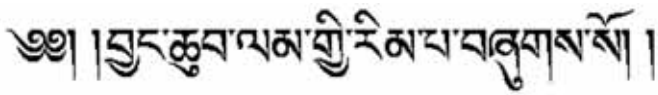

The Condensed Lam Rim



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual we can spend time for meditation. So for that purpose we sit in a relaxed and comfortable posture. While we adopt a comfortable, relaxed physical posture, we need to also ensure that our mind is also comfortable and relaxed because if the body is accompanied by a mind that is unruly, then when we find that we do have the conditions to be relaxed physically, we get all tensed up inside.

Physically we get tense as a result of the mind being overly preoccupied with so many anxieties and worries. In summary it is the unruly state of mind that causes the tension and unease in the body to the point where people often resort to seeing a therapist, and getting massages because the body is aching. They have not done something physically to feel those aches, it is really related to the mind. So I am not assuming that everyone is in that situation but we would find many do experience this.

We notice from our own experience, those two different states of mind, one state where we are physically relaxed but the mind is in turmoil and overwhelmed with different kinds of anxiety and therefore a restless mind, and another state of mind where we are genuinely relaxed both physically and mentally. When we experience both situations for ourselves and we can relate to a genuinely calm and relaxed state as contributing to our well-being, then we find we are left with no choice but to work towards actually acquiring and maintaining a really genuine relaxed state of mind. When we do acquire a genuinely calm and relaxed state of mind and experience a sense of well-being within then we can relate to the necessity of maintaining a genuinely relaxed state of mind.

When we investigate to see what causes the mind to be in an unruly state, overwhelmed with different worries and anxieties, we notice a very stubborn mind; so what is causing that? When we look into the causes for the mind to be in that state, we notice that the actual cause lies none other than within the mind itself. When we adopt a certain attitude, a certain negative attitude, that causes the mind to be in turmoil and to become unruly. Whereas when we adopt a positive state then that contributes to a gentle state of mind, a calm mind.

As mentioned previously the unruly mind causes tension in the body. The muscles start to ache and these aches are the consequence of an unruly state of mind. We need to understand that connection. Having understood that point, we can resort to transforming the negative states of mind so they become more positive. Encouraging a positive outlook will benefit the individual. When we further investigate how we are affected by a mind which is overwhelmed with the different negativities, and look within oneself, we will notice that the sole reason why the mind is in a perpetual unruly state, overwhelmed with different anxieties and worries is because we have never attempted to acquaint our mind with

positive attitudes. We have allowed our mind to remain in an overwhelmed and unruly state; we have just allowed that. The analogy of a crazed and untamed elephant is often used. When a crazed or untamed elephant or horse is let loose in the wild then it will just roam freely and there will be no control over that animal. However, when attempts are made to tame that untamed elephant or horse, and it is successfully tamed then we can give it any task to perform and it will do so to our satisfaction.

Likewise, our state of mind is like an untamed horse or elephant, we just let our thoughts and emotions run wild and we never make an attempt to really control or tame our mind. Therefore it seems that by sheer habit our mind is constantly in a state of confusion and anxiety. When we actually recognise that and make an attempt to subdue and tame our mind, and gain genuine control over it, then naturally the influences of the negative attitudes will not take place and we will not be overwhelmed by those negative states of mind.

Another analogy would be like a king or ruler who has good command over his ministers and generals. When a ruler has command over his followers then he can ask them to do any task and it will be performed well. Likewise, when we have a controlled mind, a genuinely subdued and tamed mind, we can give it any task and it will perform it well. So that is how we need to understand our states of mind.

How do we go about taming the mind in order to have genuine control and for the mind to be serviceable, performing positively? This is where the technique of meditation becomes relevant. The meditation technique is a technique which systematically helps us to gain a genuine control over our own mind, so that it becomes controlled, serviceable and more clear and focused. The positive attributes of the mind and its potential begin to really come forth when we use the technique of meditation.

How does meditation actually work to systematically bring about the positive effects for ourselves? The meditation technique applied in a genuine way involves withdrawing our focus or attention 100% from all other forms of distractions. Then having withdrawn from all forms of distraction, internal and external, you bring a 100% focus onto the chosen object of meditation, which is what we call an internal object. When the entire focus of attention is brought inwards then naturally as there is no reason for turmoil in the mind, the mind naturally experiences a genuine ease or calmness. That is the natural effect of applying the meditation technique appropriately.

