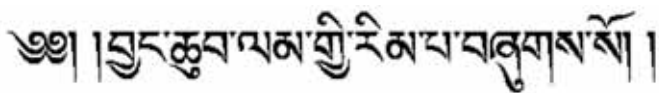


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## The Condensed Lam Rim



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As usual we can spend some time in meditation, so for that purpose we sit in a comfortable, relaxed posture. Likewise, it is important to have a bright and clear state of mind. Indeed, achieving a relaxed state physically and mentally is something that we know is beneficial in our life. It is essential. Not only in meditation, but even in our normal everyday life we find that being physically relaxed as well as mentally relaxed and calm is essential in whatever we do.

Some people acknowledge the benefits of meditation, while other say it is unrealistic to achieve mental and physical relaxation. It is beneficial to get into the habit of practising meditation, particularly in having a physically and mentally relaxed state. However, if we get into the habit of always thinking that meditation is too difficult, then we already mentally get into the habit of thinking immediately 'that is not possible, that is not possible for me'. Of course some people do have a valid reason to believe that it is not possible for them to meditate, perhaps because of the home situation, for example having young children in the house and having to spend so much time caring for them. It seems that it is hard to find the time to induce that relaxed physical and mental state.

For people who have young, rowdy and active children to look after, and who find it hard to be relaxed and calm, I advise them that while your child might be in a busy and very agitated state, you need not have to follow suite and also allow yourself to be in an agitated state. Instead, you can take the initiative to be calm yourself.

If both of you are in an agitated state, then it just gets worse, and the situation escalates. Then we will have a situation where the parents will be shouting at the kids to behave or be still, but then the children will shout back and there'll be lots of arguing going on about who should be quiet.

The point I am emphasising is that in relation to being with others, whether it is children or our partner, if we take the initiative to induce a calm and peaceful state of mind, then this would help the other person. Rather than adopting the agitated state of mind of the child, we can take the initiative to be calm, which then has a positive effect on the other person. Being calm will definitely benefit the general situation.

We cannot blame the child who is in the agitated state, because they are not mature enough to understand why it is necessary to be calm. But as a parent, as an adult, we do have that understanding. So it makes sense that the parent takes the initiative to be calm. This is a very significant point to consider.

It is important that we take the initiative to induce a relaxed and calm state, not only physically but, more importantly, on the mental level. If our mind is calm and relaxed, regardless of our physical condition, this will have a positive effect on our well-being. So therefore, within the physical

and mental level, we need to consider how important it is to find ways to settle down our mind and to make it calm.

First of all, we need to understand why the mind is not calm. Why is the mind very agitated and busy most of the time? That is because we give in to our distracted state of mind and in our disruptive conceptual thoughts. A lot of meaningless conceptual thoughts overpower our mind and we completely give in to them. We never really pay attention to how our mind is actively getting agitated and busy.

For as long as we just allow our mind to be in that state of being completely influenced by the distractions going on in the mind, then the mind will be constantly busy and in an agitated state, and thus never settled and calm. In order to identify what is causing our mind to be agitated and troubled, we need to be able to identify what is distracting or disturbing the mind. Once we have recognised that, then we can take measures to settle it down. The technique here is, which is the meditation technique, is to intentionally withdraw from all forms of distractions, and take control of our own mind and our thoughts, and don't allow our mind to follow random, distracted thoughts. By making the commitment and taking the initiative to focus our mind on a chosen object, then we notice that our mind does settle down.

Now for those of you who have tried this technique, you would notice that if you keep your mind focussed on the chosen object the mind definitely settles down. It settles down from being influenced by hundreds of meaningless distracting thoughts. And as a positive result or consequence of our mind settling down by focusing on a particular object, we feel a sense of release in our mind, a real joy. This is something, if you sincerely apply, you will experience this joy for yourself.

