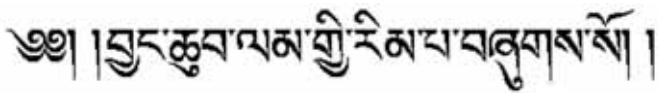

The Condensed Lam Rim



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. For that purpose we adopt a comfortable relaxed posture. We try to adopt a posture where we are not slouched but sitting upright. Adopting the appropriate physical posture, which is relaxed but upright, is conducive for meditation as it is said that straightening out our body helps to straighten the energy channels within our body and when the energy channels are straightened, it helps the mind to be alert and clearer. It helps the wind channels within to flow well and energy to flow within our body. That is the significance of having the appropriate posture.

The main purpose of meditation is that it serves as a technique to acquaint us with positive, good behaviour, both mentally and physically. Furthermore, while we acquaint ourselves with positive mental behaviours, it also generates a calmer, peaceful mind. So there are many purposes, but it mainly comes down to having a peaceful state of mind.

The technique involves subduing our mind. Subduing means having control over our mind and protecting it from the influence of negative emotions and so forth. So when we use the technique of controlling our mind from the influence of negativities then, naturally, as the mind becomes subdued we experience a state of peacefulness within us. That is the relationship between a peaceful state of mind and adopting an appropriate meditation technique.

While we learn the technique of meditation it is also important for us to understand the significance of how meditation helps and how it works. First of all it is important for us to recognise that what we call peace of mind is something that is within our reach. It is something that can be cultivated within our own mind. It is something we can find within us. It is not something external. That is something we need to recognise.

So, generating a peaceful state of mind is an inner process, something that we need to develop within our own mind. To fully understand that, we need to understand the condition of one's mind. What are the different states of one's mind? How do they generate within us? We need to understand well the actual working of one's mind. Now most of us are not really familiar with this process so, when things go wrong and something is disturbing us, we are in the habit of blaming external conditions for feeling disturbed or troubled. We immediately assume that the cause for our troubles lies outside, because we are not familiar with looking within us and checking whether that problem or trouble is caused within. Normally we hardly check on that. While external conditions can contribute to our troubles, the main cause lies within our own mind. In order to recognise and understand that, we need to understand how our own mind works. This means analysing one's state of mind, one's thought patterns, emotions and so forth; this process is really essential.

The meditation technique is a means to generate a positive attitude and positive states of mind. When we look into the relevance of having a positive state of mind I feel, through my investigation and inner research, that a positive state of mind is the most beneficial condition for one's well-being. That is because when we are able to secure a positive state of mind we can maintain a happy state of mind regardless of the external situation and conditions—even when external conditions are not favourable.

There will be many occasions when things are not going well. If we look into the external reasons for us to be unhappy there are many things we could attribute as being conditions for us to be unhappy. There are so many things that can go wrong externally, with one's personal life or even in outside in the world. We can see there are many potential things, problems and chaotic situations and so forth. If we allow all these external conditions to disturb us then it can definitely affect us and we will constantly be in an unhappy state of mind. Whereas if we can maintain a positive state of mind or positive attitude then, regardless of the external conditions and even when there are difficulties or problems externally, they will not disturb the calmness or stability within our mind. In the event that things do go wrong externally, because one is maintaining a positive state of mind or positive attitude, these external situations will not cause great turmoil and will not disturb one to the extent that one is overwhelmed by sadness or anxiety.

So, in this way, we can see that our happiness is not entirely dependent on external conditions and situations but is more dependent on our internal state of mind and a positive state of mind within us. When we begin to notice and experience that for ourselves then we can personally apply the extreme value of maintaining a positive state of mind within us.