Alternatively, there is the mind which is completely overwhelmed with distractions, where the mind constantly wanders off in every direction and is constantly busy. Even though we may not be aware of this happening it is a fact that when the mind is distracted and constantly busy, it actually causes the mind to be stressed and that is what causes the anxiety in the mind — the turmoil the fears, stress and anxieties and all of those uncomfortable feelings that we experience. These are the result of a mind that has completely wandered off. To reverse that situation, we need to recognise that the mind is distracted and is wandering off. That is what is causing the turmoil and stress within us. Therefore we need to divert the focus of our mind onto a more positive object, an object which does not cause distress and turmoil within us.

To see how this works we can use the analogy of driving a car. When we are driving we need to be constantly mindful

that we don't drive off the road or drive around the wrong corner. We have to be constantly vigilant not to hit the sides, the obstructions on the road, and we have to always be mindful so that we don't have a collision. As we develop our driving skills these things become natural, like second nature. So using that analogy, initially we need to be constantly mindful of what kind of object causes distress and turmoil within ourselves and try to avoid that. We really need to think about how the meditation technique actually works and how it brings a natural positive result because of the very technique that is involved. Then we begin to genuinely appreciate the meditation technique and we will begin to see that it is really essential if we wish to experience a life which is free from too much anxiety, fear and all of the unwanted emotions. This is how we can relate to the appropriateness of meditation.

When we refer to the meditation technique and how it is essential for making one's life more meaningful, then we have found an unmistakable technique. When we adopt the meditation technique we need to be sure that we are actually applying an unmistakable technique during our meditation session. Firstly, we need to understand that just adopting a physical posture does not mean that we are engaged in the meditation practice. In other words, sitting rigidly upright is not meditation, but rather it is a meditation posture. It is a conducive sort of posture for actually engaging in meditation.

The real meditation is genuinely focusing 100% on the appropriate object. Therefore having chosen an internal object, placing our complete attention on that object for the duration of our meditation, becomes the genuine technique. Otherwise we may be assuming that we do meditation, and others may think that we are doing meditation, but if we allow our mind to follow its normal course of being distracted and even adopt some form where it is causing more turmoil, anxiety or confusion within ourselves then the technique will not serve its purpose.

The real meditation technique therefore involves a focused mind. In order to apply a focused mind the physical posture is secondary. The meditation instruction explains that it doesn't matter whether you are sitting on a chair or sitting on a cushion on the floor, but to have a focused mind you need to adopt a posture which is comfortable. If the physical posture is not comfortable then that in itself can be an immediate distraction for our mind. The most conducive condition for our meditation is where there is least distraction for the mind when focusing on the chosen object. That is what we need to understand.

Another essential point of meditation to take note of is the manner of focusing on the object. This means that one reaches a point where it is as if the object and the subject, the mind, is one. In reality they have not become one, it just appears as if our mind and the object that is being focused upon have become one. Now when we actually think about it, if we have this gap between the subject and object during meditation, then it is very easy for the mind to become distracted. In fact we don't really achieve the desired result of the meditation where the mind becomes really at ease and calm because there is always room for some sort of excitement or other form of distraction to enter into that gap between the object and subject.

In becoming familiar with the object of meditation we need to try to reach the point where our mind, the subject, and the object of meditation, actually become like one and

inseparable. When we reach that point in meditation then we will experience genuine sense of internal mental relaxation and calmness. This would be really a genuine sense of well-being. And so at that stage we would have achieved the desired result of meditation. This will confirm the validity of the practice of meditation, and this is really the essential point that we need to take note of.

We must be clear about the type of object that we choose to focus on. The object that we choose may be an actual form, a physical object. Initially we might become familiar with it by looking at it and seeing it. However, ultimately it is not the external object that we are meditating on but rather it is an image of that object. As explained in the meditation teachings, the object to be focused on in meditation is an object of a mental consciousness. That means it is not an object of the sense consciousness. So that in itself explains that it cannot be a physical, external object that we see with our naked eyes. When we look at something physical, the object that we see is actually an object of the sense consciousness, namely our eye consciousness.

But here the meditation technique explains that the object to be focused on is an object of mental consciousness. The way to understand that, is that we choose an object to focus on, and then we induce a mental image of that object. That mental image is perceived by the mental consciousness and that becomes the focus of our meditation. When we understand this point we begin to also understand what it means when the meditation instruction explains that the object of meditation needs to be an internal object, an object within one's own mind. So that is an essential point we need to understand.

Now, having explained some of the essential points of the meditation practice, we can actually adopt an object of meditation to serve our purpose. Different objects would serve different purposes; the object we choose to focus on in our meditation here is our own breath. And the reason why we use our own breath as a medium to focus on is because when we achieve the single-pointed focus on the breath, it will naturally settle down the mind. Therefore considering ourselves mostly beginners of meditation, with minds prone to mental distractions, the first point of the meditation practice is to really help settle down our really busy mind. It therefore becomes very appropriate for us to use this object.

