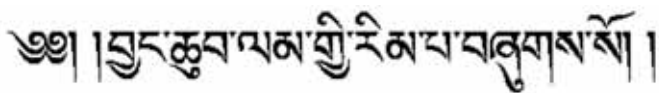

The Condensed Lam Rim



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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We can spend some time in meditation. To do this we sit in a comfortable and relaxed posture and, as I regularly remind you, the state of mind is also important. It needs to be a clear and bright state of mind, imbued with kindness. If one were able to maintain a clear and bright state of mind, imbued with kindness then when we look into the kind of actions that we engage in, we would find that every activity becomes very meaningful and beneficial. That is something that we would notice. Having a relaxed physical posture is recommended for meditation. That does not mean just sitting and doing nothing. If one is able to maintain a clear, bright and kind state of mind that will naturally have the consequence of the physical body also being relaxed. If our mind is in that state we can have a relaxed composure in whatever situation we may find ourselves in.

What I intend to make clear is that when we consider our well-being, we need to take into consideration that we are bound to spend most of our life within a busy society, wherever we may be living. Since we cannot deny that, the next thing we need to take into consideration is what would be the most meaningful way to lead one's life. The most meaningful way would be to lead a life that is free from worries and anxiety, and joyous and happy. That would be the most meaningful way.

While we can agree that leading a happy and joyous life is something that we would all naturally strive for, it may not seem too easy. However it is not that difficult when we understand that the technique for having a happy and joyous life is to maintain a happy and joyous state of mind. Nevertheless, it seems that we neglect paying attention to that aspect of ourselves. If we don't pay attention and investigate how that is to be done then naturally we won't be able to apply it. When we consider what would constitute a joyous and happy life from the worldly perspective, it would be a life where we would be able to secure a certain amount of financial stability, companions around us, a good abode and enough things to entertain ourselves. That kind of life would be considered as a happy life.

If one were to focus one's time and energy merely on these external factors, such as acquiring lots of money, external friends and companions, one ends up experiencing more problems and anxiety in one's life rather than well-being, genuine joy and happiness. One actually experiences more troubles; these would not be in relation to being deprived of food and clothing and shelter, which might be adequate; but there are many kinds of other problems, including psychological problems, which one would experience. This is mainly due to completely giving in to worldly distractions. This is something that you would have experienced in your life and something we can acknowledge to be the case when we look into our own situation.

If, on the other hand, we take the initiative to spend some time looking within one's own mind and acquiring positive

qualities such as clarity, brightness and kindness in one's mind, one would come to notice that a real sense of joy and genuine well-being starts to develop within oneself despite the external situation. Someone who has spent adequate time and energy in developing qualities within themselves, rather than being distracted with external, material things, will find that external problems do not cause them to become disturbed to any great degree and they do not feel the turmoil, anxiety and fears that we would normally experience in these situations. This shows that one's well-being is not entirely dependent on external situations but rather it is dependent on one's inner development. That becomes clear. This comes through training and we could say that this is one area of training where we might be a little bit lacking (*Geshe-la chuckles*). Even though we may have many other things, this is one area that we might be a little bit lacking.

In terms of material advancement we can say that there is a lot of progress in our society, but it might be a little bit backward from the point of view of inner development. This is a time where revolutionary new discoveries are being made. For example, scientists, doctors and neurologists are beginning to pay more attention to the inter-relationship between the physical body and the mind and are trying to find out more about what constitutes the mind and the psycho-physical relationships of individuals. Scientists and research doctors are beginning to find that one's well-being does not rely entirely upon external factors and that one's health is very much related to one's inner well-being.

In relationship to these new discoveries that scientists and doctors are coming up with, His Holiness Dalai Lama mentioned not long ago that in an encounter with a renowned doctor, the doctor mentioned that he had found that normally when one gets angry we have a tendency to blame external conditions. In most cases we believe that it is 100% the fault of external factors that causes the turmoil or anger within oneself. But when investigation and research was done, it was found that actually 95% of the cause came from one's own attitude and it is only 5% is related to the external conditions. The doctor was saying that from the scientific point of view, this is quite an extraordinary discovery. So it is quite incredible that a doctor has come to understand this through his investigations. This is really a great discovery to point out that the main causes of the turmoil and disturbances lie within oneself.

If we were to do our own research and look within ourselves we would find this to be true for ourselves. If, for example, we check our attitude or our perception when we are very upset with a friend or companion then in that moment that we are really angry they would appear totally wrong and the fault would be 100% on their side. One may even assume that one has good reason to be upset with them because they acted totally inappropriately or badly. However later on, when the anger in relation to that companion subsides, one begins to see the qualities of the person. But when we go to the other extreme, we develop attachment towards them. We may begin to see them entirely in a good light and that everything about them is perfect and appealing and there is no fault at all. At this extreme we will attribute 100% quality to that person, when in reality there might really be only 5% and the rest is exaggeration from our own mind. In that event our attitude towards that person will be influenced by attachment or desire.

