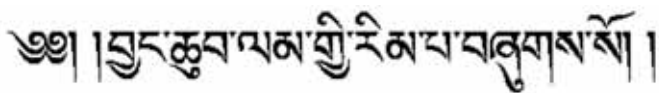


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## The Condensed Lam Rim



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As usual it would be good to spend some time for meditation. It is important to adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture, and it is also important to try to adopt a comfortable and relaxed state of mind, a clear bright state of mind, which is conducive to meditation. Relatively speaking it seems much easier for us to adopt a comfortable physical posture, and that finding a genuinely relaxed and calm state of mind seems more difficult for us to achieve. Being relaxed physically is something we are quite used to.

The reason why it is difficult to achieve a naturally clear and bright state of mind is because there are many opposing factors; there are many factors that cause unrest in the mind and prevent us achieving a relaxed calm state of mind. There are many hindrances or opposing factors for us to achieve that state of mind, so it is important for us to look into where those opposing factors come from. How do they arise? Are they coming from within us, or are do they arise from external conditions?

This sort of investigation, checking where those obstacles arise from, is worthwhile for us to do. In fact, the investigation process itself when done genuinely, looking within and checking where these opposing factors arise from, brings about a clearer state of mind.

Engaging in the investigative process develops our analytical state of mind. This process promotes a genuine wisdom or intelligence within us, particularly the wisdom of being able to detect what is beneficial and what is detrimental to our wellbeing.

Analytical wisdom, is the wisdom that engages in self-analysis, which promotes a naturally more calm, more peaceful, relaxed state of mind. It is with this type of wisdom that we develop a naturally clear and peaceful state of mind.

We don't usually pay attention to the opposing factors or obstacles that prevent a clear, calm and bright state of mind. It is these opposing factors that cause unrest in the mind, and if we don't pay careful attention it may appear to us that the opposing factors arise from external factors. If the factors that cause us unrest and an unclear state of mind were external, then we could possibly avoid or avert the external condition. However, these opposing factors and conditions are actually within us —they are not external, but developed within us.

While it is true that there might be certain external conditions that contribute to our unrest, if we don't allow our mind to focus on those external conditions then they cannot really harm us. It is only when we allow our mind to focus and pay attention to the external conditions that it begins to disturb us and affect us.

When we begin to understand this process, then we begin to also really understand how meditation is a great way to

benefit ourselves and help avoid these sorts of problems. So for us beginners, if we allow our mind to pay attention and focus on the kinds of external conditions that may contribute to our unrest, then we will feel disturbed and agitated

As long as we allow our mind to be preoccupied with external situations that make us disturbed and agitated, then we will experience unrest and disturbance. While if we don't pay attention or focus on the external factors, and we maintain a sense of integrity of looking within ourselves, keeping our mind intact, then we will not be disturbed or agitated. When we understand this, then we will naturally take the initiative to develop our state of mind to a point where we are not distracted with external factors, preferring instead to maintain attention and focus within ourselves. Meditation allows us to intentionally distance ourselves from external factors and look within by choosing a virtuous object to focus on; we place our full attention on that object.

The technique of meditation is to intentionally withdraw from all external distractions and place our focus within. The familiarity and acquaintance with this technique of meditation helps us to promote the wisdom within. This particular wisdom enables us to clearly recognise and make a clear distinction between a useful state of mind (beneficial) and negative state of mind (causes a disturbance). When we meditate like this, we begin to slowly progress. The transformation that takes place within us is a gradual but steady transformation, where we develop a natural ability to be mindful, to constantly check our state of mind and thoughts - what are we doing now? Whenever negative states of mind arise, we need to immediately be cautious, and whenever there is a positive intention to further develop positive states of mind, then we can embrace that. Doing this with sincerity means we are make steady progress in our transformation.

Our steady development relies upon our resolve to adopt this natural tendency of discerning whether something is useful or harmful for us, or not, be it a thought or a situation. So whatever we do in life, whatever thoughts we have, always use our own discerning wisdom to check whether the activity or thought is useful to us or not. When that becomes a part of our life, then we will most likely avoid falling into a situation where we are completely overwhelmed by negative states of mind or negative emotions. There would have been many occasions where we simply got upset and allowed ourselves to be in a grumpy state of mind, or be annoyed.

If we look into what caused us to be initially so annoyed, it was most probably something insignificant, probably some small matter. But yet we allowed it to escalate by just going over and over it again in our minds, rather than changing our attitudes and transcending that small annoyance. We further make it seem bigger with our own negative emotion and negative state of mind. In the end, most of the time we find the situation that can trigger something within, and we start to feel miserable and uncomfortable, getting upset and angry. There is no point at all in destroying our own joy and happiness by becoming upset and angry over a small matter. Now if it was really something grave, such as a life or death matter, then we might say, 'They cannot be blamed'. It might be reasonable to be upset and annoyed, but often when we look into the situation, when we clearly examine it, we usually find that most of the things we get upset in our day to day life are very small and insignificant, yet we allow those small and insignificant situations to completely overwhelm us. This typically happens when we go over and

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over a situation rather than changing our attitude into a more positive one.

