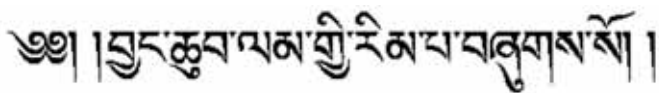

The Condensed Lam Rim



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual it would be good to spend some time for meditation. I suppose we would all assume ourselves as meditators. So naturally what a meditator does is to meditate!

In order to engage in a meditation practice, first of all we try to adopt a very comfortable posture.

The particular instruction of the sitting posture, which would be summarised into having a comfortable posture, is essential, because if we were to feel unease in any part of our body during our meditation, that would become a distraction. We would not be able to meditate well because we would be distracted by the pain and discomfort.

While we may secure a comfortable physical posture, the next thing is to pay attention to the state of our mind. If we were to not pay attention to the proper state of mind, what could make meditation more impossible?

When we relate to the mind, it is noteworthy to first of all consider it as an aspect of ourselves to be trained, and in particular, to be transformed. In other words, it is possible to change your mindset; in the earlier stages of life the mindset is more habitually negative, something to be trained and transformed into positivity, and it is definitely possible to transform the mind. If we don't make an attempt it is because there are doubts about the possibility of mind transformation. But with the right motivation and attempt to transform the mind and practise, it can be seen as really and truly possible.

In fact the real connotation of "Dharma" is to actually protect or to hold the mind against negativity. So the real connotation here is the implication of holding back the mind from negative influences and thereafter experiencing freedom from negativity. That which allows for the mind to refrain and hold back negative influence that is the real connotation of Dharma and the spirituality of Buddhism. Understanding this fundamental truth of Dharma is central to success in practice.

Meditation is a technique to prevent negative states of mind from arising by focusing the mind on a positive object. What that is, is something we can choose as suitable for our meditation. Thus, understanding the implication of what meditation really means is also a way for us to benefit from it. The practice here is the avoidance of negative habits of mind by developing positive behaviours, as it is by the merit of our good mind, words and deeds that we remain away from negativity. This is dependent on keeping our mind focused on the virtuous object of our mediation. When we are able to do that in a sitting, to actually place our mind, focus on a virtuous object then that is when the practice of meditation has actually taken effect. When we put that into practice we will feel a sense of release in our mind, and a sense of calmness within one's mind. When we begin to experience that for ourselves, we will then understand the

real significance of the practice of meditation. It becomes really meaningful and useful in one's life.

To further understand the significance of the practice of meditation, it would be good to really understand how the practice of meditation actually works to transform one's mind; to really transform negative mind into positive states and create a greater sense of well-being within oneself. So to understand that, first of all let us consider how our mind is at most times obsessed with an object that causes distress. There are certain situations or objects, which, as soon as they come to mind, challenge and disturb the mind. We have a weighed-down feeling, feeling a sense of loss of direction, hopelessness and feeling that we are losing self-confidence. When one reaches such a state of mind, it is a very uncomfortable situation to be in, because it hinders our well-being. We feel like we cannot move in any direction, we can't act upon anything because we are just so obsessed or troubled with that state of mind. Taking a particular example, which we all know, we may all have a personal experience such that as soon as we recall associated memories they bring unease into our mind. And often what happens is that we really feed into that, we seem to be obsessed with it. We never consider how we can actually come out of it. We just seem to feed it more with more speculation, more thoughts, more paranoia and so forth.

Therefore, with the technique of meditation when we intentionally divert our focus from that object or situation that causes distress, and place it upon our chosen object of meditation, which is particularly a virtuous object, as a result we begin to experience a relief. Because of the positive state of mind, we experience a sense of release and real sense of well-being. This is something that definitely happens.

You can definitely attest to it from your own experience if you were to sincerely practice. Even though after the initial relief that we experience from that brief practice of meditation, we might again feel that we are a victim of an uncomfortable state of mind and influenced by the object that causes us distress, however we do gain a temporary relief and sense of well-being. Of course as beginners it might be hard for us to completely distance ourselves from that object which causes us distress, but through familiarity with the practice of meditation and devotion to practice over time, it will become easier for us to let go of the obsessional habits and the negative states of mind. We will become more in tune with the positive state of mind by the virtue of the practice of meditation. Thus we will begin to see the real transformation taking place within oneself. And this is how it would be good for us to understand the significance of the practice of meditation.

The main point that I have been mentioning so far can be summarised into two main lines. As experienced by all of us, there are certain states of mind that as soon as we allow ourselves to be in, it causes us distress and unease. Whereas there are certain other states of mind which we would call virtuous or positive states of mind which as soon as we experience, then we feel a sense of joy; a sense of well-being and happiness. So, in summary what I am saying is let us abandon the states of mind which cause us distress, and adopt and further strengthen those states of mind which cause us a sense of well-being. Now having mentioned that as the main point, then the question is, "How do we do that?"

