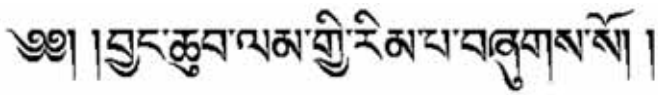

The Condensed Lam Rim



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As usual we will spend some time for meditation. For that purpose, we can adopt a comfortable, relaxed posture. At the same time, we can ensure that the mind is in a calm, clear and bright state.

One purpose of meditation is to find out whether we can induce a genuinely calm and relaxed state of mind while we are physically relaxed. I personally see the combination of being physically and mentally relaxed essential for obtaining what one wishes for, and to make life meaningful.

Some of you may find what I am about say is contradictory to the way things normally work. If you do not investigate and think further about the points I make, they might seem contradictory. My perception is that the way most people try to find happiness is to be distracted by external things and be physically very active. When the mind is busy searching for external sources of happiness, our body also becomes busy. So this combination seems to be the approach most people take to seek happiness. In other words, most of us seem to look for happiness from within a state of mental and physical busyness.

We should not completely undermine that approach – of course it can help one obtain a certain level of happiness. However if we allow ourselves to be constantly influenced by physical and mental agitation, our habituation to this might lead to complications and problems in our life. That is what I notice; you may have come to notice and experience this yourselves.

If one leads one's life like that, being completely distracted with external things and constantly agitated, then when one reaches the age of 70 or so, due to habituation, the mind would still be active and agitated. However, one's body would not be able to keep up. This might cause great suffering for the mind. But if instead one were to train one's mind to be calm, focused and peaceful, then due to familiarisation, when one reached the age of 70, naturally the mind would be very calm. I would recommend the practice of meditation to be adopted now as means to benefit us at that age.

We can begin to understand that whether or not one's mind is in a state of happiness and calm at an older age will depend on habituating the mind with meditation during the earlier part of one's life. This acquaintance in turn affects one's well-being. As I mentioned, if one has spent most of one's life being immersed in worldly distractions and not paying attention to keeping the mind calm and peaceful, then due to that habituation, when one reaches old age, suffering and unease would be experienced at a much greater level.

Since we rightly wish to take responsibility for our own future, we should pay attention to what would contribute to the real future security of having a relaxed and calm state of mind. That is done through the practice of now adopting the

technique of calming one's mind and distancing ourselves from being immersed in distractions.

If one is young in particular, this training should be adopted now. I have seen how, through the course of life, these factors seem to be true. Thus I am sharing my suggestions and advice with the younger generation in particular: try to pay attention to developing one's mind, to having a calmer, more focused mind. Then, develop positive mental qualities, such as compassion, kindness and genuine concern for others. If one trains in that way when one is young, it will definitely become a natural attitude. But I also often mention to younger people, that it is good to combine this with spending time and energy acquiring some financial means through work; and in order to get work in the future, one needs to study.

So one needs to pay attention to one's studies; further, one needs to utilise those studies for acquiring a good job and so forth. Meanwhile, rather than focusing completely on just the financial side of one's well-being – working in a job and going about one's daily activities – one could also spend some time securing a more stable, focused mind. This will then induce the positive mental qualities of genuine kindness and concern for others. Thus a happy state of mind will be induced naturally.

If one pays attention to developing one's state of mind now, one has the prospect of having a happy future. Later on, at the ripe age of around 70, you would not be deprived of physical comfort, because you would have engaged in acquiring sufficient funds for yourself to live comfortably. So physically you would not be deprived. But also, because you had paid attention early in our life to developing a focused, clear mind, you would naturally also have a calm and peaceful state of mind later in life. That is something we need to attend to now.

When I share my advice with the younger generation in particular, it is really from my genuine concern that you do not neglect taking equal responsibility for securing your future financial well-being and mental state now. Then, when one reaches a ripe age in the future, one will not be deprived of physical comfort, because one has engaged in study, secured a good job and established one's financial security and, having paid attention to one's state of mind, one will not be deprived of mental happiness. That is the best combination for one's well-being.

Securing that combination of conditions for external and internal well-being is done through the practice of meditation. This is how the practice of meditation becomes relevant in one's life. When we do the practice of meditation, we might get some temporary feeling of being relaxed, but that is not the ultimate purpose of the practice. Rather we need to ensure that the practice of meditation becomes a means to secure our long-term goal of happiness and well-being. When we apply the practice sincerely and regularly in our daily life, it naturally becomes a means to secure our future well-being.

