

*How to
Transform
Your Life*

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Venerable Geshe Kelsang Gyatso Rinpoche*

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VENERABLE GESHE KELSANG
GYATSO RINPOCHE

*How to
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Your Life*

A BLISSFUL JOURNEY



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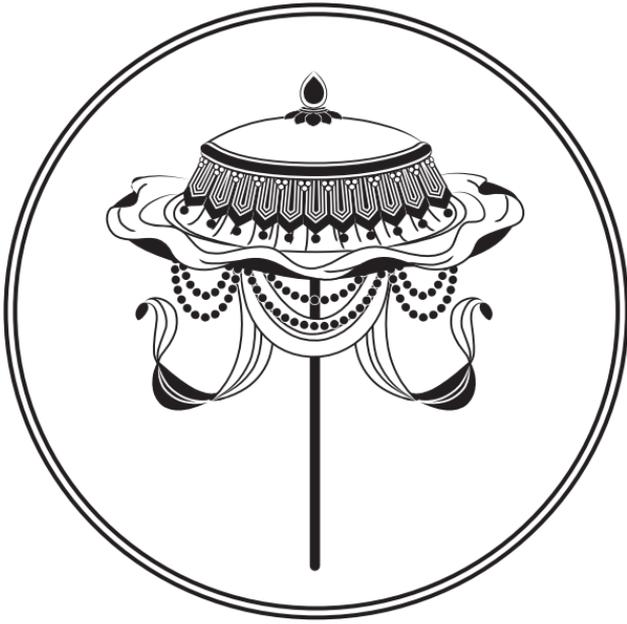
ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATIONS

The illustrations in this book depict the eight auspicious symbols, a peacock, the mirror of Dharma, the sun shining through clouds, and hands in prayer.

The symbolism of the eight auspicious symbols reveals how to begin, make progress on and complete the Buddhist path to enlightenment. Just as peacocks are said to thrive on plants that are poisonous to other birds, sincere spiritual practitioners can make good use of whatever circumstances arise in their daily life. Through the mirror of Buddha's teachings, Dharma, we can see our own faults and have the opportunity to overcome them. Like the sun dispelling clouds, we can develop the wisdom that can remove all delusions from our mind; and the hands in prayer holding a wishfulfilling jewel symbolize that by following the spiritual path we will eventually experience the completely pure mind of enlightenment.

PART ONE:

Foundation



Come under the great umbrella of Buddhism

Introduction

Through practising the instructions presented in this book we can transform our life from a state of misery into one of pure and everlasting happiness. These instructions are scientific methods to improve our human nature. Everybody needs to be good-natured with a good heart, because in this way we can solve our own problems as well as those of others, and we can make our human life meaningful. Every living being has the same basic wish – to be happy and avoid suffering. Even newborn babies, animals and insects have this wish. It has been our main wish since beginningless time and it is with us all the time, even during our sleep. We spend our whole life working hard to fulfil this wish.

Since this world evolved, human beings have spent almost all their time and energy improving external conditions in their search for happiness and a solution to their problems. What has been the result? Instead of their wishes being fulfilled, human suffering and problems have continued to increase while the experience of happiness and peace is decreasing. This clearly shows that until now we have not found a correct method for reducing our problems and increasing happiness. The actual correct method for doing this is changing our attitude from negative to positive. We must understand this through our own experience. If we check carefully how we are experiencing

problems and unhappiness, we can understand that they are all created by our uncontrolled desire, wishing oneself to be happy all the time. By stopping this wish and instead wishing for others to be happy all the time, we will not have any problems or unhappiness at all. If we sincerely practise every day stopping wishing for oneself to be happy all the time and instead wishing for others to be happy all the time, then we will understand from our own experience that through this practice, which prevents attachment to the fulfilment of our own wishes, we will have no experience of problems or unhappiness at all. Thus, if we really want pure and everlasting happiness and freedom from misery, we must learn to control our mind, principally our desire.

With wisdom we can understand how our human life is precious, rare and meaningful. Due to the limitations of their body and mind, those who have taken rebirth as animals, for example, have no opportunity to understand or practise spiritual teachings that are methods to control delusions such as uncontrolled desire, anger and ignorance. Only humans are free from such hindrances and have all the necessary conditions for engaging in spiritual paths, which alone lead to pure and everlasting happiness. This freedom and possession of necessary conditions are the special characteristics that make our human life so precious.