Some people may, at this point, feel, 'Oh, the geshe is talking about things that seem too pompous or too good to be true'. What I am saying is that it is really worthwhile to try to cultivate and maintain a positive attitude. There are many, many factors outside of us that can disturb us, animate and inanimate factors, people or objects or conditions that may go wrong. Since there are so many factors out there that could become a condition for us to feel disturbed, we need to be able to develop some sort of defence or immunity against all those problems. The real immunity or defence to protect oneself from the external problems is none other than maintaining a positive state of mind.

How this works is that while external conditions may serve as a condition to create some sort of problem, while there might be some actual problems where something is not going well or some disturbances are arising, if one maintains a positive attitude, at the very least one will not add on more problems. When things are not going well outside we just have to deal with that rather than having to deal with a whole set of new problems such as anxiety, fears, worries and feeling of depression. Thus the way to protect one's inner well-being from external situations is to maintain a positive state of mind.

This is something that I repeat again and again in my talks. Likewise you should consider and think about this again and again and really analyse these points. It seems that when we don't pay attention to maintaining a positive state of mind and a positive attitude within us, we easily fall victim to an unhappy state of mind. Others have related this to me and it seems to be the case that some people fall into a state that is really uncomfortable with anguish in their mind,

depressive feelings and a very heavy weight upon them. It seems that this state of mind spirals down to a point where it seems very difficult to come out of and one is weighed down and feels lots of anguish. This is a really pitiful state to be in. So, as we have personal responsibility for our own well-being, it is reasonable that we protect ourselves from falling into that state.

Maintaining a positive attitude relates to a combination of having a kind and considerate attitude and also a courageous and expansive view. These positive attitudes are something that we need to acquaint ourselves with. We already have the basis for these within us. With all the positive qualities, it is a matter of recognising and further cultivating and strengthening these positive attitudes within us. As we pay more and more attention to developing the positive qualities of kindness and consideration for others and so forth then, by default, the mind naturally becomes stronger and stronger and more immune to external problems.

It is unrealistic to expect that after a few attempts at meditation we will suddenly become immune to all problems and difficulties, and that they won't affect us anymore. That is too much to expect. However what we would find is that as our attitude changes for the better, our outlook is more positive and we have a more positive state of mind; where certain situations that may have caused us great distress in the past are not affecting us to such a degree anymore. We would find that things that had seemed problematic in the past have become less significant. This shows that the same difficult condition doesn't affect our mind to such a great an extent.

So, in this way as the teachings explain, we can see we all have limitless potential for our betterment and that we can definitely improve ourselves limitlessly. As we begin to notice that we are able to withstand certain difficulties and external problems then, to that extent, we can develop ourselves. This is something that we need to pay attention to as we have immediate access to cultivating the positive qualities within ourselves and further developing our state of mind. It is not something we have to purchase. We already have those qualities so we don't need to spend money to develop these good qualities within us.

If we fail to pay attention to something that is freely accessible and neglect it, then we will instead spend our lives trying to get things that we have to work hard for with the expectation that it will make us happy. But if we neglect the real cause for our well-being, which is our internal qualities, and put energy and time into acquiring external conditions through money and so forth and we don't put some energy and time into getting something that is readily accessible and free, it will be extremely difficult for us to get real happiness. This is something we need to really be mindful of. The positive qualities within us are something that we can definitely develop. They are something that we have the potential for. So it is a matter of seeing their value and engaging in the practises to develop them.

What I am emphasising here is adopting the things that are beneficial for us and discarding those that are not beneficial for us. When we think about it, it is reasonable and worthwhile to cultivate those things that are beneficial for one's well-being and discarding those that are detrimental and harm our well-being. Doing that self-analysis and looking within and understanding how our mind works, what kinds of attitudes we have, which are the harmful

attitudes and which are the positive attitudes, is a worthwhile practice.

The bottom line of what we are attempting to do is cultivating and securing the conditions for our well-being. The conditions of our well-being are, of course, twofold. There are external conditions as well as internal conditions. While I have been emphasising the development of the inner conditions for our well-being, I am not in any way advocating we should neglect external conditions. We need external conditions. We wouldn't survive if we didn't have adequate food, shelter and clothing. We need all of that for it contributes to our physical well-being.