This is really important; it's essential that we consider this. One's well-being is very much related to the state of one's mind. When we pay attention to developing the positive qualities of our mind – such as having a clear, focused, bright state of mind – this state then induces an intelligence or wisdom. That wisdom or intelligence will become the ultimate aid for us to ensure that, whatever we do, we do it in a proper way; utilising that which is beneficial and discarding that which is not beneficial. And that will

naturally be the cause for one's mind to be genuinely happy. This is how we can see the relevance of the practice of meditation in our daily lives, for our benefit now as well as for the future.

Having mentioned the practical benefits of meditation, we can adopt the practice for a short time now. Again, we reassess our physical posture and make sure we are sitting comfortably, relaxed and straight. Developing a positive intention is equally important. As mentioned in the teachings, what determines whether an activity will be good is our intention. So for meditation we need to have a clear intention, recalling the purpose of our practice, which is along the lines mentioned previously. In order to really apply the proper technique of meditation, we need to have full commitment. Even if it's for a short time, when we fully commit to doing the practice well, it becomes really beneficial. Even a short practice becomes meaningful and our acquaintance with the proper technique will ensure we always do the practice well.

To follow the proper meditation technique, first we need to completely withdraw our attention or focus from all external objects, as well as thoughts and distractions. After we bring our focus within, we then place it upon the object which, for the purpose of our meditation now, is the breath. The meditation practice involves placing our full attention and focus on the breath. That means having constant awareness of the breath. When we initially bring our focus on the breath, we might find that if we don't pay attention and if we are not constantly mindful of the breath, our mind could easily become distracted again and focus on other things. So our practice of meditation will not carry much weight because we have already become distracted.

In order to place our complete focus on the breath and maintain it there, we need to adopt the technique of being constantly mindful of the in-breath and out-breath, of our natural breathing. As we keep our focus on the breath itself, our mind would naturally become anchored to the breath. The next few minutes of engaging in the practice becomes a meaningful way to develop single-pointed focus. Our acquaintance with this will be a positive aid in whatever practice we do again in the future. Thus it is really important that we do this sincerely. So bring the focus to the breath, place it 100 per cent there, and maintain it for the next few minutes. In that way we will engage in the practice. [*Pause for meditation*] That should be sufficient for now.

It is good for us to apply the meditation technique in our daily life. Through the practice of meditation, we can really learn about the state of our own mind. We would begin to realise that by transforming our attitudes from negative to more positive ones, we would start gaining a real sense of well-being, a real sense of peace and joy. We would also begin to realise that this transformation involves recognising certain things that are detrimental to our well-being. Focusing on those things makes us agitated and disturbed. Whereas we would see that focusing on positive objects induces a sense of inner calmness and well-being. One would be able to make that distinction quite clearly.

Otherwise if we don't pay attention to our state of mind – how it works and how we need to regulate what we focus on – we might naturally return to our normal, agitated, distracted and overly excited mind. Being completely immersed in the excitement, we might not even know that time is passing. Then, when it comes time to go to bed, our

mind will be so worked up and agitated that we can't sleep well, so we will be deprived of sleep.

Indeed, what prevents us from sleeping well is the overly excited and agitated mind. Sleep, by its very nature, is a more subtle level of mind, a more subtle consciousness. One needs to be able to readily access that subtle mind to go to sleep. If, around bedtime, one's mind is overly excited and distracted, this excited mind is a grosser level of mind. It is a state of mind that relates to worldly concerns and objects. This distracted, grosser state of mind will prevent the more subtle mind of sleep arising.

On the other hand, whenever good meditators have an opportunity to sleep, they will have a very sound sleep. Of course, because they are so engaged in the practice of meditation, serious meditators don't really find that that much time to sleep!

However at our level, we definitely need sleep. In fact, it is essential for us because as explained in the texts, as well as in medical texts, sleep is a means to really relax and restore the energies in our body. We not only need to have sleep, but good sleep. Therefore, at our level, if we practise meditation, it helps to calm and quieten our mind, which will definitely induce a good sleep.

If nothing else helps, the practice of meditation – focusing single-pointedly on the object – can help one to sleep. So when going to bed just focus on the object single-pointedly. In that state of mind, one can doze off and go to sleep.

If there are any questions, if anyone would like to ask a question, a particularly good question, an interesting question...

Question: If it is the self-grasping mind which makes the decisions that are harmful, then what type of mind makes the correct decisions for oneself, and how do we distinguish between an enlightened mind and that which is not enlightened?

Answer: In order to explain the difference between those states of mind, first it would be good to get an understanding of what 'mind' is in our Buddhist tradition. Mind or consciousness, which is synonymous, is defined as an entity within oneself that is clear by nature. It is colourless and shapeless; it has no form, shape or colour. Nevertheless, it is an entity whose very nature is clear and bright. The mind's function is to reflect things. Just as a mirror reflects different external things, likewise the mind becomes aware of different phenomena, objects and so forth.