As mentioned previously the foremost and most essential condition for our meditation practice is to first of all ensure that we intentionally withdraw our focus and attention from all other objects, whether they are positive or negative objects, all distractions and so forth, we completely withdraw from all of that and initially we just focus inwards. The natural inflow and outflow of our breath becomes a medium for our focus and we try to develop an internal image of the breath itself. We place our entire focus on the actual image of the breath and the actual breathing that we engage in becomes the medium. A way that has been explained to maintain our attention is to keep count of our breaths, each in and out breath is one count; that allows our mind to be anchored on the breath itself. We will use this technique, focusing 100% on the breath, for the next few minutes.

[meditation]

If you have any really good questions you may raise your hand and we will address them.

Question: How can one tell if the mind and the object have become one in our meditation?

Answer: Again, it is not that the mind becomes one with the object, but rather that it appears to become one. We can use a watch or a clock as an example. If it was an actual physical watch that one uses as an object to focus on it might be hard to get a very vivid clear image of the watch itself. It might be possible for some, however it is definitely hard because there are so many other things around that will come into our focus and it will be hard to have a vivid image of the watch itself. But if we were to look at the watch well and use that as a medium, then when we close our eyes and bring up the image of the watch that we saw earlier, focusing on the mental image of the watch, the image becomes clearer and clearer.

Thus the mind focusing on it becomes more and more single-pointed and when the mind reaches a natural state of being focused on it, the mind and object are seemingly one. The appearance of that image that we have of that object, such as if we see a person, at a later stage we can recall the person through mental image of that person. Our mind seemingly becomes one with the mental image of whatever object we use, for example a watch. Due to the single-pointed focus on that object, it is as if the mind becomes one with the object.

Question: I have just come back from Fiji and I noticed there that people are happy and smiling most of the time. This was also true in Bali when I was there. However here in the West, even people who have been meditating for some time don't appear to be as happy, are more stressed and reserved. Why is that the case?

Answer: I am not too sure it would be the indication that everyone in Fiji and Bali are meditating and therefore they seem happy. Rather I think it relates to the living style there. Being less developed seems to be conducive for people to be a little more jovial, whereas the more developed the country is, for some reason that seems to produce more stress. In Tibet, for example, people live a simple life of farming and are nomadic even to this day, when people return from travelling in Tibet they come back saying that Tibetans seem to be very jovial and very happy, fun loving people. That seems to be a general attitude regardless of whether they are meditating or not. The environment seems to cause less stress and less anxiety and so forth, it seems to be a much more relax sort of environment. *[Geshe la chuckles]*

In contrast, in a developed nation we find that even though the development is supposed to bring more comfort, and a more relaxed life for people, the opposite seem to take place. The need to keep up and improve seems to make people become busy and stressed. Whereas people living in more modest countries seem to be more content. When they have a place to dwell and they get their food they seem to be satisfied with that. They don't seem to be preoccupied with too much else. When they are satisfied with a good meal and good shelter then they seem to be happy joyful and relaxed.

There is also a tradition in Tibet following a good harvest providing abundant food and drink, when people say, 'It has been a good year, we have good food and drink, now is the time to relax'. In Tibet there was that aspect of being joyful when things were sufficient. It seems even in the western context people in medieval times seem to have been more jovial, more family orientated. Whereas today, in the 21st century, it seems there is much more reason for distress, and anxiety. Parents now are alarmed and wonder how their children will cope with the world when it becomes more

advanced. Parents do have a genuine concern how the future generations will cope with more advancement.

As I have mentioned previously, people come to Nepal from the border between Tibet and Nepal. They come down to the valley, with their tents, put up their tents which are made of simple cloth and material and they make a fire. They use twigs and so forth they picked up and sometimes it is wet, and they don't burn well, nevertheless even with these harsh conditions, they seem to be very jovial, making their food and making the fire, singing and having a very merry time. Apparently, when people who go trekking see that, they are really taken aback and wonder how under such harsh conditions they can be joyful and enjoy life. So this is yet another indication of their state of mind.

Here in Australia, it seems that there is quite a noticeable difference between city dwellers and those who live in the towns and country. People living the towns and country seem to be much more relaxed, more friendly and you can associate with them easily. Within the cities, for example in Sydney, there seems to be yet little bit more stress, and apparently it is noticed in the driving there is a little more road rage whereas apparently in Melbourne it is a bit better. However, these days maybe the population is becoming bigger here in Melbourne. It seems like there are more cars and that is maybe causing more road rage as well. In the city people are naturally more stressed because of their busy lifestyle. So it seems that the environment definitely plays a role in the attitude and temperament displayed by the people.

The benefit of meditation is that regardless of the external point of view, meditation does help. In my experience, people who have come here initially would come with really sunken faces and even crying because of their worries and problems in life, but later seem to be quite joyful and smiling. So I have seen that people who seem to be very depressed and on the verge of crying can become joyful and happy through some meditation. It is possible.

