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## The Condensed Lam Rim

# ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་སྒྲིག་།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation. Just as we are familiar with the need to take care of our physical body, it would be good to realise that we must take care of our mind as well. Thus the purpose of meditation is to take care of our mind.

An important element of the practice of meditation is to begin with a good motivation, which is a positive attitude. This is true both for the teacher as well as for those who come to learn about meditation. As the teacher sitting on a high seat up front, I can assert that on every occasion I try to generate the most positive motivation that I possibly can. Likewise, from your side you may generate the positive motivation in accordance to the principle of the teaching, which can be encompassed in one line: 'The main purpose for me to practice meditation is so that I can benefit others'.

The importance of the motivation cannot be underestimated. In fact it is essential for whatever practice that we engage in. The teachings emphasise the importance of the motivation prior to doing any practice. This also applies to the teacher. Even though from the conventional point of view, I may be sitting up higher than you on a throne, in terms of the motivation I consider myself as being lower than you. This is an attitude that one should develop. Actually maintaining such a modest attitude at all times can really assist one in practical ways. Because of maintaining a lowly attitude, it seems that one is able to easily associate with everyone. So rather than being pompous and so forth, it would be much more practical to have a humble attitude.

The positive motivation for undertaking the practice of meditation is, ultimately, to be able to benefit other beings. When we consider the practicality of that attitude we can, through our limited experience, begin to notice that the best way to be of benefit to others is to first subdue and control one's own mind. If one has a subdued and controlled mind it contributes to a peaceful mind within one self. With a peaceful mind, one is definitely able to assist and benefit others. Pursuing the benefit of others really begins with practice of working on one self.

It is reasonable to pose the question: what are the practical benefits one can give others if one has a subdued and peaceful mind? Firstly, subduing one's mind doesn't seem to assist one in acquiring great wealth that one can use to help others. The conventional idea of helping others seems to relate to assisting and helping others with material wealth. But when we look into the reality of the situation further, we will begin to realise that our help and benefit to others isn't limited in just giving material needs.

Our primary focus should be in subduing and controlling our own mind, working towards achieving a peaceful state of mind, which doesn't require the accumulation of great wealth. Then later if we were to acquire wealth by the virtue of having subdued one's mind, it becomes much easier for us to assist and help others with our wealth. Having overcome our selfish attitude, we would be able to naturally and easily share our wealth with others.

Some people confide in me that they really would like to help others. Especially if they have lots of money, then they could really be of assistance in benefiting others. 'It is just that I don't have the money right now. I don't have the money, but if I were to have lots of money, I would really benefit and assist many'. Because they are close to me, I can also be direct and so usually I tell them, 'Let it be. Don't worry about getting lots of money. If it is hard enough to share what you have got now, when you get lots of money your altruistic intentions may change. Rather than actually helping others in a practical way, you might start to think about how to invest that money to make even more money'. That would be the case for someone whose mind is not prepared, someone who does not have a subdued and controlled mind. Even with good intentions, if one's mind is not really subdued then it is unlikely that one would be able to help others even with wealth.

On a practical level, what one can do even if one doesn't have lots of money, is to start working on controlling one's mind. Someone who has practised controlling the mind and who has got some level of peace of mind, will naturally make others feel at ease, and be calmer and more peaceful, just by being in their presence. We can gauge that from our own experience. When we are with someone else who is calm and peaceful, we seem to get the ripple effect, and our mind also becomes calm and peaceful.

Conversely, if we associate with someone who is constantly agitated and short-tempered we seem to get a negative effect as well. We can gauge from our own experience how someone else's positive attitudes, and calm and peaceful state of mind actually benefits us. In the same way, as we practise and acquire a controlled and a subdued mind followed by a peaceful mind, it will definitely benefit others in the same way. We can see the truth of this even in relationships with people who we closely associate with in our daily lives. If we are calm and peaceful ourselves, that will definitely assist others in making them feel calm and peaceful as well. With a calm and positive mind, we can help others to overcome anxiety and so forth in their mind. That is how we can assist others in a practical and worthwhile way, even without any wealth.

Thus, the purpose of the practise in meditation is to subdue our own mind. Subduing our mind means to control our mind from being influenced by the disturbing states of mind, which are called afflictions. Controlling our mind so that it is not influenced by the distractions will naturally result in having a more peaceful mind. When we really think about it, what disturb us are all the distractions. The distractions come in different aspects,

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they may come from actual contact with objects of attachment or anger, or it can be from particular thoughts and worries. Paranoia is one of the key factors that can really disturb our mind. For as long as we allow our mind to be influenced by these various forms of distractions, to that extent, our mind will be troubled with anxiety, depression and so forth.