So the fundamental nature of the mind according to Buddhism is clarity. Because of this, even at an ordinary level, our mind can go through transformation and over time will eventually become what is called an enlightened mind, which is the ultimate state of purity of the mind.

When I suggest engaging in the practice of meditation to induce a clearer and brighter state of mind, what I am referring to is to supersede a mind which is otherwise confused. Even though the mind still has its fundamental nature of clarity, the occasional disturbances or obscurations that occur in the mind obscure that clarity. These obscurations include, for example, anger. When anger arises, the clarity of the mind becomes obscured. When we lose that clarity of the mind, we are then prone to making a lot of mistakes; likewise with strong desire. Or sometimes the mind feels engulfed and overwhelmed by darkness. That is like a form of ignorance manifesting in the mind. These are what obstruct the clarity of one's mind. When the mind is

obstructed by the disturbing conceptions – which we just identified as attachment, anger and ignorance – it makes the mind agitated, confused and troubled.

The great Indian master Shantideva has given an analogy for the necessity of having a clear mind. If, for example, our body is affected by disease, naturally it will be weakened and we will not be able to utilise the body's potential. Likewise when the mind is obstructed by the delusions, these defilements obstruct the mind's ultimate potential to be completely clear and focused. They weaken the potential of our mind.

To address your question, at an ordinary level, while the *nature* of one's mind may be very clear, it can be obstructed by what we call the defilements or the delusions. Thus it is not an enlightened mind yet. However, it has the potential to become an enlightened mind that is completely free from all obstructions; it abides in a perpetually clear and bright state, a loving state as you mentioned earlier. That is the ultimate goal in Buddhism.

Your question was in fact a very good question to clarify this point. I appreciate that. Thank you.

The distinction between an enlightened mind and a mind that has the nature of clarity but may otherwise be obstructed – what we call an ordinary mind – as far as they are 'minds', of course they are the same. The difference is that an unenlightened mind is still obstructed by the delusions, so there might only be moments of clarity. On the other hand, an enlightened mind is in a perpetually clear and bright state. Also, because there are no obstructions or defilements at all, not even the stains of the defilements in an enlightened mind, it is an omniscient mind. Thus the main distinction between our mind as an ordinary mind and the enlightened mind is that an enlightened mind is an omniscient mind, whereas we have limitations to what we know.

To give a simple analogy of what omniscience means, if we were to look at this clock, when we see the clock, unless we have been given its history, we have no idea as to where it was made, what kind of person made it, where the elements came from, or where each atom might have come from. All those details would be completely unknown to us. However, when an enlightened mind sees the clock or any other phenomenon, it knows every subtlest detail about the clock: where it was made, where it comes from, how each and every atom and larger molecules came together at certain times. It knows every single detail to the fullest. That is a defining quality of an enlightened mind: it is omniscient.

The Tibetan word for enlightened being is 'sang-gye' which is made of two syllables: (a) clearing away all defilements; and (b) increasing all of the best qualities. It is also referred to as the 'bodhi mind', the awakened mind.

So 'buddha', or sang-gye according to the Tibetan term, has that two-fold meaning of having completely eradicated all defilements and negativities, and completely proliferated or increased to the ultimate state all the good qualities.

Question: So, whatever the self-grasping mind decides is wrong?

Answer: First, one needs to drop the misinterpretation that everything in relation to self-grasping is a wrong mind; one needs to overcome that misconception.

What that mind relates to is a grasping to a 'self'. So there is a self, and there is grasping to a self. What this connotes is having strong grasping just to one's self.

Ven. Michael clarifies with student: Did you ask the question about 'self-grasping' or 'self-cherishing'? I need to make that clear to Geshe-la.

Student: I am not sure of the difference, but perhaps I meant self-cherishing mind.

Ven. Michael: So the answer is then in relation to self-cherishing. I might have made an error in translating self-grasping instead of self-cherishing to Geshe-la in Tibetan.

The mind of self-cherishing is not a wrong conception; it's not a completely erroneous mind. That is to be understood. However, self-cherishing is explained as a mind that obstructs one from doing good deeds, because a self-cherishing mind focuses mainly just on oneself. So the good deeds in relation to benefiting others will be obstructed by that self-cherishing mind. There are texts that equate the self-cherishing mind to the self-grasping mind. Even though they are separate minds, they are seen as being almost the same.

Here we will distinguish between the self-grasping and self-cherishing minds. Self-cherishing is an attitude of having a strong sense of self-importance, to the extent of neglecting others and holding oneself as the most important.

So the self-cherishing mind is a mind that sees oneself as being important more important than others, excluding others, and only interested in one's own concerns. Even from a worldly perspective, this is not really appreciated by others. For example, in a family of four children, the parents might say, 'All of them are quite good, but one in particular is really good in the sense of caring for others, thinking about others.' The other three children might just focus more on themselves. So that is the downside of self-cherishing. Even in a conventional sense, selfishness is not considered as a virtue.

