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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 seat yourself comfortably in the meditation posture. Then, when sitting in the meditation posture it is important to generate a good motivation. I don't know if there's a need to say a lot with regards to motivation since you are now already familiar with what a good motivation is.

The meaning of meditation is to train the mind in single-pointed focus on a virtuous object. The significance of this is that the disturbed mind that is agitated by the disturbing thoughts does not experience happiness and its power is dispersed. Because it is distracted in many different directions by one's different wishes and different thoughts, the mind is not very focussed and the potential of the mind is not properly harnessed.

There are many different types of thought that disturb the mind. For example, there are the thoughts that are wishes with regards to different objects of one's desire. Here we have the objects of one's desire that relate to the present and the objects of desire that relate to the future and so forth. One spends a great deal of time thinking about these objects and disturbing one's mind in this manner. When one thinks about the future it brings some happiness to the mind as long as one thinks about something that is happy. Quite often, however, thoughts that are directed to the future are some kind of worry and tend to instil fear. One mentally makes oneself so afraid about some hypothetical situation, what might come about, that one can break out into a cold sweat even though nothing has happened and it is highly uncertain what will happen. It is very important that one gets a handle on one's disturbing thoughts.

If one thinks about one's situation one should ask the question, 'When is one supposed to be happy if one can not be happy now when one has all the good conditions for happiness together?' Now is the time to be happy and in order to be able to be properly happy one needs to meditate. As the great bodhisattva Shantideva remarked, the reason why one is not experiencing the happiness that one is searching for is because one has not properly understood the ways of one's mind. One has not properly understood the psychology of one's mind. Everybody naturally wants to have happiness and avoid suffering and one directs all one's actions towards this aim. Despite working with this motivation for a long time one has not achieved that aim. The reason for this is that one has not properly understood the psychology of one's mind; the way one's mind works.

Therefore it is important that one practises meditation and one starts to work with the mind to attain happiness

so that one can achieve one's aim. To achieve that purpose one first of all sits oneself in a relaxed manner in the meditation posture. This means that one shouldn't tense one's body. Sometimes one tends to sit in a manner where one tenses one's body, as if one is pressing inwards. That is also not conducive. One should sit upright, but relaxed, without tensing the body. At the same time one should not become too relaxed, where the body becomes dull. This is also not conducive.

On the basis of sitting properly one should then adjust one's mind. The mind should be relaxed, but not too relaxed. One should tune the mind correctly; not too relaxed and not too tight. Then place the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. By doing this meditation one is able to experience a very specific type of happiness that only arises from meditation practice. We can meditate in that manner for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

I think it would be good for you if you were to meditate a little in such a manner regularly every day and keep the mind on the object with mindfulness. But one should not think that the practice of mindfulness and introspection is only done during the formal meditation practice. One also needs mindfulness and introspection in order to protect one's vows and pledges and to protect one's ethics. One needs to keep the actions of one's body, speech and mind virtuous with mindfulness. One needs to keep them on the virtuous object with mindfulness and repeatedly analyse with introspection whether the actions of one's body, speech and mind are still virtuous or not. If one finds that they are not virtuous then one should correct them and put them on a virtuous path again. As the great bodhisattva Shantideva said, with mindfulness one is aware of the virtuous object, one's ethics, one's vows and so forth. With mental introspection one analyses whether what one does has become harmful and non-virtuous or not, and then rectify one's actions. One should protect one's vows and pledges in this way, even at the cost of one's life. I prostrate to whoever is able to practice in this manner.

It is important not to lose one's positive wholesome mental attitude. It is when one loses the positive wholesome thought that one feels empty and dark. In order to be able to feel full and joyful one needs to keep a positive wholesome attitude. You can check for yourself the significance of that.

