

# Eight Steps to Happiness

## Also by Geshe Kelsang Gyatso

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Clear Light of Bliss  
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GESHE KELSANG GYATSO

# Eight Steps to Happiness

THE BUDDHIST WAY OF  
LOVING KINDNESS



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*(included at the request of faithful disciples)*

## Acknowledgements

This book, *Eight Steps to Happiness*, gives a detailed and practical commentary to the revered Mahayana Buddhist poem *Eight Verses of Training the Mind*, written by Bodhisattva Langri Tangpa (AD 1054-1123). The poem expresses the essential methods for developing universal love and compassion, and does so in a way that has inspired generations of practitioners for almost a thousand years.

The book is based upon transcripts of two courses of oral teachings given by the author at Manjushri Kadampa Meditation Centre. The transcripts were carefully checked and substantially augmented by the author during intensive editing retreats in 1998 and 1999.

We are deeply grateful to Venerable Geshe Kelsang Gyatso for his great kindness in preparing a commentary that brings alive the full meaning of this celebrated text for the benefit of all worldwide. The power and lucidity of the commentary show clearly that the author writes with full personal realization of the subject matter.

We would also like to thank all those dedicated senior Dharma students who assisted the author with the editing and who prepared the final manuscript for publication.

Roy Tyson,  
Administrative Director,  
Manjushri Kadampa  
Meditation Centre,  
August 1999.

# Introduction

This book is based on the widely renowned *Eight Verses of Training the Mind* (*Lojong Tsig Gyema* in Tibetan), which was composed by Bodhisattva Langri Tangpa, an eleventh-century Buddhist Master from Tibet. Though comprising only eight four-line verses, this remarkable text reveals the essence of the Mahayana Buddhist path to enlightenment, showing how we can transform our mind from its present confused and self-centred state into the perfect wisdom and compassion of a Buddha.

Every living being has the potential to become a Buddha, someone who has completely purified his or her mind of all faults and limitations and has brought all good qualities to perfection. Our mind is like a cloudy sky, in essence clear and pure but overcast by the clouds of delusions. Just as the thickest clouds eventually disperse, so too even the heaviest delusions can be removed from our mind. Delusions such as hatred, greed and ignorance are not an intrinsic part of the mind. If we apply the appropriate methods they can be completely eliminated, and we shall experience the supreme happiness of full enlightenment.

Everyone wants to be happy and no one wants to suffer, but very few people understand the real causes of happiness and suffering. We tend to look for happiness outside ourselves, thinking that if we had the right house, the right car, the right job, and the right friends we would be truly happy.



*Buddha Shakyamuni*

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We spend almost all our time adjusting the external world, trying to make it conform to our wishes. All our life we have tried to surround ourself with people and things that make us feel comfortable, secure or stimulated, yet still we have not found pure and lasting happiness. Even when we succeed in fulfilling our desires, it is not long before our desires change and we want something else. We may find the house of our dreams, but a few months later we feel that we need a bigger kitchen, an extra bedroom, or a larger garden, and we begin to think of moving. Or perhaps we meet the 'perfect' partner, fall in love, and move in together. At the beginning our partner seems to be the most wonderful person in the world, but before long we begin to see faults in him or her. We discover that we are no longer in love, and soon we are looking for someone else to fulfil our desires.

Throughout history human beings have sought to improve their external situation, yet despite all our efforts we are no happier. It is true that from the point of view of material development many countries are making progress. Technology is becoming more and more sophisticated, and worldly knowledge has increased dramatically. We know so many things we did not know before and can do things we never even dreamt of. Superficially it looks as if our world is improving, but if we look a little more deeply we shall see that there are now many problems that never existed before. Terrifying weapons have been invented, our environment is being poisoned, and new diseases are appearing. Even simple pleasures like eating or lying in the sun are becoming more dangerous.

The result of an unbridled pursuit of happiness from external sources is that our planet is being destroyed and our lives are becoming more complicated and dissatisfying. It is time

we sought happiness from a different source. Happiness is a state of mind, so the real source of happiness must lie within the mind, not in external conditions. If our mind is pure and peaceful we shall be happy, regardless of our external circumstances, but if it is impure and unpeaceful we can never be truly happy, no matter how hard we try to change our external conditions. We could change our home or our partner countless times, but until we change our restless, discontented mind we shall never find true happiness.

If we have to walk across rough and thorny ground, one way of protecting our feet is to cover the whole ground with leather, but this is not very practical. We can achieve the same result in a much simpler way – by covering our feet. Similarly, if we wish to protect ourselves from suffering we can either try to change the whole world to make it conform to our wishes, or we can change our mind. Until now we have been trying to change the world, but this clearly has not worked. Now we need to change our mind.