Going back to the self-grasping mind, the conception of grasping to a self is a wrong conception, as it is grasping to a self that does not exist. It is a completely erroneous state of mind which holds on to an inherently existent self that does not exist. It is a misconception. Self-cherishing on the other hand isn't necessarily a misconception because the self that one is holding on to could be an existent self. However, there is a cherishing of that self. That is the distinction between the two states of mind. Because it is a complete misconception, self-grasping is said to be the cause of all our sufferings. That is the basic cause of all our problems.

Student: And that's the one that makes decisions with the delusions?

Answer: That's true. As mentioned in the teachings, the root of all suffering, all unwanted things is the grasping to the self. Thus if one overcomes the grasping to the self, naturally one will overcome all vices.

As mentioned previously in other sessions, the root of all problems, all unwanted things in one's life is said to be the misconception of grasping to a self. We can detect how that grasping to a self initiates all other vices or negative states of mind if we really look into our attitudes. First, the misconception of grasping to an inherently existing self induces a strong clinging to this self [which in fact does not exist]. This misconception then induces strong clinging to a self; thus that notion of 'I' or 'me' appears very strongly.

When there is a strong sense of clinging to the 'I', naturally there will be also an attachment to those things that are favourable to the self. First, because of the strong clinging to the 'I', there is also a strong clinging to 'mine', one's possessions – 'I' as an individual being and what's 'mine', one's body and other possessions. Then with that strong clinging to an 'I' and mine comes a strong attachment to those things that are favourable to the self or 'I', and anger or aversion arises for what opposes the interests of the 'I', what is unappealing to the 'I' and 'mine'. That is how, through the initial misconception of grasping to a self, the clinging to an I is induced and attachment arises towards those things that are favourable, while anger arises towards those things that are unfavourable to the self. That is how all of the vices spin out from that clinging or grasping to the self.

When we look into how our attitudes develop, what our likes and dislikes stem from, we can begin to detect that they originate from this strong clinging to the self. As many texts indicate, when there is a strong clinging, attachment and anger naturally accompany this clinging to the self. I cannot assume that this is true for everyone; there might be certain individuals who do not have anger or attachment. But for ordinary beings generally, wherever there is a clinging to a self – which is induced by the grasping to a self – attachment and anger will follow.

In whatever we do we can see this natural sequence. For example, when we see a person we like or someone who is appealing, we can detect attachment arising in the mind. When we see someone who is unappealing or someone who annoys us, we can see that anger arises.

As you were saying, in Buddhism there is not one mind that we would say is the right mind that makes decisions. In fact, just as there are many negative states of mind, there are many positive states of mind, such as compassion and love. When one acts out of love or compassion, those actions are positive. The ultimate clear mind that makes good decisions is the mind that realises selflessness, which directly opposes the grasping to a self. The mind that grasps to a self is a misconception. That which opposes this is that which understands selflessness: that there is no inherently existent self. So that state of mind is real wisdom. And decisions made out of that state of mind will ultimately be good decisions.

All levels of mind – the misconceptions, as well as wisdom in all their forms – come from one's own mind. It is a matter of the degree of clarity. In relation to the erroneous state of mind of grasping to the self, how that misconception is opposed and replaced with wisdom is by the same mind itself watching, understanding, first of all, how that grasping to the self occurs. First one realises that the grasping of a self is none other than merely holding onto an entity that does not exist, and that whatever is perceived by that erroneous grasping to a self will appear as being real and true. This analysis is a process of elimination rather than immediately gaining the wisdom; it is a process of eliminating the different levels of the erroneous mind of grasping to the self. One will initially come to understand that what is perceived by the grasping to the self doesn't actually exist in that way, and this wisdom will replace that erroneous view. When that wisdom is further stabilised and clarified, one gains the ultimate wisdom of selflessness or emptiness. That is how the process works.

When one analyses in this way using reason, one will be able to understand the statement that, while the grasping to a self

is a misconception, what opposes it is the wisdom realising selflessness. When you hear this as a statement, does it make much sense to you? But in the process of analysing and thinking about it, the truth and reality of it will dawn upon you. So it is a gradual process.

Thanks very much for the questions. They were very good.

Of course, in mentioning that the questions are good, it can also help for you to have a happy state of mind, a temporary happy state of mind.

Before we conclude the session for the evening, it would be appropriate to spend a few moments again in meditation. This time, as we sit in an appropriate physical posture and generate a focused mind, the object we will focus on is the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we hear the sound of the mantra, we maintain our complete focus and attention on that sound. When the sound subsides, we can just maintain that focus for a while.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed by Peter Boothby
Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
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