Another account is when I was teaching when I first came to Australia, I was teaching up in Bendigo, at the Buddhist centre there. When I was conducting meditation sessions, people from the neighbouring town would come. I heard later that there were comments made by other people that those people had never seemed very happy and joyful, but since they had been going to the meditation centre they seem to have become more joyful and more friendly. So that is something which even others who are not necessary Buddhist actually noticed. They saw the benefit of the practice of meditation. So it seems that it is more noticeable for those who live together and have seen the earlier parts of their life as being miserable, and then see them becoming more joyful. Whereas we who are meditating are already joyful so you may not really notice. *[laughter]*

Then there are many who have made personal comments like, 'When I meditate I feel much more relaxed and calm within my. If I don't meditate, then I feel in turmoil, I feel uncomfortable and uneasy. So regardless of the appearance, it seems that, for someone who is genuinely meditating there seems to be a real sort of inner sense of well-being and joy.

Question: Can meditation ever be harmful?

Answer: As I mentioned earlier, it is very important that we are very clear about the meditation technique before we begin to meditate; that is really essential. On that point when His Holiness Dalai Lama was recently here in Melbourne, he mentioned that someone had confided in him that he had

meditated for eleven years. He had an earlier sense of joy and happiness but he had completely lost that in meditating. So that is an indication that either the approach was not correct or the actual technique might have not been an appropriate technique.

These days 'meditation' is a word which may be used in various different ways. There are many different techniques which may be presented under the name of meditation. They may be promoted as being fantastic, and initially we may be carried away, and go to it, but if we are not really mindful and careful and we don't know what really is entailed, then at the end it might be quite harmful for us. It is really important that we are clear about the technique before we actually proceed.

I regularly emphasise that the most essential thing that we need to be mindful of in our life is to protect a sense of joy and happiness within ourselves. That is the most important thing and the meditation technique is a means to actually to do that. It is a means to protect a joyful and happy mind and guard against a mind of despair. That is what the meditation technique is for. It has to be utilised towards that end. Another important point that I emphasise is being able to discern whether the technique is an appropriate and the practice is appropriate or not is through one's own analysis and wisdom. As I emphasise regularly, cultivating a genuine wisdom within oneself is most essential because ultimately whether something is right for oneself or not, has to be discerned through our own intelligence and wisdom. That is something for us to judge.

It is to that effect that the Buddha said, 'Don't accept my words and advice merely out of faith in me. Rather analyse and check with your own wisdom what I have said. When you find that it withstands reasoning and logic, and you find that it is true or useful then you may adopt it'. This is in line with the instructions that the Buddha has given. To that effect, some individuals have confided in me that after many attempts have reached a point where their meditation is going quite well. Whether it is entirely appropriate or a correct meditation they are not yet sure. So that goes to show that they are using their intelligence, while they do find some good effect they are still wary and wanting to be sure. Even something which appears to be really very beneficial, initially may still have, tested further to see the genuine appropriateness of it or not. This can be discerned through one's analysis which comes gradually.

Question: Geshe la you appear to be a very happy person; what is your favourite meditation object?

Answer: I have shared in the past that even though I cannot claim that I do any great practices, I do spend a significant time on cultivating love and compassion, and that is my object of focus in meditation. That seems to be really useful for myself. As I cultivate love and compassion and really try to acquaint myself with love and compassion, I find that as a result, naturally I don't have enemies but many friends; who still keep increasing. So naturally it makes me happy that there are more friends than enemies. *[laughter]* Even today I encountered two people who came up to me and thanked me for smiling and being joyful; they said that they really appreciate that. There are others who also make comments.

In fact I have many stories about how showing a jovial outlook and happy gestures seems to benefit others, really help others just by seeing them. When I approach others with a smiling face, they might have a solemn face but when

they see me, somehow they again smile too and then they just go along. *[laughs]*

So bringing it back to the main point meditating on love and compassion seems to be really the optimum way to gain genuine happiness. That is actually considered to be the essence of the Dharma, love and compassion, and it is really true. I must say that even though I cannot boast about any qualities or realisations from the practices, I do have a jovial mind, happy mind, which is something that I can boast about.

I am happy that you appreciate my jovialness, so I thank you for that *[laughter]*. Your question made everyone also smile and be joyful too. *[laughter]*

So before we conclude this session for the evening, let us again take the opportunity to spend a few minutes in meditation. So this time the object of our focus can be the sound of the mantra to be recited which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we hear the mantra being recited, we try to keep our entire focus on the sound of the mantra and then as the recitation subsides we just try to maintain our focus on the residue of the sound.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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