Since we depend and rely upon external conditions I advise the younger generation to pay attention to their studies. When you are young it is the best time to put time and energy into study. If one puts some time and energy into one's studies now it will help to secure a good job later on in life. The more studies one has done, the more experience one gets through one's studies, the more one would be likely to secure a stable job. One may work as an apprentice and so forth, and slowly one's wages will increase and one's external conditions will only become better. Whereas if one neglects to study now, and puts time and energy to day-dreaming or having good times with friends and so forth, it would be very difficult to have the right conditions to secure the means for external well-being. Therefore I emphasise to the younger generation the need to put time into study. But, at the same time it is also worthwhile to pay attention to developing one's inner qualities. It can be done hand in hand. While the studies are the means to secure external conditions, developing the inner qualities is the way to secure the conditions for inner well-being. If that can go hand in hand from when one is quite young then that will continue throughout one's life. This is what I usually share with the younger generation.

When we understand the importance of developing a positive state of mind and inner qualities as a way to secure our well-being, we will also begin to recognise and understand that the meditation technique is an essential technique for our lives as it is the means to do that. That summarises the main point of what the meditation technique is all about. It is a technique that helps to acquaint us with the positive attitudes within one's mind and this also influences positive behaviour, good conduct. Good conduct and positive behaviour is something that makes us a sincere and good human being. As we develop that we also develop a genuine means of protecting oneself from problems in our lives. Whatever the situation may be, whatever conditions arise, it may be a cause for those problems to be experienced. We all don't wish to experience that, we all want to solve the problem and come out of that difficulty and problem. We all want to find the right way to solve the problem.

Now external conditions may somewhat contribute to solving some problems. But when problems have come to a point that they become a real mental anguish and cause a lot of anxiety and fear, it is hard for us to expect external conditions to solve the problem. It can be solved, it has to be solved, but it has to be done internally within one's mind. So this is where the relevance and significance of meditation can be seen as a way to help to address the internal problems within us.

When we can see how this works and what the internal situation is for someone who may be experiencing lots of worries and anxieties we can see that it is really a matter of

changing one's way of looking at things and adopting a different perspective.

I'd like to relate a story about this. This story, which many of you might have heard before, concerns a significant point during my escape from Tibet. On my escape I was travelling in a group of quite a few monks. One of the eldest in our group was Geshe Kachen. At one point we were running out of provisions and Geshe Kachen started to worry a lot. 'Oh, we're finished. We have completely run out of provisions. What will happen?' It was a really difficult situation. At that time there was another monk in our group called Geshe Tenpa. Geshe Tenpa said to Geshe Kachen, 'There's no need to worry. Since we are escaping, we will come to a new land, a new place. Wherever we come, it'll be inhabited by people and whatever those people eat we will be able to eat as well. And so we would definitely be never be deprived of food. Whatever they are eating, we will get that as well.' Later Geshe Kachen said, 'That perspective really helped my mind to let go of its anxieties and worries. Once we arrived in India, it was true that there were people waiting with rice, lentils and dhal and we were given that and that's what sustained us.'

When we think about it, it is often the case that a lot of our worries are based on the prospect of something that may go wrong in the future, when in fact it has not happened at all yet. Just the prospect that something may go wrong, can cause a lot of worry and anxiety.

Having related a few points about the benefits of meditation and how it may help, we can now actually adopt a few minutes of meditation practice. I have already related quite a few points; if you find them useful you may want to remember them. It can be asserted that when we take initiative to adopt the meditation practice the very least benefit that one will experience is a relaxed mind. Our mind takes a rest. Our mind is normally very, very busy, constantly thinking about many different things, constantly going out in every direction, following every whimsical thought and that is what causes all the anxieties and worries and so forth. The meditation technique involves intentionally withdrawing one's focus from all external and internal distractions and bringing it to a central focus and placing that focus upon a chosen object. When we apply that technique the mind does get a rest. It really does feel relaxed and restful during that time.