### 4.2.1 Exhorting the disciple to take the essence of this basis with endowments

#### 4.2.1.2 Reflecting on their great importance

Last time we started with the great meaning of the precious human rebirth. When we contemplate the great meaning of the precious human rebirth one should come to understand that one should give up the small meanings. The point of contemplating the great meaning of the precious human rebirth is that one doesn't waste it with small purposes and small objectives. If one were to spend one's life only in the pursuit of attaining happiness and avoiding suffering until one dies, only being focussed on the happiness of this life, then one would not

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be any different from an animal. That is exactly what animals also do. As a human being one should aspire to something more meaningful than that. If, for example, one were to aspire to attain real lasting happiness, that would distinguish oneself.

If one lets one's mind be consumed with concern only for the happiness of this life, and not extend that concern for the happiness of future lives, it doesn't leave much space in the mind for thoughts of the dharma. It has the effect of closing the mind to thoughts of the dharma. If one proceeds in such a manner, just being concerned with the happiness of this life, it is very likely that one will fall down in the future even though one desires happiness. The analogy used here relates to India where they used to set traps for elephants. There were many elephants and they dug trenches and covered them with thin wood and then earth. Then they planted a very special type of grass on top. This was a grass that elephants desire a lot but didn't grow everywhere. When the elephants saw the grass they are unsuspecting. They are drawn because of their strong desire for the grass and they put aside any type of caution. Instead of getting the result they wanted they fall into the trap. The elephant didn't get the grass but got prolonged suffering. If one is not careful and lets one's life be consumed with worldly activities focussed on this life one will end up likewise.

One should try to create the causes for a happy future life. Sometimes this creates confusion. One thinks, 'If I aim for liberation and enlightenment, which are the ultimate goals, it is not appropriate to spend some thought with regards to what will happen to oneself in the immediately proceeding life or in the next life'. There can be a feeling that since I one is aiming for liberation and enlightenment, which are ultimate goals, it would not be appropriate for one to concern oneself with what happens in the next life. That is an unnecessary thought. One should concern oneself with what happens in the next life. One should work for human rebirth or higher divine rebirth because if one does not attain liberation and enlightenment in this lifetime then one has to continue to work for liberation and enlightenment in the next life. That is only possible if one has the conducive conditions. It is not possible in every type of rebirth to work for liberation and enlightenment. One needs a very specific type of situation. So working for higher rebirth in the next life, human or divine rebirth, is the temporary purpose. When we talk about the great purpose of the precious human rebirth it can be divided into the ultimate purpose and the temporary purpose. Temporarily one needs to have a human or higher rebirth in the next life. Ultimately what one needs is liberation and enlightenment.

Did you get that point? You now have a precious human rebirth with the eight freedoms and ten endowments and this type of rebirth has a very great purpose, a very great meaning. One should not spend one's life in the same way as animals do. One should do something that distinguishes oneself from animals. For example, animals are very proficient in engaging in strife with their enemies and harming them. There are many stories about

animals fighting with each other. One story is of a raven having a dispute with an owl. At one point the raven, when the owl had left the nest, took away the owl's young chicks and, of course, killed them. Not only did the raven kill the young owls it butchered them, took out their hearts and laid the hearts on a flat stone. When the owl saw this it did the same to the raven. It kidnapped the raven's children, murdered them and cut out their hearts and laid them on a flat stone. Animals are very proficient in engaging in strife with each other.

Another example is the instance where a snake encountered a human. The human hit the snake and thought that he had killed it and then let it lie there and went off into the forest. He thought the snake had died, but the snake hadn't actually died but continued to lie there until the person returned and then, when he passed by, it bit the person and the person died. That is quite significant. The snake hadn't died and it didn't go away somewhere, but continued to lie there in wait for the person to return and then bit the person when he passed by. The point is that trying to harm one's enemies is something that animals are very adept at and one should try to do something more meaningful.