To give an example of unnecessary paranoia and worries: We fill our life with worries such as 'what if' this or that happens. Different types of worries consume and occupy the space of our mind, and the whole day we could be occupied with anxiety and worries. We can take a particular example such as someone who is worried that they might lose their eyesight. Such a person is may constantly be preoccupied with the thought that they might lose their eyesight. It is said that a person who worries about losing their eyesight experiences much more suffering than someone who has actually lost their sight due to some circumstance.

Someone who has already lost their eyesight and has learnt to accept it, may not be preoccupied with anxieties and worries and at peace about having lost their eyesight. Whereas, someone who has eyesight but worries that they may lose it will have much more anxiety in their mind. This is just one example of how a lot of paranoia and anxiety in our lives, is not based on facts and reality, but rather are mere speculations.

We have looked at one example of what could bring worries and anxiety to our mind, but there are many more instances in our lives of speculations that cause anxiety and worry. Someone who lacks practice in subduing and controlling their mind and allows their mind to be completely influenced by these numerous worries and anxieties can experience severe depression, to the point of losing all reason to live any longer. They may come to a sad point where it seems pointless to continue living a life, which is filled with so many problems and difficulties. That can be a very unfortunate conclusion that some people come to. Someone who practises meditation may still have worries and anxieties in their mind, but the practice of meditation serves as a medium to control the mind and not let it be completely influenced by the distractions, worries, anxieties and so forth.

The very technique of meditation we are attempting to do in the actual time that we spend in meditation, is to withdraw our mind from all the delusions, worries, thoughts—from every type of distraction. We attempt to withdraw our mind from that and put our full focus on one particular object, which does not cause delusions to arise. By keeping our focus on a particular object during that time, we can see that we have taken control over our mind so that it is not being influence by worries and anxieties that cause the mind to be disturbed. As we distance our focus from those distractions and keep our focus on the object of meditation, the mind naturally settles and calms down. The mind does not experience the result of being influenced by distractions during the period of our meditation. Someone who has access to the technique of meditation can see through their own experience that when practiced in a proper way, they can

definitely get the temporary benefit of subduing the mind. Thus, as we experience the benefit of meditation, we will begin to get the conviction that meditation actually works. There is no other way to gain a peaceful and subdued mind than through the practice of meditation, so one must spend time to engage and familiarise oneself with the practice of meditation.

We cannot expect a quick result from the practice of meditation in a few days, a week, weeks or even few months. Rather after a few years of continuous practice of meditation, we should be able to affirm a sound progress. It is a matter of maintaining the consistency and continuity of our practise on a daily basis. After a few years we can begin to see how much progress we have made. Some people feel a little bit discouraged or complain about the fact that it should take so long, but that's how it is. It is the nature of sound practice that it comes only through familiarity and time.

Having reflected on the main purpose and technique of the practice of meditation, what is it that we are trying to achieve in the long term and seeing that progress comes slowly, we should then maintain that focus and understanding within oneself. Then with that realistic understanding, begin to spend some time on a daily basis in the practice of meditation, to the best of one's ability. Meanwhile we still need to work in a worldly environment, earning money and so forth. If on one hand we are in touch with the main goal and ideals in our life, then on the other hand we can continue to work in the world and that will not distract us. We can still maintain our focus. We have to use our intelligence to do a balancing act between the focus of meditation and working and surviving in the world. Understanding the combination, we will be able to have a sound life. Now we will spend some time in actual meditation.

In relation to the focus or guidelines for life, I often stress to those who confide and are close to me, that one needs to maintain a balance in one's life. That is, to maintain the practice with understanding and at the same time to engage in means for survival by making money. I often advise people that if you lead a life with a good balance, you will be able to reap the results later on when one reaches a mature age. When you retire around the age of sixty plus, you would reap the actual result of the continuous practice of meditation. When one retires and has the time, one would be able to relate to one's earlier practices and continue to practice in a relaxed manner, while one is also enjoying the material comfort which is the result of physical work in the world. We all need to some physical comforts. Our body needs some comfort and we can enjoy that comfort. To enjoy those comforts with the right set of mind and be able to really relax and have a peaceful mind would be the best of both worlds.