If we honestly investigate our own perceptions in that way we would notice that this is very true. Our anger or

attachment taints our perception of the object as being entirely ugly or beautiful. Researchers, doctors and so forth have also discovered that this is very true. The main point that I am emphasising is the need to investigate our perceptions and how they influence our attitude to an individual or a situation. That is something that is worth looking into and investigating. The technique of meditation is essential to adequately and effectively conduct an unbiased and good investigation within oneself. So this is where the importance of meditation arises.

The practical benefit of beginning to understand how our attitudes towards others are very much tainted by extremes, either anger or attachment, is that we would not be so prone to allow anger to infest us for too long. For example, if we can accept this reality and remind ourselves of it again and again then when we get angry at an object, we may be able to remind ourselves that what I am seeing in this individual that causes me to become upset or angry is only 5% from their side; the rest, 95%, comes from my own mind or attitude. If we can remind ourselves of this fact then we would immediately calm down and not be as inclined to become upset and angry. By realising that it is only 5% fault on their side, we would reason that it is not appropriate for me to get upset and angry with them. So it can help in that way.

When there is a strong attachment for a person because they appear to be beautiful, one can remind oneself that their beauty is only 5%, and no more than that, and 95% of what I think is beauty in that object is coming from my own faulty state of mind. If one can remind oneself in that way, an infatuated attraction towards that person will subside and the agitation in our mind due to the attachment will naturally subside. Then we will immediately feel much calmer. By adopting these attitudes we can be free from intense anger and attachment. If we can be free from intense attachment and anger then we will greatly benefit from it.

Anger gives you a false sense of superiority or strength, even physically. Someone who is normally a bit weak and might not be so inclined to fight, actually starts to feel strong when they feel the intensity of anger. The body seems to stiffen up and it may give them a sense of invincibility. It is good to be aware of this fact because we might think when we are dealing with a person who is a weakling, especially if they are ill, but if they become angry that will give them the strength, so you had better watch out! (*Geshe-la chuckles*).

The point is that if we employ these means of self-analysis and investigation to study our mental states and attitudes and how to deal with them effectively, then we can benefit our well-being. Actually, finding out and investigating the states of mind is not an entirely new technique. Even in western culture there have been individuals studying in the field of the workings of the mind called 'psychology'. For quite a long time I have understood and heard from others that the psychological study of the mind has dwindled at certain times and been a little bit stagnant. But it seems that modern psychologists are taking what has been discovered and studied previously and taking it a little bit further and expanding the scope of psychology. That is what I understand, which is a very good, very healthy, sign.

In summary, the main point that I am trying to emphasise this evening is that one of the best means and ways to secure well-being is by developing a genuine sense of joy and happiness within one's mind and the best technique to do this is meditation.

So what does the technique of meditation entail? I regularly teach that meditation is basically a technique where one chooses a virtuous object, or simply an object that does not cause any delusions to arise in one's mind, as an appropriate object to focus on and one places one's entire focus and attention upon that object. One tries to maintain one's attention and focus upon that object for a period of time. The more we familiarise ourselves with this technique of focusing on an object that does not cause the delusions to arise, to that extent, the mind naturally subsides from all forms of distractions and experiences a sense of genuine calmness and tranquillity.

The reason why it is emphasised that the object should not be an object that causes the delusions to arise is because if one were to focus on such an object, then it defeats the purpose of meditation. The whole point of meditation is to try to free the mind from the negative states of mind or emotions that cause us turmoil, anxiety, fear and so forth. So the object needs to be one that does not cause any negative states of mind to arise. It can be any object, either a virtuous object or a neutral object, as long as the object does not cause any form of delusion to arise in the mind. Then, having chosen the appropriate object, one places one's full attention and focus upon the object and maintains that focus for a period of time. That is the technique of a formal meditation. Then it is a matter of familiarising oneself, acquainting oneself, with focusing on that object.

I can relate a very practical approach to understanding the benefits of meditation. Initially, if one thinks about meditation one may get lost in the complexities of how one should meditate or what antidote to apply for the particular types of delusion that arise. It may become a little complex in one's mind. In order to rid oneself from these complications it is good to use practical examples to see the effectiveness of the practice of meditation. We can look at an easy example in one's everyday life. One will know from one's own experience that when one is in an intense moment of anger in relation to an object that for as long as think about the object our anger will be fuelled and we will become more upset, angry and agitated. If we even temporarily divert our attention from the object that causes us anger and makes us feel upset, we notice that the anger naturally subsides and we will feel a little bit relaxed and have some relief from that intense feeling of anger. That will be a benefit. We would see that our mind becomes calmer and more relaxed, because we are relieved of that intense anger.