To say, "this is what we must do" without presenting a technique would not be fair. So the technique of how to

abandon the negative states of mind and adopt positive states of mind is by engaging in the practice of meditation. This is the main point I am presenting: that the practice of meditation is most essential for our ultimate well-being. To analyse in this way by checking one's own mind, to find out what is really useful and what is harmful for oneself is most essential. What are the negative states of mind that as soon as they occur cause distress, unease and agitation? And what are the positive states of mind, which cause us well-being and ease? To analyse, to think about it and analyse it in such a way is part of the practice of meditation.

As the great meditation master Geshe Karapa mentioned, "If we don't know the state of our own mind, we will not experience real joy in what ever we do". As this great meditation master had mentioned, it is exactly true that we if we don't know our own state of mind by distinguish between what is a positive state of mind and a negative state of mind, then there is no way for us to experience a real sense of joy, a real sense of happiness within oneself. How do we begin to understand and distinguish this? It is through self-analysis, through investigating one's own state of mind. That is the only way. By recognising and identifying the negative states of mind we are then able to overcome it. There is no other way. It is not as if we can chase away the negative states of mind with a stick or with stones—like scaring off dogs or other menacing creatures—we cannot scare away the negative attitudes within ourselves. The only way is through the practice of meditation. These are the main points we need to consider for the practice of meditation.

Another essential point that we need to consider on a regular basis is that we have the ability or potential to overcome the negative states of mind. We all have that potential and ability to abandon the negative states of mind; the reason is because the negative states of mind are not based on reality but rather on false conceptions. Thus, they are not based on reality. Every negative attitude within—what we call the delusions—is based on false conceptions; and whatever is based on falsity can not withstand logic. When you use logic and reasoning to establish truth and reality, then that which is not true will eventually fade away through the virtue of sound logic and reasoning. That is why the delusions, or negative states of mind, can be completely eradicated from one's mind. This is a most essential point to contemplate.

We do not have to have a belief in past or future lives in order to benefit from the practice of meditation. The ultimate goal in Buddhism is to attain liberation and enlightenment; but even if we do not really have a clear understanding or belief in that we can still benefit from the practice of meditation. The reason why one would be interested in meditation is because we all naturally wish to have a clear and bright state of mind, complemented with the ability to have clear, discerning wisdom, and also further complemented with a peaceful and joyful state of mind, a content mind. So if that is something that we wish for, then the meditation practice is something that would be useful for oneself, regardless of whether we consider ourselves religious or not, whether we have any beliefs in past and future lives and so forth. If we naturally want to have a clear, bright state of mind, a peaceful, happy mind, then the meditation practice applies. The technique is useful for oneself. That is why we should consider the need to practice meditation.

So at this stage we can now actually take the time to actually adopt the meditation technique.

As mentioned previously, let us readjust our physical posture as that it is in a comfortable posture. While adopting a comfortable posture it is most essential that we pay attention to our state of mind. Primarily the most important thing is to ensure that we have a bright and clear state of mind, as opposed to a lethargic or sluggish mind, to induce a clear and bright state of mind. A clear and bright state of mind becomes a most suitable basis to actually engage in the practice of meditation. The next point of the mindset is for the purpose of meditation is to intentionally withdraw from all forms of distraction. It is the distractions that cause distress and confusion in our mind. Therefore, for the practice of meditation now, to make it really a proper practice, we need to intentionally withdraw from all forms of distractions. Just bring your focus to the object of meditation, which is your own breath. With the natural inhalation and exhalation, we place our full attention and focus just on our breath. In this way we try to maintain a 100% focus on the breath itself.

(Pause for meditation)

That should be sufficient for now.

As we attempted in our short meditation session now, it would be highly worthwhile to incorporate a few minutes of meditation, such as 5 minutes of meditation session each day in our daily life. It is not really the quantity, but the quality. Even a short meditation in our daily life where we really focus on the object will definitely bring about a significant benefit for oneself. Even in this short meditation session we can see how it actually benefits us. If during the meditation we have found a sense of relief, a sense of tranquillity and calmness in our mind, then that is because of the fact that we have temporarily diverted our attention and focus from the things and objects which normally cause us distress, anxiety, fear and so forth. All the unwanted feelings that we experience are temporarily cut off because we are not focusing on the object that causes distress and so forth. Therefore we immediately feel the relief when we do the meditation practice properly, even if it is for a few minutes. During that few minutes we have actually successfully diverted our attention from the negativities; from that which causes us unpleasantness and an uncomfortable feeling within ourselves. If we regularly practise diverting our attention from that, and place it upon a virtuous or positive object then, due to that familiarity, our mind will become more and more acquainted with focusing on something positive.