Having introduced the purpose and manner of the practice of meditation, we will now engage in the actual practice of meditation for the next few minutes. For that we adopt the appropriate physical posture and mentally we need to make a commitment to ourselves to withdraw our mind from all distractions. Leave aside every other concern and thought for a while and for the next few minutes we try to bring our full attention and focus onto

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the meditation object, which is our own breath. We use our breath as the focal object.

Initially, as we focus on our breath we shouldn't have laboured breathing. It shouldn't be too heavy or too shallow. You should leave your breath in its natural state. Initially when we try to focus on our breath it may take some time before we can relax into that natural state. Our focus and attention might be too firm, too hard and we might strain or, at the other extreme, we might be too relaxed. After some fine-tuning of our focus as well as our actual breathing, it is said that we will come to a very natural, relaxed, breathing rhythm. We then focus on that natural rhythm of the in-flow and out-flow of our breath. When after fine-tuning you find that right rhythm and focus, it then becomes the right way of meditation. The main point is to try to withdraw our mind from the distractions and maintain the focus on the breath. When distracted, keep bringing the focus back to the breath. For the next few minutes we will engage in the practise

*(Pause for meditation).*

We have attempted to engage in the practice of meditation. If we can commit ourselves to engage in a similar manner in a daily practice of meditation we will definitely experience the good results of that the practice of meditation at some time. In fact, when we start to make a commitment to familiarise ourselves with the practice of meditation, we will come to a point where we would always find time in a day for the practise of meditation. We will find the time. There are many people who complain, or rather have an excuse, that there is no time for the practice of meditation. They are too busy to practise meditation on a daily basis. But if one actually starts to familiarise oneself and actually engage in some practise of meditation, one will come to a point where one will make sure to find time for the practice of meditation. No matter how busy, no matter what is going on, there will always be some time for the practice of meditation.

The main point that I am making is that one should not lose one's opportunity to practise meditation on a daily basis. If one makes the commitment to oneself to practise meditation one will always find the time or the opportunity, to practise. To give a contemporary analogy to illustrate this, we can think of those who have a favourite TV show. No matter what is going on, one will try to finish work *(laughter)* to get back home to be able to watch that favourite show. One will make sure to catch one's favourite television show and to be there at the right time. One will find every opportunity to do that.

There is another analogy in relation to going to the cinema. There are some who make sure that once a week they have a certain time that they will go to the movies *(laughter)*. That is something they have as a commitment. Every week they will go to the movie at certain time to see a show. And the reason why they aspire to that is because, apparently, they get some benefits from that. They make a commitment to that every week. No matter what is going on they will always find an opportunity to go to the cinema and similarly with other shows. The reason why one does that is, of course, because of one's familiarity. One associates with the temporary benefits

that one gains from that and makes the commitment and then finds the opportunity. It is the same with meditation. When we see the benefits and familiarise ourselves with them we will find the opportunity to practise.

When one has come to a point of making the equation that one sees that the benefits one gets out of the practice of meditation far outweigh any other activities, then one would use the time that one used earlier for one's movie for meditation instead. That is how someone who has actually clearly seen the benefits of the practice of meditation and how crucial it is to engage in the practice of meditation will behave. Someone who has not reached that point will, if there was an option to do the practice of meditation or to go to the movies, still choose to go to the movies *(laughter)*.

When one begins to notice that one is actually starting to put more importance in finding the opportunity to meditate and lessens one's time in seeing movies, and is able to give up one's time to go to movies in exchange for the time to practise meditation, that is actually a sign that one's distractions are beginning to lessen.

We are coming to the end of the session, so does anyone have a question?

*Question: I have the following problems: When I try to meditate, and I shut my eyes completely, it very easy for my imagination to wander off. When my eyes are half closed, I can only concentrate for a couple of seconds and then I start to see something that distracts me.*

There are specific instructions as to where to leave one's gaze, one's eyesight. According to the instructions for meditation if one has one's eyes completely shut then initially, of course, one will still have distractions but that could also cause a darkness, which leads to drowsiness or stupor. One extreme would be someone who is not really experienced in meditation having their eyes completely shut. Whereas, if one has one's eyes too wide open, as you mentioned earlier, we associate with the things that we see externally. That will then lead to distractions and the mind can become excited.