Now for a few minutes, we can all definitely experience that! But how long will that last? If we expect it to last much longer, then we would again be allowing our mind to be busy with distractions. For those who have made the comment, it is beneficial to have the mind settled. You may agree that it is good to have the mind settled, but nevertheless find it very difficult to maintain the focus. When we come to the point of recognising or experiencing that a settled mind is a happy joyful state of mind, then we need to first of all have a realistic approach. It is unrealistic to expect to be able to focus for a long time and achieve a calm mind immediately, because we are not familiar with that practise yet. A more realistic approach is to give it time. We need to continuously put in some effort and time in focusing our mind, beginning with a short duration, and sincerely do the practise on a daily basis. Initially we might not be able to focus for a minute or so, but then slowly we notice that after a month or two, our attention span becomes longer, maybe four or five minutes. We will see that progress if we apply the practice regularly.

For the meditation technique to work, it does require consistency and commitment. Then definitely it is possible for the mind to achieve a state where we can have a focussed mind for a long time. One of the qualities of our mind is that whatever we familiarise it with, then we will achieve that mental state. When we apply enough familiarisation with the meditation technique, then it is definitely possible to achieve a focussed mind for a long period of time.

Then there are also those who query the practicality of the meditation technique where the emphasis is to focus on a certain length of time. And, practically speaking, they say

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that people could not sit down in meditation all day long, they have to engage with the world go out and work and earn a living and deal with everyday life. People lament that when they come out of meditation their mind again gets distracted. However if we apply the meditation technique sincerely and regularly, then we notice that, unlike before, where our mind is completely influenced by distractions that causes mental turmoil, we instead experience tranquillity and calmness during the meditation practice. The positive effect of practising regularly is that even when we come out of the meditation, there is a lingering effect of calmness in our mind.

If we encounter a situation that previously would have caused us immense distress, then we have done a certain amount of meditation, the same situation will not disturb us to a great extent. We find that meditation has definitely a great positive impact in our life. We do not get affected by situations as in the past. This is a positive effect, even if the mind still gets distracted. When we see how the meditation practice has a positive effect in our life, maintaining a certain amount of inner tranquillity and calmness, then we begin to see the great significance of meditation. This is not some sort of spiritual game we are playing, but rather something meaningful that has a positive effect in our life. We begin to notice that the meditation technique is an essential tool to improve our life, giving us a better attitude in life.

When we think about it on a practical level and ask ourselves, does our well-being and happiness depend on a disturbed state of mind or does it depend on positive state of mind? From our experience so far in life, we will be able to see for ourselves that negative states of mind and negative attitudes do not contribute to our well-being or to our mental tranquillity and calmness. However, a positive state of mind definitely contributes to a happy mind. The meditation technique familiarises us with positive states of mind that contribute to our well-being. This is how we need to understand the practical benefits of meditation.

When we use our own intelligence to investigate the validity of the meditation practise and we realise that it is beneficial, then this understanding becomes a personal confirmation that the meditation technique is useful. Coming to this realisation ourselves is better than having to rely upon somebody else's word, because if we constantly depend on what everyone else says, then we can never really be sure if that information is valid or not. Sometimes we are a little bit gullible; it is easy for us to be led astray by what others say. If we give in to their views, if we are too gullible or too trusting, then sometimes we may get the wrong information from them. Thus it is worthwhile that we use our intelligence to investigate what is valid and what is worthwhile for ourselves as well as for others. We do have intelligence; all of us have incredibly sound intelligence. As human beings we have this incredible gift of using our intelligence in a very positive way. Of course that same intelligence can also be used in a negative way too. There are some people who use their intelligence to find ways to harm others, even harming themselves. This is an example of when the intelligence is misused or gone astray. Whereas, if we use the sound intelligence that we have to find ways to promote wellbeing and happiness for oneself and others—that is wonderful. There are many wondrous ways of using our intelligence, and indeed we can take the initiative to make the commitment to use our intelligence in those ways.

So to give an example of the wonders of human intelligence, I personally feel that just looking at airplane and how it flies

is enough for me to be in awe of human intelligence. This is incredible; by putting certain elements together you have this huge big thing that flies in the sky and actually brings people across continents and benefits humanity in so many ways.