Although there are many humans in this world, each one of us has only one life. One person may own many cars and houses, but even the richest person in the world cannot possess more than one life; and, when that is drawing to an end, he or she cannot buy, borrow or manufacture another. When we lose this life, it will be very difficult to find another similarly qualified human life in the future. A human life is therefore very rare.

If we use our human life to accomplish spiritual realizations, it becomes immensely meaningful. By using it in this way, we actualize our full potential and progress from the state of an ordinary, ignorant being to that of a fully enlightened being, the highest of all beings; and when we have done this we will have the power to benefit all living beings without exception. Thus, by using our human life for gaining spiritual realizations we can solve all our human problems and fulfil all our own and others' wishes. What could be more meaningful than this?



Maintain harmony and joy all the time

Inner Peace

Inner peace, or mental peace, is the source of all our happiness. Although all living beings have the same basic wish to be happy all the time, very few people understand the real causes of happiness. We usually believe that external conditions such as food, friends, cars and money are the real causes of happiness, and as a result we devote nearly all our time and energy to acquiring them. Superficially it seems that these things can make us happy, but if we look more deeply we will see that they also bring us a lot of suffering and problems.

Happiness and suffering are opposites, so if something is a real cause of happiness it cannot give rise to suffering. If food, money and so forth really are causes of happiness, they can never be causes of suffering; yet we know from our own experience that they often do cause suffering. For example, one of our main interests is food, but the food we eat is also the principal cause of most of our ill health and sickness. In the process of producing the things we feel will make us happy, we have polluted our environment to such an extent that the very air we breathe and the water we drink now threaten our health and well-being. We love the freedom and independence a car can give us, but the cost in accidents and environmental destruction is enormous. We feel that money is essential for us to enjoy life, but the pursuit of money also causes immense problems and anxiety. Even our family and

friends, whose company we enjoy, can also bring us a lot of worry and heartache.

In recent years our knowledge of modern technology has increased considerably, and as a result we have witnessed remarkable material progress, but there has not been a corresponding increase in human happiness. There is no less suffering in the world today, and there are no fewer problems. Indeed, it might be said that there are now more problems and greater dangers than ever before. This shows that the cause of happiness and the solution to our problems do not lie in knowledge of material things. Happiness and suffering are states of mind, and so their main causes are not to be found outside the mind. If we want to be truly happy and free from suffering, we must learn how to control our mind.

The real source of happiness is inner peace. If our mind is peaceful, we will be happy all the time, regardless of external conditions, but if it is disturbed or troubled in any way, we will never be happy, no matter how good our external conditions may be. External conditions can only make us happy if our mind is peaceful. We can understand this through our own experience. For instance, even if we are in the most beautiful surroundings and have everything we need, the moment we get angry any happiness we may have disappears. This is because anger has destroyed our inner peace.

We can see from this that if we want true, lasting happiness we need to develop and maintain a special experience of inner peace. The only way to do this is to train our mind through spiritual practice – gradually reducing and eliminating our negative, disturbed states of mind and replacing them with positive, peaceful states. Eventually,

through continuing to improve our inner peace we will experience supreme permanent peace of mind, or 'nirvana'. Once we have attained nirvana we will be happy throughout our life, and in life after life. We will have solved all our problems and accomplished the true meaning of our human life.

Since we all have within us our own source of peace and happiness, we may wonder why it is so hard to maintain a continually peaceful and joyful mind. This is because of the delusions that so often crowd our mind. Delusions are distorted ways of looking at ourself, other people and the world around us – like a distorted mirror they reflect a distorted world. The deluded mind of hatred, for example, views other people as intrinsically bad, but there is no such thing as an intrinsically bad person. Uncontrolled desire, also known as 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 be intrinsically desirable. 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 deluded mind of attachment that projects all kinds of pleasurable qualities onto its objects of desire and then relates to them as if they 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 not seeing things as they really are. Since our mind is under the control 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.

When things go wrong in our life and we encounter difficult situations, we tend to regard the situation itself as our problem, but in reality whatever problems we experience come from the mind. If we were to respond to difficult situations with a positive or peaceful mind they would not be problems for us; indeed, we may even come to regard them as challenges or opportunities for growth and development. Problems arise only if we respond to difficulties with a negative state of mind. Therefore, if we want to be happy all the time and to be free from problems, we must develop and maintain a peaceful mind. Sufferings, problems, worries, unhappiness and pain all exist within our mind; they are all unpleasant feelings, which are part of the mind. Through controlling and purifying our mind we can stop them once and for all.