There are many people who confided in me that they have experienced anxiety and a very, very busy and chaotic state of mind and been overwhelmed by that in the past. They have had a good experience from having found the meditation technique and having attempted to adopt that. They have confided in me that they are now convinced that the meditation technique is like a panacea, a medicine for the mind. Just as we have medicine for physical conditions, meditation is like a pill or medicine for the mind to become calmer. These are individuals who have some experience from their past experience and now have the benefit of meditation.

Thus, by thinking about this temporary benefit of meditation, we can see it is worthwhile to apply the technique. The technique involves intentionally withdrawing the mind from all forms of distractions or thoughts then bringing our focus inward and then placing our entire focus on the breath, which is the object that we focus on in our meditation here. So for the next few minutes we will completely keep our mind or focus on the breath

itself. We will spend the next few minutes in this way. (*Pause for meditation*).

That is sufficient for now. It will be really useful if, just as we have attempted now, we carry out some meditation practice in our daily life. The more we acquaint ourselves with meditation practice the more it will help us to gain a genuinely calmer, more stable, clearer and focussed mind. This is something that will assist us in whatever we do in our life. We might all have the experience where we were given a task but our mind was distracted and not focussed and we didn't accomplish what we wanted to do well. That's where things starts to go wrong. Therefore it is worthwhile to have a focussed and calm state of mind. That will be useful.

If anyone has a question you may raise your hand. We have time for a question or two.

Question: I have two questions. To be honest, I feel shy to ask those questions because I don't know the appropriate way. I would like to know what the significance of the numbers: 3, 7, 21, 108 are in Buddhism? That is my first question. My second question is, if you are beginner what kinds of advice would you gives to someone to teach them how to use the mala, and to use it properly as well? That's it.

There is talk in relation to number 8 and how it is quite significant. It is what we call an auspicious number. I am not able to comment on all the specific numbers that you have mentioned. Numbers may relate to forms of practise that involve a certain number. For example, number 7 can relate to the practice called the Seven Limbs. So number 7 is sometimes a way to signify that particular practice.

With 21, there are certain mantras that it is said will help to purify negativities if we do them 21 times. The Vajrasattva mantra when recited at least 21 times is said to purify one's mistakes.

So because these numbers are related to other auspicious practices they become significant numbers in themselves. However it is not as if you don't do 7 or if you go beyond 7 there will some great fault. It is not like that at all. If we have to choose a number then that is a significant number. The reason that we keep count of certain practices is to generate some sense of accomplishment in one's mind and later we can rejoice about that, 'Okay, I have done a certain mantra 21 or 108 times, I've accomplished that'. Then, every time one remembers that one could rejoice, feel happy and further generate self confidence within oneself.

There are instructions about how to use the mala in relation to different practices. In Buddhism it is very much associated with deity practices. In different practices you might sometimes hold the rosary in your left hand, sometimes in your right hand and then sometimes you hold it near your heart. You could use your thumb to count the rosary beads, or you could use your first finger or index finger or third finger and so forth.

These instructions relate to specific practices. If one were doing a specific practice then there are some instructions in relation to that. If one is doing a retreat focussed on a particular deity then there are four types of actions in relation to the practise of the deity; peaceful actions, extensive actions, powerful actions and wrathful actions. There are specific instructions in relation to the deity practice. When you are doing the mantra in relation to peaceful actions you use your thumb on your index finger.

For extensive actions you use the third finger, for powerful actions the fourth and for wrathful actions the fifth finger.

Leaving aside that complexity, we normally use our index finger and that suffices for all of the other actions as well. The advice for beginners is to use your rosary or mala with one's thumb as the first and then the index finger on top of that. That would be the way to count.