We need to be mindful of this damaging behaviour. If we are mindful from moment to moment on a daily basis, then there is a possibility for us to have a more steady, more joyful and calm state of mind. Otherwise, for us ordinary beings it might be difficult to achieve a real, genuine happy state of mind. Sometimes we can find ourselves being excited about something, perhaps being too over joyful and then in the next moment feeling completely depressed again. If we are not mindful, then our emotions may fluctuate from moment to moment, like a roller coaster and not be steady. For example, when you are picking up a cup of tea you are feeling happy, but by the time you take a sip and put it down you are feeling a bit depressed, or even upset and shaky. Our feelings swing rapidly from one extreme to the other.

The way to protect ourselves from these momentary fluctuations of the emotions in our mind is to develop a more steady and calm mind. We can develop this by adopting a meditation technique where we develop a discerning wisdom where we are constantly checking our state of our mind, making sure that we don't fall victim to our negative states of mind and emotions. If we do find that our negative state of mind is about to arise, then we can nip it in the bud. We need to immediately detect it for what it is and not allow ourselves, not to feed it, not allow it to overwhelm oneself.

We do this through the practice of meditation. Meditation is a technique where we choose to focus on a virtuous object by completely withdrawing from non-virtuous thoughts and objects and place our focus within ourselves. This meditation technique, which we will do for a few minutes, is something we need to try to carry out in our daily life. Meditation is more than a state where we are sitting rigid with our eyes closed. It is a state of mind where we are mindful and diligent, where we are constantly aware of what is going on with our thoughts and emotions. We need to understand how the meditation technique helps us to develop a healthy state of mind.

Now we will meditate, sitting in a comfortable and relaxed posture, withdrawing our mind from external distractions and bring our focus within ourselves. And thus having brought our focus within, we then place our entire focus and attention on our breath, which is the object to focus on in our meditation. So placing our attention and focus on our breath means just being mindful of our natural breath, coming in and going out. Just be mindful of that and nothing else. Constantly be fully aware of each in breath and out breath, and just focus on that and nothing else. *(Pause for meditation)*

We have not been able to go through the text for a quite a few sessions, however, questions are also important to resolve. When we consider the main reason we are here, I feel that it is mainly so that we can all find a practical way to lead a more meaningful and contented life. From my side I feel that I wish to share some practical techniques that can be adopted in everyday life so we can manage our life in a more constructive way. As mentioned previously, this means developing an inner wisdom or intelligence that allows us to discern for ourselves what is useful and what is harmful to ourselves. When we develop that ability ourselves, then it helps us become stronger. We develop a stronger character so that we don't become easily influenced by others, and gullible to whatever they say.

It is so easy to be led astray and influenced by others if we are not mindful and careful. If we have developed a sound intelligence within ourselves, then we can develop a positive inner strength that will be the main assistance for us to lead a more meaningful, constructive life. Otherwise, if we are not able to discern anything for ourselves, this means we will most likely make poor decisions for ourselves, and we might easily be victim to other people's nonsense. For example, when someone gives us a glass of wine we may just accept it blindly without considering possible consequences. Someone may offer us a glass of wine as a way to influence us to engage in drinking and becoming intoxicated. But if we can use our own wisdom and intelligence then we might be able to reason, 'well if this person is offering me a glass of wine now, and I accept it and drinking becomes a habit for me, will this person who offers me wine now continue to pay for my drinks?' If we develop a habit of drinking alcohol such as wine, we might even become addicted to it. If we ask the wine giver for another glass of wine, then they would probably say 'No, buy it yourself!'

I direct this advice particularly to the younger generation because they are yet to experience so much more in life. Younger people are easy targets as they are easily influenced. When I share this advice with the younger generation about developing our own discriminating intelligence and wisdom, it is my attempt to try to give them the essential tools to develop a more healthy, constructive, and more meaningful life.

### Questions

*Question: When I was growing up, I was taught to fight for what is important. How do I stop myself from becoming angry?*

*Answer: By all means we need to fight for what is right, but not with anger but rather with compassion and love, not by losing love and compassion in our heart. Definitely there are times where we have to correct the wrong, particularly when others out of maliciousness try to prevent that. We need to correct that, but with love and compassion in our mind. That is the Buddhist perspective.*

At the same time we are not going to deprive others of their rights, and from what they are entitled to. So when we are attempting to right a wrong from our point of view, we need to make sure others do not lose out, that they will not be deprived of their rights. We need to be fair as well as right. As beginners in our practice we cannot expect ourselves to be completely without anger or arguments when we try to fight for our rights. That is hard, but it is good for us to accept that it is possible to develop a genuine sense of compassion in our heart.