It is the same with attachment. If one is infatuated with an object of desire then the more we think about it the more we feel uncomfortable and agitated. Being agitated and worked up is not a comfortable state to be in. If we divert our attention to another object, whatever it may be, we will immediately feel relief from that intense attachment or desire. Using these practical means as an example, we can understand the benefits of the practice of meditation when we do it in a regulated and formal way.

The chosen object for our meditation here is our own breath. Whether focusing on the breath can become an antidote for overcoming anger and attachment is difficult to say. However, if we are able to successfully focus on the breath then during the time that we focus on the breath we will definitely be released from any immediate or manifest levels of anger or attachment. During that time any manifest levels of negative states of mind or delusion will definitely subside. Therefore, to that extent it definitely benefits us, even if

when we only get a little immediate release from anger and attachment. It is definitely a positive thing to do and we can experience a definite benefit from that. So, to that extent, it is worthwhile to do this practice.

In relation to specific antidotes for overcoming specific negative states of mind or delusions, the teaching indicates the specific antidote for overcoming attachment is focusing on the defects or faults of an object. To overcome intense anger the appropriate antidote is to meditate on compassion. It is said that meditating on emptiness, the ultimate reality of phenomena, is the ultimate antidote for overcoming all forms of delusion. The teachings give specific practices to overcome specific delusions. The meditation of focusing on the breath is described as a very effective method for overcoming an overly discursive mind that is full of distractions, thoughts and speculations. To overcome such a busy state of mind, the most appropriate meditation is focusing on the breath. Focussing on the breath is not prescribed as a specific antidote for overcoming attachment, anger or other delusions. However when the very discursive and busy state of mind subsides we are naturally released from the intensity of the delusion. So, to that extent, it is an effective technique.

We will now apply this meditation technique. So, first let us readjust our physical posture to in an upright but comfortable and relaxed posture. Then we adjust our mental state to be as bright and clear as possible and within that bright, clear state of mind we make a commitment to temporarily reduce or completely remove ourselves from all forms of distractions and not pay attention to any other thoughts and ideas and so forth. We completely withdraw our mind from all forms of distraction and then bring our focus inwards and place it upon the breath and maintain our focus on the breath for the next few minutes. We will spend the next few minutes in meditation in this way. (*Pause for meditation.*)

It would be useful to apply the practice that we have attempted now in our short session in our daily life. The technique that we applied now, which is focusing on the breath, while not complicated to understand can definitely have a benefit to release us from intense negative states of mind such as anger, attachment, desire, jealousy, pride and so forth. We have many forms of negative states of mind which, when they are manifested, lead us to experience the negative consequences of feeling agitated, in turmoil and lacking peace and calmness within oneself. Therefore it is really in our own interest that we try to protect our mind from the influence of these intense negative states of mind

If we take it upon ourselves to apply the meditation technique on regular basis, particularly when we are prone to intense, negative states of mind, then we can definitely calm down a bit and not to give in to the negative state of mind. That is how we can protect ourselves from negativities. When we are able to overcome these intense negative states of mind of anger, desire and so forth, we will experience a natural calmness and feel settled within oneself. Within that experience of calmness and being settled we will also experience a sense of joy and happiness that is ultimately what we seek for our well-being.

While we are protecting ourselves from the negative states of mind on one hand, on the other hand we need to protect positive states of mind such as love and compassion, genuine kindness and genuine concern towards others. These are states of mind or attitudes that, in every aspect, have a benefit for us as well as practical benefits for those

around us. These are positive states of mind that we need to constantly protect and uphold within ourselves. Protecting the positive states of mind such as love and compassion and kindness and genuine concern for others also has a direct connection or influence over the clarity and brightness of our own state of mind which contributes to joy and happiness within us. It directly has a positive effect of protecting the happiness within one's mind.

Just as it is essential to protect the sense of happiness and joy within one's mind our physical health is also very important for our well-being. We need to protect our health. The practical means to protect one's health and to remain in good health is to avoid things that are detrimental to our health, such as certain kinds of food and drink. If we neglect to protect ourselves from consuming certain foods and drinks that are detrimental to our health, then as a result we may suffer from illness which is uncomfortable.

Now, because of the fact of being a human being, we all undergo a certain amount of mental distress and physical illness. To certain extent that is something that is unavoidable. By the mere fact of having been born with the contaminated aggregates, one is prone to sometimes feeling sad or distressed and physical illness. That is something that we need to accept as a fact of our existence. This is true for any ordinary human being with any status, regardless of whether they are rich or famous. No one, with the exception of realised beings, is spared from a certain amount of physical and mental unease; as long as we are ordinary human beings this is part of our reality.