The main thing is to imagine receiving the blessings of the deity. So when one does any mantra of a particular deity, the main point as one recites is visualising or imagining that one is receiving the blessing of the deity, the enlightened being. One is actually receiving the blessing when one does that practise in that way. It helps to calm and settle down the mind as well.

Question: There are so many different meditation styles at the moment. Some people meditate using nice calming music, some use rivers, some eyes open, some lying down. Is there one style you recommend as the best form?

There are different forms of meditation. They may differ as to how open your eyes are or closing your eyes or lying down. I am not too sure about listening to music because the main point of meditation in our tradition is that it is a technique to acquaint oneself with a positive state of mind that is free from the negative influences. If one listens to music, depending on one's state of mind, it could very well be that one develops attachment to the music. In that case if you are focusing on the music you might be cultivating more attachment.

Therefore one needs to be mindful as to whether the technique one adopts is serving the purpose of meditating on something positive to increase positive attitudes and decrease negativity within one's own mind. What form of meditation one uses depends on the individual; for some it seems that lying down is more effective and they are able to focus in that way. There is, of course, the danger of falling asleep but if one is able to maintain focus that would be suitable. The posture that we adopt here seems to be conducive for a more focussed mind but it depends on the individual.

Some individuals may have a different set up of the channels and if they lie down it helps them to clear the channels. If that is the case then, for such an individual, lying down becomes the more suitable way to meditate. Ultimately it is up to an individual to find out which posture is most suitable for them. Through one's experience one would come to notice that, 'If I adopt this kind of posture it helps my mind to become more focussed, clearer and so forth'. Thus it is really up to the individual to find what posture is best for them.

Question: I was wondering if death is experienced in a gradual process or if it would be like falling asleep and suddenly waking up in another existence?

There is a detailed description in the scriptures of how a natural death process is a gradual process. At death what is happening is that the elements within our body are beginning to withdraw. The earth, water, wind and fire element dissolve. What happens is that the potency of each of the elements in our body begins to decrease and that this is a gradual process as all our senses completely withdraw, and then we experience the actual death. That is a gradual death process.

However if it is a sudden death, such as an accident or someone is shot or even someone is very, very sick, it is said

that it is hard to recognise those processes. In the case of a sudden death the individual might not experience the gradual sequence of the death process. It is as if some sort of darkness occurs and then awakening in another existence.

Of course what we call death in the normal western convention is the point when the breath stops. That is what I understand. However according to the Buddhist scriptures when the breath stops that is just an external sign of the wind element being withdrawn but not necessary the actual death taking place. Thus there are great descriptions in the teachings that there is still a subtle consciousness within the body that can still remain. That is not something, however, that would be obvious to outsiders. Now it seems that a lot of scientists, neurologists, psychologists and so forth, are beginning to question whether there is something beyond our physical body, something that we call a subtle mind..

Question: Does everyone wake up in the same type of existence or are there different existences?

Of course there can be no straightforward answer to that question because it depends on your beliefs. There are some who believe that there are two kinds of existences: an existence that is favourable and pleasant and is called heaven in some traditions and an unpleasant existence that is called hell. According to Buddhist beliefs, where we believe in reincarnation, there are more existences than just those two. There are quite a few different existences. However what is common is that one might wake up, as you put it, to either a pleasant existence or an unpleasant existence.

Where we are reborn, or what level of existence, whether it is a pleasant or unpleasant depends on one's karma, as explained in the Buddhist tradition. If one has created positive karma it will naturally contribute to a more pleasurable, pleasant existence. If one has created more negative karma in one's life then that will contribute to one waking up in an unpleasant existence. That is what will determine where we wake up or are reborn. Thus it is explained that for as long as we are under the control of our karma, we ourselves don't have immediate control of where we are reborn. It is as our karma that decides.