It is said the right balance is to have the eyes gaze at the tip of one's nose. The eyes should not be open too wide and not completely closed, but rather slightly open that you are able to see the tip of your nose. That is the measure as instructed. Recently when the Dalai Lama was in Sydney he was giving instructions on meditation. He was teasing foreigners saying that, for you, it seemed that because you have a larger nose it might be much easier *(laughter)*. You have an advantage because of the nose being larger you are able to see the tip of your nose easier. For us, easterners, because our nose is smaller *(laughter)* it is harder to see the tip of the nose. But of course he was kidding. He doesn't mean that you have to actually focus on the tip of your nose but to lower your gaze to that level. Closing one's eyes, or even having them a little bit open, will not actually affects one's focus on the object of one's meditation for someone who is more experienced.

As a beginner we interact with the outside world, and everything else, mostly with our sense perception. The

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technical term is sense consciousness, which means the sense perceptions that are the eyes, nose, smell, and so forth. The perception or the consciousness that focuses on the object is actually our mental consciousness, which is subtler and deeper within us. When we are become distracted by what we see we are still associating with our eye consciousness rather than using our mental consciousness to focus on the object.

When we become more familiar with focusing on the object with one's mental perception or mental consciousness, then having the eyes closed or open will not affect one's focus. Even if one's eyes are a bit open, we will not be distracted because we don't relate or associate with the eye consciousness. The more dominant consciousness within us is said to be the mental consciousness. When we can relate to, and fine tune, the mental consciousness making that more dominant than other sense perceptions will not influence it. Even if one sees something in front of one it will not be a distraction. When the meditator hears something, it will not distract them because they are not relating with their sense perceptions or sense consciousnesses. Therefore, the main point is that when we focus on the object of meditation we do not try to use our sense perception but rather our mind, the mental perception.

*Question: For the past four years, everyday, I have been meditating and I find that it is still difficult to see the benefit. I still lose calm, control of my mind. I still get distracted.*

*(Translator: I think you may be bringing out something that I missed in my earlier translation. Geshe-la earlier mentioned that maybe after six years one would see some benefit (laughter). Geshe-la is re-emphasizing that point.)*

When you claim that there is not much benefit, you are perhaps relating to an overall great dramatic change. That might not be the case. However, with the experience that you have gained so far from the practice of meditation, you might have noticed for yourself that you definitely have a little more control of your mind and thoughts. Even though you may still have distractions, you are nevertheless able to distinguish these distractions and identify them. In being able to notice and identify them you are not allowing them to completely dominate and affect your mind to as great an extent as they used to previously. You might see that benefit of not being completely overwhelmed with anxiety and worries during the practise of meditation. So, not being completely overwhelmed by the distractions is something you can actually relate to.

It is good to gauge the progress of one's practice of meditation in relation to the time when one didn't know anything about the practice of meditation. What was one's lifestyle, attitude, and mind-set prior to becoming interested in meditation practice? Compared to that earlier time is there some change or not, some progress or not? When one makes a comparison with that earlier state and sees the difference, one will definitely be able to identify some definite progress or change from that time.

Geshe-la mentioned earlier, though you have practised for four years as you mentioned, because you are still young, it is good to give it a little bit more time, say six years, and then one might be able to see a little bit more

progress. It is definitely related to familiarity. If one does not see some sort of progress then it is easy to lose interest or be discouraged.

There are other people who have also mentioned that they become discouraged and in fact some have actually given up meditating, which is sad. I give this practical advice to those from a younger generation: Being young, one of course needs to associate with the outside world. One may still be engaged in studies and it is important that one continues one's studies. Likewise, one also needs to have friends, so one needs to associate with friends, particularly in close relationships. It is important, by all means, to have a partner, to have a close intimate relationship. That is something that you are biologically at a point of relating to.

Therefore, by all means, have relationships but don't treat your relationship like a starving person treats food and starts to gobble whatever they get. A starving person may not spend any time assessing whether the food is edible or not, whether it is poisonous or not. They might just gobble down anything they get. If one were to adopt that manner in relationships it could be quite dangerous for one. It will lead to disappointment. With relationships one should check first from a distance. This is not to merely judge from the external appearance of the person, but to spend some time to try to get to know them, to know their inner qualities. When one begins to see some inner qualities one could commit oneself to a more intimate relationship. In that way there will be mutual benefit for oneself and for the other.