Then through the virtue of that practice, at a later stage, even if a normal situation or object that ordinarily causes us distress comes up we would find that it does not cause us as much distress as in the past. In the past when an uncomfortable situation or some object that causes distress comes up, then as soon as we were under that influence we might have found ourselves to be completely under the sway of that influence and feeling distressed and uncomfortable for a long period of time. Whereas through the practice of meditation the difference that we would notice for ourselves is that, even when that uncomfortable situation or object comes to mind, it will not influence us to the great extent as it used to in the past. When we begin to notice that for ourselves, then that is clear sign of the positive effect of the practice of meditation. That is a clear sign of transformation taking place within oneself. Through

that gradual process and practice, we will find the benefit of it. Ultimately, this is how we take responsibility of one's own mind and one's own life.

To bring goodness and well-being into one's own life, we need to take that responsibility ourselves. There is no other way that others can make our lives better for us. The only way that others can really help us is by giving us some good advice. Through their experience, sharing some good advice or some good techniques is what others can do for us. But after we hear it, we are the ones who need to implement it. We are the ones who have to put it into practice. Thus it is clear that ultimately, we have to take the responsibility ourselves. This is why it is necessary for us to actually implement the practice of meditation in our daily life.

When we think about it in this way, then it begins to dawn upon us that meditation practice is also a way of bringing about good behaviour and mannerisms for oneself.

With the few minutes remaining for our session, I can either continue with the topic unless there are some questions. If anyone has a question you can raise your hand.

There's no rush for us to go through the subject. It is my approach to take it slowly and work with it gradually. I think that is more suitable for us. Indeed this attitude of taking it slowly is a very practical approach to trying to achieve something. There is a common saying "You can go quickly—slowly". [*Geshe-la laughs*] This is also, as I have related in the past, from my own experience when I escaped from Tibet. When we were on an escape route, and came across the border we were very anxious to get to the place that we had to get to. In that anxiety we would be asking the villagers and nearby people, "How far is it that we have to go? How soon will we reach there?" There was a particular camp that was set up, and we were told that we had to reach that place. So we were asking the locals, "How soon will we reach there? How can we go there?" And one of the responses that I remember to this day from so many years ago is, "You will reach there quickly if you go slowly." [*laughter all around*] In fact what he said has really rung true in my life as I have noticed that when we are hasty, it doesn't speed things up. Actually it might hinder our process when we are hasty and try to rush things. Rather if we just take it slowly and take it easy, things become easier to manage and thus the result will come out sooner, quicker.

You might have the experience also that whenever you feel rushed, that is when things don't really work out so well. It might actually obstruct what we are doing and take more time. Whereas if we feel relaxed and calm, then whatever task we have at hand, it's manageable. We can do it well and we actually get the result. With that experience, then we can see the truth of the saying that, "We can reach quickly by going slowly".

On a similar note, as I recall from childhood when I was young, the most exciting event in the year was Tibetan New Year, because it was a big celebration and there was a lot of goodies and so forth. As youngsters, on Tibetan New Year's Eve we would all feel very anxious about when the sun rising and the first day of the New Year and that we will get our goodies. [*Geshe-la laughs*] That evening seemed much longer than usual. It seemed to take much longer to go through the night and for the sun to rise. That is because of anxiety in the mind. It is not as if it is taking unusually longer for the sun to rise. It is just because of the anxiety in the mind, being very apprehensive and anxious about it. And it seems also true for kids here when it is Christmas

time. Kids seem to be asking, "When is it going to be Christmas?" And especially on Christmas Eve they are very anxious about the next day and receiving their presents. That's another clear sign.

And I have noticed that some kids would be asking their mums, "So when is Christmas coming?" And if it is still a month ahead, when the mum responded that there is still a month, they would say, "Oh goodness. That's a long time." They seem to be disappointed.

So that was on the point of going gradually through the teachings. However, coming back to the point of questions, if there are any questions I'd be happy to answer.

Question: You mentioned earlier that one should keep one's entire focus on the object during meditation. So, does that mean that we don't allow any thoughts to occur in the mind?

Answer: That is true. As you mention, while adopting the meditation to focus on the breath, then just keeping your entire focus and attention on the breath itself is a most essential part of the practice. Therefore, any kind of other thought, even what we would normally consider positive thoughts, good thoughts, is a distraction for that particular practice, because this is a technique to eventually develop single-pointed concentration. Within an attempt to develop single-pointed concentration, any other thoughts or any other object other than the chosen object becomes a distraction.