We do not have to get angry whenever we fight for our rights, and sometimes it is OK if we get a little upset and angry. For example, I often think about sisters Tara and Susie, (children of former residents) who are both here now. When Tara was about five, both of them came towards me at the dining table. When I praised Susie, saying she was a nice girl, Tara responded by saying that 'Susie is sometimes naughty.' I said, 'Sometimes being naughty is OK. Even your dad is a little bit naughty, even your mum is a little bit naughty, and maybe yourself too. Sometimes your dad is naughty, right?' And Tara said, 'Yes, that's true'. 'Sometimes your mum might be a little bit naughty', and she responded 'Yes, that's true'. 'Sometimes you might be naughty', and to that she said, 'No'. She was saying in proud way, 'No I'm

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not naughty'. This is the way we can look into and analyse these things.

*Question:* I am struggling with many things in life. When someone gives me advice, I feel that it is done in good faith but I find it very hard to apply it. Also when I come your teachings, Geshe-la, I agree with what you say, but when I try to meditate I find it very difficult to concentrate and start nodding off. When I see others doing well, I wonder what's wrong with me, why can't I also practise?

*Answer:* If you were to take a more practical approach it need not be as complex a situation as you think. Sometimes we may feel that the advice is given in good faith by parents or teachers or friends, so we feel we should follow it. But first of all, try to understand all advice that is given, and then secondly try to put the useful ideas into practise. Find the one thing that can be useful to improve your life.

Our development is a gradual process. We start from simple and manageable things, and then we can slowly progress and build on that. Advice for meditation is generally to do it for a short time, but try to do it well. But even if it is for a short time, even just for a minute, if you can focus for a minute then that is an achievement. Then we can slowly and gradually increase that. Don't be overwhelmed by others who seem to have meditated for a long time. For all we know, they may also be having a hard time; maybe they also find it hard to focus. Even though they might be sitting there rigidly and looking very pious and very concentrated, they might actually be quite distracted too.

There are those who tell the truth about their meditation practice, just as in the way you are, confessing that you are having a difficult time. If others were to confess themselves too, we might see that there are many who are in similar situations. There are actually many who confide in me that they find keeping the mind focussed difficult.

So first of all bring the focus within and then try to place it on an object and try to keep it constant. Developing concentration and maintaining it is very difficult. Those who confided in me that they are not able to maintain any focus and concentration for a long time say it was because their parents constantly told them to focus on external achievements in life. Advice was always centred on directing energy towards external achievements. There was never any thought to look within and try to develop any sort of awareness; the advice was always to focus outside. They say this gave them a habit of constantly just focusing outside, and that is why it is so hard for them to focus within. There might be some truth in that.

This is the situation for most of us; we are mostly familiar, and are used to being, completely distracted with external things. However, we are all gathered here because we are all like minded people who intentionally want to develop and learn the practice of meditation.

When we allow our mind to be completely distracted, our mind is not at rest. There is no sense of calmness within the mind. Whereas when we adopt the meditation technique such as we do here, where we intentionally withdraw from distractions and bring our mind to focus within, then our mind becomes relaxed and calm.

As I regularly emphasise again and again, whether we meditate long or not, or able to meditate in a focussed way or not, is not the main issue. The main issue for us is to have a more meaningful life, a more joyous and happy mind. We try not to allow our mind to become overwhelmed and

disturbed by unhappiness, but instead try to maintain a sense of joy and happiness. This is the main thing we need to protect. The most essential thing for us is our happy state of mind, not material things such as money and wealth. We can try to promote and protect any happiness that we have achieved. If we lose that sense of joy and happiness, then that is when things become grim and difficult. When that sense of joy and happiness is lost, then it doesn't help or it doesn't matter whether we are famous or rich or have high status; it doesn't help at all.

For example, Michael Jackson had money, he was influential, he was famous, but nevertheless it seems that he needed to take some sort of pills to feel more tranquil and calm. Somehow taking one or two pills was not enough and he had to take more. Eventually he overdosed. Apparently a number of years earlier Michael Jackson made an attempt to go over to India to see the Dalai Lama, however it seems that meeting was not possible at that time. I think the Dalai Lama said he could meet Jackson on his next visit to the US. But it never happened.

Richard Gere apparently went to see the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala and stayed about three months, possibly because he was separated from his wife; maybe that was the problem he was experiencing. It seems Richard Gere saw the Dalai Lama because he was suffering a little bit from anxiety and depression from having separated from his wife. From learning about Buddhism, Gere seems to have a happy mind.

The point is that we can definitely do something in cultivating a happy and joyous state of mind; it is in our own hands. If we neglect this, and if we don't do anything about it, then when it seems like we have no choice, we are doomed. But we all have the potential to work on developing a better state of mind. Relying on pills doesn't solve the problem; we can't rely on pills and drugs to make us happy. The end result, we can all see, is not happiness. The main point is that we are responsible for our own happiness, and we have the ability to achieve this.

Before we end the session for the evening, we can spend a few minutes in meditation. The object to focus on is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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