To understand this fully, we need to understand the relationship between the mind and external objects. All objects, whether pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, are mere appearances to the mind, just like things experienced in a dream. This is not easy to understand at first, but we can gain some understanding by thinking about the following. When we are awake many different things exist, but when we fall asleep they cease. This is because the mind to which they appear ceases. When we dream, the only things that appear are dream objects. Later, when we wake up, these dream objects cease. This is because the dreaming mind to which they appear ceases. If we think deeply about this, we will understand how we can cause all the unpleasant things that we dislike to cease simply by abandoning impure, deluded

states of mind; and we can cause all the pleasant things that we desire to arise simply by developing a pure mind. Purifying our mind of delusions through spiritual practice fulfils our deepest longing for true, lasting happiness. We should memorize and contemplate the meaning of the following words:

The things that I normally see in dreams do not exist.
This proves that the things that I normally see while
awake do not exist,
Since both of these things are equally mistaken
appearance.

I will never grasp at the things that I normally see,
But just be satisfied with their mere name.
By doing this I will liberate myself permanently
From the sufferings of this life and countless future
lives.

In this way I will be able
To benefit each and every living being every day.

We should understand that although 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. At the moment our mind is like muddy water, murky and polluted by delusions. However, just as it is possible to separate mud from water, so it is possible to purify the mind of all delusions. With no delusions remaining in our mind, there is nothing that can disturb our inner peace and joy.

Since time without beginning we have been under the control of our mind, like a puppet on a string. We are like a servant working for our mind; whenever our mind wants to do something, we have to do it without any choice.

Sometimes our mind is like a crazy elephant, creating so many problems and dangers for ourself and others. By sincerely engaging in spiritual practice we can reverse this situation and gain mastery over our mind. Transforming our mind in this way, we will finally enjoy real freedom.

For our spiritual practice to be successful, we need the blessings and inspiration of those who have already gained deep inner realizations, but we also need to give ourself constant encouragement. If we cannot encourage ourself, how can we expect anyone else to? When we understand clearly that inner peace is the real source of happiness, and how, through spiritual practice, we can experience progressively deeper levels of inner peace, we will develop tremendous enthusiasm to practise. This is very important because to attain the supreme permanent inner peace of nirvana we need to engage in spiritual practice sincerely and diligently.

This does not mean that we should ignore external conditions. We need inner peace, but we also need good physical health, and for this we need certain external conditions such as food and a comfortable environment in which to live. There are many people who concentrate exclusively on developing the material side of their life, while completely ignoring spiritual practice. This is one extreme. However, there are other people who concentrate exclusively on spiritual practice, while ignoring the material conditions that are necessary for supporting a healthy human life. This is another extreme. We need to maintain a middle way that avoids both extremes of materialism and spirituality.

Some people believe that those who strive to attain nirvana are being selfish because they seem to be concentrating only

on their own inner peace, but this belief is incorrect. Our real purpose in attaining the supreme permanent inner peace of nirvana is to help others do the same. Just as the only way to solve our own problems is to find inner peace, so the only way to help others to solve theirs is to encourage them to engage in spiritual practice and discover their own inner peace. This way of benefiting others is by far the best. If through training our mind we succeed in pacifying – or even completely eliminating – our own anger, for example, we can certainly help others to control theirs. Then our advice will not be mere words, but will have behind it the power of personal experience.

We can sometimes help others by providing them with money or better material conditions, but we should remember that the greatest benefit we can give is to help them overcome their delusions and find true, lasting happiness within. Through technological progress and by organizing society in fairer, more humane ways, we can certainly help to improve people's lives in some respects, but whatever we do will inevitably have some unwanted side effects. The best we can hope for is to provide people with conditions that bring some temporary respite from problems and difficulties, but we cannot give them true, lasting happiness. This is because the real cause of happiness is inner peace, which can be found only within the mind, not in external conditions.

Without inner peace, outer peace is impossible. We all wish for world peace, but world peace will never be achieved unless we first establish peace within our own minds. We can send so-called 'peacekeeping forces' into areas of conflict, but peace cannot be imposed from the outside with guns. Only by creating peace within our own mind and helping others do the same can we hope to achieve peace in this world.