Leaving aside what happens after death, one also doesn't have much control even during one's life. In my case, I never had the intention to come to a place like Australia. It was never on my list, however I believe that it is karma that has brought me to Australia. We may have noticed that there will be times when we have dreams or plan for ourselves but somehow we end up somewhere else. We don't have much control over that. So even in one's life experience there seems to be some sort of force, which we call karma, that determines our direction. We might have certain preferences or choices but other conditions just present themselves. Sometimes they may be good conditions and things work out quite well even though we didn't plan it. But on certain occasions things don't work out well at all and of course it was not in one's plan to face difficulties and problems. One had a plan for things to go well but beyond one's control things did not work out well. One may face lots of difficulties and problems—they just seem to present themselves.

According to Buddhism even though it is our choice that we would have something better those unwanted things, difficulties, arise uncontrollably because of karma. Ultimately what determines our karma is our state of mind. If we feel that this description has some validity then the

way to change our karma for the better is none other than acquainting ourselves with a generous, kind and compassion attitude. The state of mind that determines the best karma is said to be a compassionate mind, so that is something for us to acquaint ourselves with.

When we think about this, it is almost amusing to think that things somehow, sometimes, just seem to be pointed in a certain direction, and even without much control you just seem to be sent in that direction. It is quite amusing to think. 'Why is that so? How is that? How is that happening?' There are often people who do question, 'Why is it happening? Why is this happening to me?' They ask why things happen seemingly without one's control?

When the description of karma is given according to the Buddhist teachings it seems to help these people to understand the situation. That seems to describe why we seemingly don't have immediate control over our situation, because it is karma that is determining our direction. For those who believe in God, and thus believe that good or bad situations are presented by God, as I think is described in the Christian tradition, a difficult situation might be a test from God, so to speak. When that description is given for someone who has a belief in God, then that also helps the mind. It helps them to believe that even though it is out of one's immediate control there is something that is controlling that for a purpose or reason. That helps their mind to understand and accept. So, in both cases, accepting the situation is the main point.

Question: A simple question, how much emphasis do Buddhists place on the birth day?

From astrological point of view there seems to be some significance. In the Tibetan tradition we do have those who study astrology. For astrologists it seems that what day you were born, what time and so forth, will allow them to do calculations and make a prediction of what sort of life you will have and so forth. Now some are quite accurate, some not so accurate.

I recall that on TV there was someone, I don't know what you will call him, but someone with silver hair, and he would say that depending on what date you were born, what sign you were, that you will get a certain job, or this will happen to them.

This would have been on channel 10 (*laughter*). Maybe he's on channel 7 now (*more laughter*). I first saw him many years ago and he was quite young then (*more laughter*). It seems that his English is not good and he seems to have an accent. That same person is on channel 7 around 11 o'clock in the morning. He would write down something on a chart and depending on the chart he described certain things. Again it might be that some people who listened to him may get some benefit. However I think karma is something that is beyond that.

Other people may use tarot cards. Apparently someone who used to come here did that. Sometimes this is quite amusing because some say certain things and it seems to be quite accurate but there are others who I have heard in the past who said, 'Oh, it is not too difficult, you will be like a soothsayer, so to speak, if you say a few things and it actually works out for them (*more laughter*)'.

In another incident I recall someone telling me when I was at the Sanskrit University in Varanasi, that if you answer your exam questions assuming them to be right, they can actually turn out to be correct.

He related an account whereby if you assume something it can actually turn out to be true. He told a story about someone who was leading a goat. There were three other people in the story. The first asked, 'Where are you taking the dog?' The person leading the goat didn't listen to the first person. However when the second person made the same comment, 'Where are you leading the dog?' he started to wonder, 'Why is that person saying this?' So when the third person made exactly the same comment, 'Where are you leading that dog?' he thought this must be a dog. So he left the goat saying 'I don't need the dog' (*more laughter*).

Apparently this was a scheme by the three people. They had teamed up to get the goat away from the person (*more laughter*) and the three people got the goat. That is the story he related to show that if you start to assume something then it might turn out to be true for you.

Before we conclude for the evening we can again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time the object that we will focus on is the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited .

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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