The first step towards changing our mind is to identify which states of mind produce happiness and which produce suffering. In Buddhism, states of mind that are conducive to peace and happiness are called ‘virtuous minds’, whereas those that disturb our peace and cause us suffering are called ‘delusions’. We have many different types of delusion, such as desirous attachment, anger, jealousy, pride, miserliness and ignorance. These are known as ‘inner enemies’ because they are continually destroying our happiness from within. Their only function is to cause us harm.

Delusions are distorted ways of looking at ourselves, other people, and the world around us. The way a deluded mind views these phenomena does not accord with reality. The deluded mind of hatred, for example, views another person

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as intrinsically bad, but there is no such thing as an intrinsically bad person. Desirous attachment, on the other hand, sees its object of desire as intrinsically good and as a true source of happiness. If we have a strong craving to eat chocolate, chocolate appears to us to be an intrinsically desirable object. However, once we have eaten too much of it and start to feel sick, it no longer seems so desirable and may even appear repulsive. This shows that in itself chocolate is neither desirable nor repulsive. It is the mind of attachment that projects onto it all kinds of desirable qualities and then relates to it as if it really did possess those qualities.

All delusions function like this, projecting onto the world their own distorted version of reality and then relating to this projection as if it were true. When our mind is under the influence of delusions we are out of touch with reality and are, in a sense, hallucinating. Since our mind is under the influence of at least subtle forms of delusion all the time, it is not surprising that our lives are so often filled with frustration. It is as if we are continually chasing mirages, only to be disappointed when they do not give us the satisfaction for which we had hoped.

The source of all delusions is a distorted awareness called 'self-grasping ignorance', which grasps phenomena as inherently, or independently, existent. In reality all phenomena are dependent arisings, which means that their existence is utterly dependent upon other phenomena, such as their causes, their parts, and the minds that apprehend them. Objects do not exist from their own side, in and of themselves; what they are depends upon how they are viewed. Our failure to realize this is the source of all our problems.

The type of self-grasping that harms us most is grasping our own self, or I, as inherently or independently existent. We instinctively feel that we possess a completely real and

objective self or I that exists independently of all other phenomena, even our body and mind. One consequence of grasping at our self as an independent entity separate from the world and other people is that we develop self-cherishing, a mind that regards oneself as supremely important. Because we cherish ourselves so strongly, we are drawn to the people and things we find attractive, we want to separate ourselves from the people and things we find unattractive, and we are uninterested in the people and things we find neither attractive nor unattractive. In this way attachment, anger and indifference are born. Because we have an exaggerated sense of our own importance we feel that others' interests are in conflict with our own, and this in turn gives rise to competitiveness, jealousy, arrogance and lack of consideration for others. By acting under the influence of these and other delusions we engage in destructive behaviour, such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and hurtful speech. The result of these negative actions is suffering for both ourselves and others.

Even though our delusions are deeply ingrained, they are not an intrinsic part of our mind and so they can definitely be removed. Delusions are just bad mental habits, and like all habits they can be broken. Through making a sincere and consistent effort to become familiar with constructive states of mind we can eliminate even the most stubborn delusions and replace them with the opposite virtues. For example, we can weaken our anger by familiarizing our mind with patience and love, our attachment by familiarizing our mind with non-attachment, and our jealousy by rejoicing in others' good fortune.

To eradicate delusions completely, however, we must destroy their root – the mind of self-grasping. To do this we



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need to familiarize our mind with the true nature of reality, or ultimate truth. If we destroy self-grasping, all other delusions cease naturally, just as the leaves and branches of a tree die if we destroy its roots. Once we have completely eradicated our delusions it will be utterly impossible for us to experience unpeaceful states of mind. As we shall no longer have the internal causes of suffering, external causes of suffering, such as sickness or death, will have no power to disturb our mind. This permanent cessation of delusion and suffering is known as 'liberation', or 'nirvana' in Sanskrit.

Although attaining our own liberation from suffering is a wonderful achievement, it is not enough. We are not isolated individuals but part of the family of all living beings. Everything we own, everything we enjoy, all our opportunities for spiritual development, and even our very body come from the kindness of others. Are we to make our own escape from suffering and then abandon everyone else to their fate? This would be like a young man imprisoned together with his aged parents who makes his own escape but leaves his parents behind. We would not admire such a person. We definitely need to make an effort to liberate ourselves from the mental prison of our deluded minds, but our ultimate aim must be to help everyone else do the same.