However, a bomb, such as the nuclear bomb, is also created by human intelligence. This is an example of using human intelligence for destructive measures. We can see how human intelligence, when not used in a proper way, can be led astray and used for destruction. But as human beings we do have incredible intelligence that can be used and harnessed in positive ways.

Human intelligence can be used to remove our suffering, and create a happy and joyous state of being. Human intelligence allows us to achieve that. We can definitely remove misery from our lives and engage in a really joyous and happy state of mind through using our human intelligence.

If we keep holding on to the belief that 'I am suffering, I can do nothing about that, no one can help me', then we are setting ourselves up for being constantly engulfed in that misery and to remain in that state of mind. For as long as we allow ourselves to believe that there is nothing we can do about our miseries and problems, then we are holding on to it unnecessarily. Of course the problem won't go away because we are holding onto the problems through our own attitudes and the way we think. But if we can open our mind and begin to see that all the problems and miseries we are experiencing are none other than the creation of our own mind, a state of mind or attitude within us, then we can begin to expand our mind to induce a courageous mind, and have the self-confidence to overcome our problems and miseries.

We can thoroughly investigate and ask ourselves, what is creating our misery? What is the real cause? What kinds of attitudes within me cause me misery? What causes the conflicts, the agitation and unsettled feeling within myself? We begin to detect the negative attitudes within us, and then take the initiative to fight and to overcome them, not allowing them to overwhelm and destroy us. We put some value in ourselves, thinking that 'I am not going to allow this to happen to myself, I am not going to allow these negative attitudes to control me, to infest me and eat me up. I am going to combat and overcome them'. When we take that initiative, then we realise it is possible to do so. Our intelligence enables us to overcome those very attitudes and conditions that cause us misery.

Indeed, when we use our intelligence and investigate, we are able to see that the many problems we are experiencing are none other than of our own creation, as a result of our own attitudes. We normally are in the habit of instinctively blaming others for our problems. We are so used to thinking that it is someone else's fault. The only anger we have when there is a problem is directed to what's 'out there' causing this problem, who is it that is causing this problem? What kinds of situations 'out there' are causing this problem? But if we keep giving into that way of thinking, then of course there will be no end to our problems because we have not really pinpointed the real causes. Whereas we can take the initiative to look within, at what kinds of attitude could be within us. What kinds of state of mind could be within myself? Having investigated in this way, we will be able to detect that our own state of mind is the main cause behind our problems, not something else 'out there'.

We need to be particularly mindful about even small incidents. We blow them up in our mind; like adding spices to food we add on superstitious thoughts, doubts and paranoia. Even with a small incident or problem, we start to escalate that problem by adding on those negative attitudes. Then, when it is blown out of proportion, it seems to us like a huge problem. When we look at it, it starts from a small incident, but then we add on our superstitious state of mind. I have shared with you earlier, anecdotes about how an extra superstitious mind creates a big unnecessary problem. When I was living in Brisbane in a Buddhist institute called Chenrezig Institute, I come back to Victoria for a visit. I was visiting another Buddhist centre, Geshe Loden's centre, and while I was there, two people offered me a ride to go into the city. I replied 'Well, I would rather stay back and relax a bit'. So they went out by themselves and about an hour later I saw them arrive back all shaken, really trembling. I was curious and asked what had happened. They said there was a car accident. But what actually happened was that they went off the road slightly, something to do with the brakes caused them to go off the road. There was no major mishap, and clearly no physical damage to the car or to them. However they were noticeably shaken and shocked with the prospect that something terrible could have happened, and that was why they were in such a great shock, because they could have broken their limbs, or they could have broken their legs or whatever. But when I pointed out that the reality is that nothing happened to them, they calmed down and were smiling and happy again. This is just one example where nothing has happened, but it is the mind creating all these scenarios; the mind speculating what could have happened.