To elaborate a little further, even a positive thought, for example by focusing on the suffering of certain beings, when one focuses on the suffering of beings initially if one is practiced in compassion, by the mere recollection of suffering of other beings it induces a sense of love and compassion which is a very virtuous, positive state of mind. Feeling love and compassion for other beings is incredibly virtuous and positive. However, when one is actually attempting to develop single-pointed concentration and using in this case the breath as an object to focus on that, even that sort of positive thinking becomes a distraction. As soon as you think about it you are diverted from your object of focus. So that then actually becomes a distraction. That is how it is to be understood, not that positive thoughts should be avoided entirely, but during the meditation practice, one should avoid to be distracted by that.

As beginners, if we allow our mind to be distracted—with the assumption that it is a positive thought, in this example compassion—initially we might feel, "OK, I am feeling compassion for other sentient beings. That is a really good thing so I should allow my mind to go there." If one allows that to become habit, then because of our habituation with other kinds of attitudes and focuses as well, sooner or later we might actually be diverted to other kinds of distractions, which are not really positive, not really virtuous. So in that way, it is like our mind is tricking us to be diverted temporarily—because it is good—but in fact if we allow that we could go on to other objects. So you can see the significance here.

Question: As Buddhism teaches non-violence, what should one do in a situation where one's life is threatened and especially your children's life is threatened?

Answer: One point we need to really understand here so that there is no misunderstanding or misinterpretation is that the Buddha's teachings are definitely based on non-violence. But adopting non-violent conduct does not mean that one cannot

correct something that is wrong or right. One has to make that distinction first of all.

To take a particular example again, maybe it's not as drastic as your example of the life being threatened, but imagine two people who are partners in a relationship. If there were to be a dispute between the two involving, for example, dividing the assets, each partner would have a legal right to having the assets divided equally, right? Not acting with violence in this situation does not imply that one should not take measures to get one's fair share of the assets, if the other is trying to take advantage of maybe taking your share and not giving what rightly belongs to you. Non-violence in this situation doesn't mean allowing the other to completely abuse you, take advantage of your share and completely deprive you of what rightly belongs to you.

What it means is that one needs to fight for one's share, but *without* losing a sense of compassion for the other person. The argument or dispute that I am adopting here is to "get what is rightly mine and what is rightly for the other too". So with that attitude in mind, to actually go along with the legal procedure and so forth to get one's own share rightly, without wishing to "get even" with them, or take revenge, or harm them in any way, you just make things equal and fair. With that attitude one does not need to use violence. To get what rightly belongs to oneself is not a violent act. But to go about it without compassion but with hatred and anger would be a violent act. So the key point is compassion in the motivation so your actions are harmless at all times.

The main point to take into consideration here is that what is defined as a violent act is an act done out of anger. When you do something out of extreme anger, then that act itself—whatever one does, intentions and so forth—when it is tainted with anger or hatred, becomes violent and harmful, not only to the other but to oneself. There are so many examples that we can have, so many illustrations of how out of anger—even attempting to right a wrong—when it's done out of anger and hatred, the results don't come out good. It becomes disastrous. In the unfortunate event that a separation takes place, when it is done out of anger and hatred, there is so much hurt, so much unease on both sides. Whereas if there was a genuine concern, genuine love and compassion for each other, then even in the event of the separation needing to take place because of their situation, because of that genuine concern and compassion for each other, there is not that much hurtful experience, not that much unease when that separation takes place. Thus what I am pointing out is that the attitude one has for the other. If it's without strong anger and hatred, then the act itself, whatever happens is more likely to be a better situation.

As a general rule, we would have to say that, according to the legal system it seems that if a violent act is done out of self-defence, then it is acceptable to retaliate. According to the legal system, that seems to be the case. Whether the legal procedure is being done on an honest basis or not is another matter. If it is done in an honest way, it seems that that is something that conventionally is accepted. Your question was a good question.

When I was recently visiting Khensur Rinpoche in Adelaide, there was one teacher, the master there. When I conversed with him he mentioned after a teaching he gave in Tasmania when he stressed the point that Buddhism is based on non-violence, that one should not under any circumstances act with violence. After the talk a person there called Jampa asked Khensur Rinpoche, "So, would that mean that if

someone came to threaten my girlfriend, even threaten her life, I would just have to sit by and watch that?" The person didn't mention what his answer was, but he asked me "What kind of answer would you give in that situation?" I told him that, actually the answer is quite simple; a husband or partner who is timid and afraid would just sit in a corner and watch. But if they could show some bravery then they would go out and protect their wife. This is an accepted convention and that's the answer I would give. *[laughter all around]* He said that sounded quite reasonable.

Before we conclude the session for the evening, it would be good to take again an opportunity to engage in a brief meditation. This time the focus of our meditation would be the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we hear the chant of the Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra, we keep our entire focus and attention on the sound itself. Then as the recitation subsides, we just maintain that awareness and focus of the earlier focus on the sound. And just maintain that for a few moments. So in that way this becomes the actual meditation and focus.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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