Thus the final goal in Buddhism is the attainment of full enlightenment, or Buddhahood. The Sanskrit term 'Buddha' means 'Awakened One', and refers to anyone who has awakened from the sleep of ignorance and is free from the dream of mistaken appearance. Because ordinary beings like us have not yet awakened from the sleep of ignorance we continue to live in a dream-like world of mistaken appearances and do not see the true nature of things. This is the fundamental reason why we experience suffering and are

of limited benefit to others. Through completely removing all traces of the darkness of ignorance from their minds, Buddhas attained omniscient wisdom and the limitless ability to help all living beings.

Their boundless and all-encompassing compassion gives Buddhas the energy to work without interruption for the sake of others. They understand the real causes of happiness and suffering, and they know exactly how to help living beings in accordance with their individual needs and inclinations. Buddhas have the power to bless people's minds, causing their delusions to subside and their virtues to increase; and they also have the ability to emanate innumerable forms for the benefit of others. Of all the ways in which Buddhas help living beings, the most effective is to teach them how to control their minds and follow the spiritual path to liberation and enlightenment.

The founder of Buddhism in this world was Buddha Shakyamuni. After attaining enlightenment, Buddha gave eighty-four thousand teachings, all of which are advice on how to subdue and overcome delusions by cultivating virtuous states of mind. Buddha's teachings, as well as the inner realizations achieved through putting these teachings into practice, are known as 'Dharma'.

In the text on which this book is based, Bodhisattva Langri Tangpa has condensed the very essence of Buddhadharma into eight short verses. Through contemplating the meaning of these verses we shall see that they contain a step-by-step path to complete inner peace and happiness. If we sincerely put these teachings into practice we shall gradually subdue our destructive and self-centred habits of mind and replace them with the positive minds of unconditional love and compassion. Finally, by practising the instructions given in the chapter on

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training in ultimate bodhichitta, we shall be able to overcome the fundamental delusion of self-grasping ignorance, together with its imprints, and thereby experience the bliss of full enlightenment. This is the real meaning of seeking happiness from a different source.

Although *Eight Verses* was written over nine hundred years ago, it is as relevant today as it was then. Whether Buddhist or not, anyone with a genuine wish to overcome their inner problems and achieve permanent inner peace and happiness can benefit from Langri Tangpa's advice.

### REBIRTH AND KARMA

Since some background knowledge of rebirth and karma is useful for understanding the main practices explained in this book, there now follows a brief introduction to these topics.

The mind is neither physical, nor a by-product of purely physical processes, but a formless continuum that is a separate entity from the body. When the body disintegrates at death, the mind does not cease. Although our superficial conscious mind ceases, it does so by dissolving into a deeper level of consciousness, called 'the very subtle mind'. The continuum of our very subtle mind has no beginning and no end, and it is this mind which, when completely purified, transforms into the omniscient mind of a Buddha.

Every action we perform leaves an imprint, or potential, on our very subtle mind, and each karmic potential eventually gives rise to its own effect. Our mind is like a field, and performing actions is like sowing seeds in that field. Positive or virtuous actions sow the seeds of future happiness, and negative or non-virtuous actions sow the seeds of future suffering. This definite relationship between actions and their

effects – virtue causing happiness and non-virtue causing suffering – is known as the ‘law of karma’. An understanding of the law of karma is the basis of Buddhist morality.

After we die our very subtle mind leaves our body and enters the intermediate state, or ‘bardo’ in Tibetan. In this subtle dream-like state we experience many different visions that arise from the karmic potentials that were activated at the time of our death. These visions may be pleasant or terrifying depending on the karma that ripens. Once these karmic seeds have fully ripened they impel us to take rebirth without choice.

It is important to understand that as ordinary samsaric beings we do not choose our rebirth but are reborn solely in accordance with our karma. If good karma ripens we are reborn in a fortunate state, as either a human or a god, but if negative karma ripens we are reborn in a lower state, as an animal, a hungry spirit or a hell being. It is as if we were blown to our future lives by the winds of our karma, sometimes ending up in higher rebirths, sometimes in lower rebirths.

This uninterrupted cycle of death and rebirth without choice is called ‘cyclic existence’, or ‘samsara’ in Sanskrit. Samsara is like a Ferris wheel, sometimes taking us up into the three fortunate realms, sometimes down into the three lower realms. The driving force of the wheel of samsara is our contaminated actions motivated by delusions, and the hub of the wheel is self-grasping ignorance. For as long as we remain on this wheel we shall experience an unceasing cycle of suffering and dissatisfaction, and we shall have no opportunity to experience pure, lasting happiness. By practising the Buddhist path to liberation and enlightenment, however, we can destroy self-grasping, thereby liberating ourselves from

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the cycle of uncontrolled rebirth and attaining a state of perfect peace and freedom. We shall then be in a position to help others to do the same. A more detailed explanation of rebirth and karma can be found in the books *Introduction to Buddhism* and *Joyful Path of Good Fortune*.



*Maitreya*

## *End of preview*

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