one needs to do two things. First, there is restraint – not engaging in a non-virtuous action from the beginning. The second step is that of reversal – if the mind has started to go in a negative direction or one has started a negative action, one has to reverse the course of that thought or action. So, one has to stop the harmful action and bring the mind back to a positive state.

By protecting and looking after one's mind, one attains happiness. Why? Because a pacified mind is a happy mind, while an unpacified mind is an unhappy one. This is something we can confirm through our own experience, and recognise the importance of looking after the mind.

Now we are going to practice some meditation. Please sit in the appropriate meditation posture.

The meditation we are going to practice is the meditation on the coming and going of the breath. The meditation on the coming and going of the breath is the primary antidote to the over-conceptualising mind. Regardless of whether you have a mind that is a bit over-conceptualising, strongly over-conceptualising or not over-conceptualising at all, this is the meditation we are going to do tonight, because it has the benefit of calming the mind. It is a very simple meditation – just focusing on the breathing. Not much thinking or reasoning is needed, so one doesn't agitate the mind.

First, we bring the mind back home, focusing it internally. Then, after having totally collected the mind internally, we place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. Here, the focus on the coming and going of the breath should be total, so for those one or two minutes, the mind should not wander to any other object, but should remain vividly and single-pointedly on the object of the coming and going of the breath. We can meditate in this manner for a few minutes. *(Pause for meditation)*

It's a bit late already today, so now we could have some time for questions and answers. I've talked a lot, so now I should give you an opportunity to say something! If you

have some questions, we can have questions. Otherwise, I am going to continue with the text for a bit.

*Question:* What is the Buddhist view on keeping someone on life support?

*Answer:* Whether it is Buddhist or not, in general we appreciate it if life is preserved. Generally, everybody thinks it is a good thing to preserve life. Of course, there are many individual views around, but generally one can say that the preservation of life is appreciated.

The person is not dead if there is still consciousness in the body – that is why the body is still alive, because that person's consciousness is in the body. Once the consciousness leaves the body, the person is actually dead. So, if there is still consciousness in the body, there is also a life in the body.

The person might not be able to feed themselves because of their sickness – if you did not feed them, they would die after a few days – but that is the same situation for us. The continuation of our life depends on sustenance – if we did not eat and drink, we would die. There is really no difference – the person on artificial life support will die when the support is switched off and when they are not fed any more. But it's the same for us – we would also die if we were no longer fed.

Sometimes it is said: "That person is suffering, put them out of their misery". Then one kills the person and this is regarded as compassion. However, it is difficult to say whether the person is suffering or not – that is a very difficult decision to make, so that type of compassion is questionable.

If a horse breaks its leg and that the leg cannot heal, people will say: "Instead of letting the horse suffer, we will put it down to put it out of its misery". Although that compassion is also questionable, at least we can see there is some actual suffering there; one can be sure that the horse is suffering.

But with people on life support, we cannot be so sure. If they are a close relative – such as one's mother or father – although they may not be able to respond or interact, it still provides some mental comfort to have them around. For example, if you know a person with advanced Alzheimer's disease, they are no longer able to recognise their relatives, but we still keep them around.

I think this situation of someone on life support is very similar. There are many individual ideas about this topic. Everybody has reasons for their point of view. Those who say that life support should be continued have reasons, and those who say it should be discontinued also have their reasons.

*Question:* At what age would you recommend teenagers and young adults to start doing practices like [meditation, etc.]?

*Answer:* The first thing a child needs is an example. The child needs to be able to observe the parents practising the Dharma, rather than the parents trying to teach or indoctrinate their child.

For example, if the parents are Christian, rather than

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them trying to teach a child about different Christian beliefs and practices, it is more beneficial for the child to be able to observe and then participate in their own way in the different Christian practices – going to Church, giving charity, and so forth. The child should be able to take the parents as an example. Then, later when the practices are formally explained, that explanation will fall on fruitful ground.

One can explain simple Buddhist principles in simple terms to a child. For example, Chenrezig [FPMT centre in Queensland] had a Buddhist Sunday school where they would explain how to make water bowl offerings, the importance of not harming insects, etc. They would explain that if one harmed an insect, it would hurt the insect in the same way as it would a human. One might pinch the child slightly and say: "Look at how this hurts you; similarly when you hurt an insect, when you squeeze it or whatever, you are hurting it".

One could continue: "Likewise, you don't like to be harassed or abused by others, so you should not do those things to others. You don't like to be harmed, so you shouldn't harm others". If one tried to force the child to sit there in the seven-point meditation posture and meditate, it would not be very successful. I think it would even generate in the child some nausea about meditation practice, because children like to move around and play.

Teaching the child about Dharma should be in the context of a playful environment; if it is a playful environment, they are quite happy to learn new things. But if you take away the playful environment, they won't be so keen.

At Chenrezig, Ven. Robina Courtin asked me about giving a talk to some of children there at Sunday School. I brought with me a big bowl of chocolate. After they had all prostrated, I called them up each of them and gave each of them a piece of chocolate – they quite liked that!

I said to them that there are two types of children – good children and naughty children. Which type of child do you want to be? Do you want to be a good child or do you want to be a naughty child? Then I asked them, what is a good child? A good child is a child who listens to its parents. I told them that's what I think – a child who listens to its parents is a good child, but a child who does not listen to its parents is not a good child.

I told them that a child who listens well to its parents will have good behaviour and a good education, and later will have all the fruits of those things. That boy or girl will be able to afford the things they want to buy – they will be able to have a nice car, and so forth. Children need some kind of aim, they need something to aim for. The children quite liked my advice. I heard later then from the parents that some of the children were saying: "Geshe Doga said such and such". It is important that when you try to educate a child, you do it in a very gentle manner.

For tonight, we can just sit in the meditation posture, focus the mind internally, and then place it on the mantra.