That is in terms of relationships, but we need to consider work again. We need to support ourselves and thus we need to work and engage in the outside world. While one is living in the world for one's survival one can, at the same time, relate to the benefits of the practice of meditation and see that as a long-term investment rather than seeking a quick result for immediate gratification. One should see meditation as a long-term investment. When one spends even a short amount of time daily on meditation the culmination will be experienced later in life. As I mentioned earlier, when one comes to the right age the culmination of all those years of continuous small practice and small duration times of practise in meditation will add up to a happy and joyful life at the end of one's life. That would be a very reasonable, worthwhile goal to look towards in this life.

As one invests in the practice of meditation, as a long-term investment to get the benefit later in life, it is also good at the same time on the practical, worldly level to invest some of one's money too. Try saving some money and try not to spend everything that one gets and just use it up for immediate gratification. Keep some money aside as a long-term investment in the bank or a safe deposit. Make a commitment that that is for a long-term goal to purchase something.

To give an analogy in relation to this, I recently received a letter from a mother who was explaining that her daughter was very thankful for the advice I gave to her when she was quite young. I remembered when she came as a very young girl, I advised her to save some money so that she would be able to be proud of it later, and use it to

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buy something of her own, such as car or better still a house. In fact the girl saved money and when I received her letter recently she has bought a house from the money she saved and is already married. She was very thankful for the advice, and encouragement to do that. Her mother told me that when she advised her daughter, she didn't seem to take much interest, but that she seemed to take my advice and actually followed it up. So she reaped the benefit of that investment herself.

Likewise, especially for the younger generation, I feel that it is really important that one makes the commitment to save some money to use for more meaningful purposes later on in life. On the same note, even though this may seem that I am interfering in other people's lives and it is not for me to give this sort of advice, I have given personal advice to some parents with whom I closely associate that it is good to put aside five or ten dollars weekly in savings in that particular child's name and under no circumstances to try to use that money for something else. When that child reaches the age of twenty that accumulation of five or ten dollars could add up to fifteen or twenty thousand dollars. That can be given in total sum to someone who has come fresh out from university, and who needs to live by him or herself and needs access to things. That sum of money would be really appreciated and useful for them then. Just giving them some pocket money or buying them some expensive gift and leaving it at that will not have real, lasting benefit for the child when they actually grow up.

In fact when they reach twenty or twenty-five years of age and one has not put money aside for them in their name and they need to buy a car or something else, one would not be able to find that money. Twenty thousand dollars is not something that one would be able to easily come up with on the spot. Whereas one would have it, if one had saved for them in their name since they were quite young, I'm talking about when they are five or six years old. Whenever one can, from the earliest possible age, save five or ten dollars a week in their name in a separate account and leave it for them. Then, later on in their life, they will be able to use that money and really appreciate it and find it really useful.

Some have the ideas that, 'Oh well. If the parents are quite wealthy one doesn't need to worry. One doesn't have to save for them because the parents are wealthy anyway.' But, on a practical note, just because the parents are wealthy there is no guarantee that the child will get some big lump sum of money later on in their life. If there is divorce or something happens anything is possible, and the child might not get anything. Therefore, as parents concerned for their child it is good to have a mutual agreement to save up for the child.

Even if the parents remain together when the child grows up, just suddenly to give some money could be difficult or may not even be appreciated. If it is saved from their pocket money in the beginning, with the understanding that later on it would be given to them, then since this money actually belongs to them (because it was saved in their name) then it would be much easier to present that money to them, and for them to accept it as well. This is because it is not a separate gift but was in fact saved for

them in their name. That would be a practical way to make a worthy gift to your children when they most need it.

Having giving this advice in my early days here, some parents have saved up money for their children in that way. They have mentioned to me that it actually has been really beneficial. It has been useful for the child and the parent to be able to present that money when they really needed it. Even though, as I mentioned earlier, it might seem that I am interfering with others lives, if there's some practical benefit then it is worth mentioning it.

The main point I am making is that in relation to every aspect of one's life, whether it is one's wealth or one's knowledge, one has to try when one has the means and ability to put some energy and effort into being able to stand up on one's own feet and be able to stand up for one self. If one puts in the energy and time now, one will surely reap the good result later.

Before we conclude for the evening let us again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time our focus is the name mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni, which we will recite. We keep our mind focused on the sound of the mantra of the name of Buddha Shakyamuni and just try to remain focused for a few minutes.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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