Animals can be harmful with regards to their enemies. But they can also be very caring with regards to their young and can go to very great lengths to look after their young. Being very aggressive, merciless and harmful with regards to one's enemies and being very attached and going to great lengths when the welfare of one's own side is at stake, isn't thinking that distinguishes one from the thinking of animals. That's what animals do. Another example comes from penguins. After a young penguin is born the parents spend the whole day, from morning to evening, in the ocean hunting for fish. They somehow carry the fish in their throat and mouth, without swallowing the fish themselves, back to their young. The young penguin has to wait all day on land standing by itself, probably feeling quite lonely, wondering when the parents will come back and crying. When I saw this on TV I wondered what the young penguin thinking. What is in its mind, having to stand there all day long waiting for the parents to come back in the evening to bring some food. Maybe it has the thought in its mind, "Oh, when they come back in the evening, I will have something to eat". Anyway, for me it was a good lesson in samsara.

So do you have a question?

*Question. Geshe-la, I was seeking your guidance in regard to the Terry Schiavo case and what the Tibetan Buddhist position was on withdrawing the feeding tube from a woman who for 14 years was in a vegetative state but was not dying and was not in pain.*

We discussed that last Wednesday I think. Generally every person regards their life as their most precious possession. That's why it is important that one also looks after the life of others and values the life of others and protects the life of others. As I said, that is the general position. But there are many individual ideas with regards to this situation and it becomes quite complicated and maybe it is not necessary to bring religion into it.

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There is an assumption that the person is suffering but how do you know whether the person is suffering or not. One does not really know. The reason given is compassion for the suffering, ending the suffering of the person. But it is not really clear whether the person is suffering or not. What is clear is that the person still has consciousness and still has life. What one can say is that the life force is definitely still there.

*Question. Am I to take it that Geshe-la is saying that the decision to withdraw the feeding tube was inappropriate?*

The person was still alive. That life has to be protected and conserved. The general position would always be that life has to be valued, protected and preserved. There are exceptions where it is actually better for an individual to die. There was the case where the Buddha, in one of his previous lives, killed a ship's captain who was planning to kill the 500 merchants that were on his ship. This was done to prevent the captain accumulating great negative karma and the merchants experiencing great suffering and so forth. It was actually out of compassion. The Buddha was in one of his previous lives, a bodhisattva, and he killed the captain out of great compassion to protect the lives of the 500 merchants and to ensure the captain did not receive the karma of having killed 500 human beings. This case is not really a situation like that. To really be certain whether the killing of another person is really the beneficial thing to do and what is more beneficial for their next life is a very, very subtle and difficult decision to make. That is very, very difficult to ascertain.

*Question. You offer an analogy from Buddhist mythology which happened millennia ago, but I'm talking about something which happened less than a week ago.*

(Translator. Sometimes it pays to look to the meaning of the example rather than to cling to the example.)

The point is that we don't have clairvoyance. Without having clairvoyance it becomes impossible to decide whether it is the right thing to kill a sentient being or not.

Some people may say one isn't really killing the person because by just taking their food away the person doesn't die immediately. That, again, is a tricky argument. Personally, I think that it would have been better to keep her alive. That's my personal view. Similarly, my advice is that it's better to try to avoid birds building their nests around the house; using parts of the house for their nests. Try to avoid that possibility, but once the nest has been built and the eggs have been laid in the nest one should protect the nest so that the eggs aren't destroyed or fall down. I personally feel that it is better to preserve life. It is also better for the family. It is also comforting for the family to still have their mother around. It's difficult once you start the process of keeping the person alive artificially. It becomes very difficult to stop that process but there are, of course, also other concerns involved. There is the immense expense that is involved in keeping a person alive and there are probably lots of worries and difficulties involved for the relatives and the families. There are many issues. I'm not sure what the involvement of the law was in this point but, generally,

one can just form a personal opinion that one is comfortable with.

As was explained at the beginning, seat yourself in the meditation posture, bring the mind back home, focus it internally and then, after having withdrawn the mind internally, place it single-pointedly on the name mantra of the Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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*Edited Version*

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