This analogy points out that in many cases even though in reality nothing serious is taking place, the mind starts speculating and creating lots of scenarios to make the situation seem worse than it is. If we check our own mind, we can see that a lot of our problems and difficulties in life are nothing more than these speculative states of mind.

Having explained the practical benefits of meditation we can now adopt the meditation technique. We assess our physical posture and adopt a calm and relaxed posture, sitting straight. Likewise, try to have a calm bright state of mind. And then within that we focus on our breath. Having brought your full attention on the breath, withdraw from all other forms of thoughts and temporarily just forget about everything else, and bring your full attention on your breath. In this way try to keep your mind focussed on the breath for the next few minutes.

*(Pause for meditation).*

## Questions

*Question:* How can one encourage family or friends to adopt meditation?

*Response:* When it comes to others adopting meditation techniques, it depends on their having the interest. If they don't have the interest then it is difficult for them to adopt it even if you keep suggesting it. It seems to be a cultural norm in the West for people to act upon their interests. If they are not interested, then they will not take meditation into consideration.

There are couples who have lived together for over twenty years, but as soon as one reaches a point where they don't have interest any more, in spite of having children, they say

'I am leaving, I am not interested in this relationship any longer'. Some even make comments that they feel bored being with the same person all the time. The main point to take into consideration is that if the other person doesn't show any interest, then it is not right for us to push. It doesn't help; it doesn't help the situation to push. However, you can still benefit them by taking a keen interest in meditation yourself. If you have found meditation useful, then take the initiative to apply it in your life. Then you would not have to say much to them, friends or relatives would notice that there is some change in you; some positive transformation. This is the point at which they would get interested in how you had achieved that transformation.

There are people who have confided in me that their partner or their friend is meditating well and they themselves are not: 'I am not a settled and happy person because I don't take the initiative in the practise of meditation, whereas my partner or my friend, they seem to be content and happy because they do take meditation seriously and are meditating well'.

Some people who don't meditate still seem to recognise that there are benefits for others who do meditate. Even some children can relate to the practical benefits of meditation, talking about when dad goes to practise meditation he comes back joyful and happy, and having a good time as a family when he comes back from meditation. Or when mum comes back from a meditation session, she seems to be happier. In this way others notice the positive effect of practice. Sometimes someone will tell a partner who is getting agitated or showing signs of getting upset, 'I think it's about time you go and do your meditation practice again'. They encourage them to go and meditate. I advise people to practise meditation themselves first, rather than trying to convince others. When you become calmer and more peaceful, then people will notice this. You can leave some meditation books in the house, lying around so others can notice them. You're not telling them to read the books, just making them available. If you have been easily irritable and easily annoyed in the past, even with insignificant small things, then if you become calmer and more patient because of meditating, then those around you will notice that. You won't need to tell them about trying meditation, you can leave meditation books around and they might feel like reading them. When you are not around they might peek into the books to see what has transformed you. This is a practical gentler approach in getting people interested in meditation.

Then there will be also times when a friend or partner or family member may be feeling unhappy and depressed for some reason. At that point it might be an appropriate time to say, 'Have you considered trying meditation? It seems to really help'. That's when they will be the most receptive to meditation as an alternative method. When everything seems to be going all right in life, when they seem to be enjoying life, then meditation practice does not seem to be relevant. So you try to suggest it when things are not going so well, then they might take it as something worthwhile for them. When times are difficult and there are problems, then they may see the significance of meditating.

*Question:* The text book talks about the hell realms and the fear that we need to generate of them. I'd rather take refuge and strive for enlightenment out love and compassion rather than being motivated by fear. Is fear really necessary for our practice?

*Response:* In terms of refuge one needs to think what does refuge mean? Why do people take refuge? What does refuge mean literally?

Of course the hell realm is not unique to Buddhism. The fear is that we need to check whether it is a rational fear or an irrational fear. If it is a rational fear that is based on some reality, such as the suffering of a hell realm that we do not want to experience, then that can be a motivator. Having the fear of not wanting to experience the suffering can motivate us to be liberated from that suffering. Having a rational fear of suffering that does exist, can be an impetus for wanting to be free from that. Taking refuge becomes significant, based on the fear of not wanting to experience that suffering.