Nevertheless, even though some things are out of our control, some states of mind and health issues can be prevented. If we neglect taking control of our own emotions and attitudes and experience mental distress that would be because of one's own negligence and not having paid attention to this. So the immediate cause is one's own negligence. Likewise physically, if we don't avoid certain kinds of food and excessive alcohol which is detrimental to our health, then we haven't taken responsibility for our own health. Those are avoidable, so it's a matter of paying attention and applying a little of discipline in one's own life, for one's well-being. The point I am relating is that is useful for us to consider this. Even if we are quite well now, physically and mentally, there are many measures to improve our well-being. That is what we can pay attention to and that is what can be improved.

It is worthwhile considering improving our mental state and physical health because what we ultimately wish for is well-being for ourselves. That is what we all wish for. So, by every means, it is completely appropriate that we explore improving our mental and physical states. To the extent of our ability, it is worthwhile to pay attention to maintaining our health and so forth but when someone does suffer certain kind of illness it can become a quite pitiful and sad situation.

In a recent TV account we witnessed a young child of seven years who died. The TV showed quite a bit about the situation of a child succumbing to disease and losing their life. The parents were really distressed and when I witnessed that I couldn't help holding back my tears for such a sad occurrence. How much sadness would the parents have experienced? They had such affection for the child that they did not want to be separated from the child at any cost. But under these circumstances they were without control and had to be separated from the child. There was nothing that could be done and yet it caused so much sadness and

distress to the minds of the parents and for me witnessing this was a sad, sad situation. There is not much one can do but say prayers and dedicate them to the child and her parents. Even now when I think about the situation it brings sadness and a determination to send out prayers and goodwill for the family and the child. There are sad situations like these. This again is part of the reality of being born as human being. We are all prone to disease and illnesses. This is the reality.

Finally, I would like to really show my appreciation for those of you who have come throughout the year. You have shown keen interest and come to this session very eagerly, with lots of love, joy and determination. I would like to put my hands together in our traditional style and say 'thank you' from the depth of my heart. A particular source of joy and happiness for me is to see your eagerness to learn when you come here. Not only do you come to the session but you come with a really keen interest and goodwill. That is what I really appreciate.

On January 12 a meditation program will start. It will be led by experienced students, Allys and Jeremy. It would be good if you were able to come to that. It will be beneficial. Monday evening sessions start from January 3. The first Mondays will again be led by experienced students. While new students may come to the sessions, it will be good for older students to also come for meditation regardless of who is leading the meditation. Who is leading is not the main point. The main point is to have an opportunity to meditate with like-minded people and get the benefit. When older students meditate it will inspire the new students as well.

So, on behalf of the Tara Institute, the whole community, I would like to wish everyone a merry Christmas and a happy new year. I have made an attempt to find out what 'merry Christmas' really connotes. I have not yet been given a satisfactory explanation of what 'merry' means. Someone described it as being related to merits, like accumulating merits but I am not too sure. There is a Tibetan saying that if someone is asked to describe something they just repeat the same words saying, 'you know "merry" means merry, there's not much more meaning than that' (*Laughter*). There is not much explanation except for what the word 'merry' means.

I have been given a good explanation of what 'happy new year' could connote. I consider these words, 'happy new year', quite sacred. There can be a deeper meaning with this greeting. In giving the words a deeper implication, 'happy' would relate to happiness and we can take it further to mean a genuine sense of well-being and happiness within oneself. 'New year' of course relates to the coming year. So what this is implying is to greet others and make the commitment for one to take it upon oneself to bring a genuine sense of happiness within oneself for the coming year. That, I feel, is really significant. It can also have a relevance to one's outlook and attitude to one's well-being in the coming year. Whether we have had a good time or a bad time, the year is coming to an end. So, we can look forward to the new year with a new sense of determination and new sense of energy to apply one's life towards the aim of gaining a real sense of happiness and contentment. That is something that can be also be a practical approach for the new year.

From my side, my offering is to make prayers for your well-being in relation to having a healthy, long life and to have prosperity and well-being. This is done from a sense of love for all of you. This is in the spirit of the western greeting, 'I wish you love'. Besides the actual greeting, the conveying of

one's love to others is very significant. It can bring a lot of solace for someone else and seems to benefit others. For example, one may have had a difficult relationship with someone but if one comes to terms with it and relates to him or her that one might actually love them, then that can change their whole attitude to you and begin to endear themselves to you. The very word 'love' is meaningful and soothing. If one means it when one says it, then it definitely carries weight.

Before we conclude for the evening we can again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time, as we sit in an appropriate relaxed posture with a fresh and clear state of mind, the object to focus on will be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. As we bring our full focus to the sound of the mantra we try to maintain that sense of focus on the sound. Then, when the mantra recitation stops, we try to maintain a focus on the residue of the sound for a while within a sense of joy and happiness within one's mind. That then becomes your meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed from tape by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by John Burch
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
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