Then of course the teachings need to serve their purpose. If reading the teaching causes agitation and restlessness in our mind, then it's better to focus on something else that soothes and helps us, because the whole purpose of the teaching is to be suitable for our practice and our mind. We need not have to take it all on board right away and try to digest it all immediately. However, in relating this to the whole structure of Buddhism, the question is not so much whether there is a hell realm or not, but when we relate that to suffering, if there is suffering to be experienced, then where does the suffering come from? Is there a cause or not? Is the suffering without any causes? Or is there a cause for that suffering? Then that becomes an investigation point, as according to the Buddhist teachings, nothing comes out of the blue. There is nothing that happens spontaneously, without any causes and conditions. So if the suffering is real, and it is experienced, and we do not wish to experience it, then this wish becomes the impetus for us to look at finding out the causes of suffering and then to overcome them.

Where is that suffering coming from? From a negative action, for example, killing. If we were to make a commitment to avoid killing, then the consequences of that action—suffering—will not be experienced. When we initially relate to that fear, it makes us uncomfortable. So we need to try to look into why is it making us uncomfortable? How can we overcome this unease within? This uncomfortable feeling or unease comes from the cause, from the prospect of having to experience suffering. If that is the fear, then we need to develop a sense of confidence. 'If I want to avoid the causes to go into the hell realm, then the causes are negative actions such as killing, stealing and so forth. If I avoid them, then why should I fear them?' There is no reason; there is no need to fear the result of suffering because we have avoided the causes of suffering. It is clear that if there are consequences from a specific cause, then when that cause ceases that consequence will also cease. From the Buddhist point of view, this healthy fear becomes an impetus for developing the first point of renunciation. And because renunciation is one of the states of mind that we need to develop if we seek liberation, then we have to develop renunciation.

If we relate to the hell realm and the fear of the hell realm and other sufferings, this becomes an impetus to want to be free from that suffering and thus developing renunciation in our mind. This is the main significance of the teaching. The teachings encourage us to slowly go from level to level, through the different levels of renunciation, bodhicitta, loving compassion, and enlightenment. All of this comes gradually from a small step, then we can see the significance of the teachings and how they do relate to our lives, and how there is a place for them. Otherwise, if thinking and relating to the teaching creates more confusion and more

fear, then they definitely do not serve their purpose. So we need to be able to relate to the teachings, to have an overview and holistic view of the teachings. It's a gradual process; it doesn't come right away; it will all fit together slowly.

The main point is in having an overview and seeing the significance of the teachings. The main thing is to develop renunciation, which is then followed by other realisations of love and compassion and bodhicitta so forth.

In relation to irrational fears, there are those who claim that they are experiencing hell realms right now, and feeling very disturbed because of that. People need to keep things in perspective, and understand them in the right context. It is better not to be engaged in something that does not benefit you.

It is difficult to answer your question about proving it, because you can not show the hell realms; you can't see it right now. According to Buddhist teachings, subtle reasoning and subtle logical reasons are used so that eventually people will come to understand the various existences. This is not only unique to Buddhist tradition. Other traditions also explain the sufferings of the hell realm, and each tradition will attest to the fact that there are hell realms, and there are sufferings in the hell realm. However, we can relate to the six realms. For us humans, we can see the animal realm.

In relation to reincarnation, when we think about it, it is not unique for Buddhists, because every tradition talks about when someone dies, there is something that goes on; some traditions call it the soul. There must be something to it if each genuine tradition has something to say about an afterlife. If we reject all other major religious points of view because we cannot relate to them or don't experience and see the view, then this is not logical and is not enough of a reason to say something does not exist just because we cannot see it.

Before we conclude for the evening, let us spend a few minutes in meditation. The object of our meditation is the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra. Keep our full attention and focus on the sound of the mantra and maintain that focus for a while.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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