This book presents many profound methods of spiritual training, all of which are practical ways to purify and control our mind. If we put these methods into practice we will definitely gain a special experience of mental peace. By continuing to improve this experience, deluded states of mind will gradually diminish and our inner peace will grow. Eventually, by abandoning delusions altogether, we will attain the supreme permanent inner peace of nirvana. Having overcome our own delusions, such as anger, attachment and ignorance, and developed profound spiritual realizations of universal love, compassion, concentration and wisdom, our ability to help others will be far greater. In this way we can help others solve their problems not just for a few days or a few years, but for ever. We can help them discover an inner peace and joy that nothing, not even death, can destroy. How wonderful!

How to Develop and Maintain a Peaceful Mind

We can develop and maintain a peaceful mind by transforming our mind from negative states into positive states through engaging in the pure spiritual practices that are presented in this book. Through this we can transform our life from a miserable state into a state of pure and everlasting happiness.

Happiness and suffering are parts of the mind; the former is a joyful feeling and the latter an unpleasant feeling. Since happiness and suffering are parts of the mind, if we want to avoid suffering and find true happiness we need to understand the nature and functions of the mind. At first, this might seem to be quite straightforward since we all have minds, and we all know what state our mind is in – whether it is happy or sad, clear or confused, and so forth. However, if someone were to ask us what the nature of our mind is and how it functions, we would probably not be able to give a precise answer. This indicates that we do not have a clear understanding of the mind.

Some people think that the mind is the brain or some other part or function of the body, but this is incorrect. The brain is a physical object that can be seen with the eyes and that can be photographed or operated on in surgery. The mind, on the other hand, is not a physical object. It cannot be seen with the

eyes, nor can it be photographed or repaired by surgery. The brain, therefore, is not the mind but simply part of the body.

There is nothing within the body that can be identified as being our mind because our body and mind are different entities. For example, sometimes when our body is relaxed and immobile, our mind can be very busy, darting from one object to another. This indicates that our body and mind are not the same entity. In Buddhist scriptures, our body is compared to a guest house and our mind to a guest dwelling within it. When we die our mind leaves our body and goes to the next life, like a guest leaving a guesthouse and going somewhere else.

If the mind is not the brain, nor any other part of the body, what is it? It is a formless continuum that functions to perceive and understand objects. Because the mind is formless, or non-physical, by nature, it is not obstructed by physical objects. Thus, it is impossible for our body to go to the moon without travelling in a spaceship, but our mind can reach the moon in an instant just by thinking about it. Knowing and perceiving objects is a function that is unique to the mind. Although we say, 'I know such and such', in reality it is our mind that knows. We know things only by using our mind.

It is very important to be able to distinguish disturbed states of mind from peaceful states. As explained in the previous chapter, states of mind that disturb our inner peace, such as anger, jealousy and desirous attachment, are called 'delusions', and these are the principal causes of all our suffering. We may think that our suffering is caused by other people, by poor material conditions or by society, but in reality it all comes from our own deluded states of mind. The essence of spiritual practice is to reduce and eventually

completely eradicate our delusions, and replace them with permanent inner peace. This is the real meaning of our human life.

Normally we seek happiness outside ourself. We try to obtain better material conditions, a better job, higher social status and so forth; but no matter how successful we are in improving our external situation, we still experience many problems and much dissatisfaction. We never experience pure, lasting happiness. This shows us that we should not seek happiness outside ourself, but instead establish it within by purifying and controlling our mind through sincere spiritual practice. If we train in this way we can ensure that our mind remains calm and happy all the time. Then, no matter how difficult our external circumstances may be, we will always be happy and peaceful.

In our ordinary life, even though we work very hard to find happiness it remains elusive for us, whereas suffering and problems seem to come naturally, without any effort. Why is this? It is because the cause of happiness within our mind – inner peace – is very weak and can give rise to its effect only if we apply great effort, whereas the internal causes of suffering and problems – the delusions – are very strong and can give rise to their effects with no effort on our part. This is the real reason why problems come naturally while happiness is so difficult to find.

From this we can see that the principal causes of both happiness and problems are in the mind, not in the external world. If we were able to maintain a calm and peaceful mind all day long we would never experience any problems or mental suffering. For example, if our mind remains peaceful all the time, then even if we are insulted, criticized or blamed, or if we lose our job or our friends, we will not become

unhappy. No matter how difficult our external circumstances may become, for as long as we maintain a calm and peaceful mind they will not be a problem for us. Therefore, if we wish to be free from problems there is only one thing to do – learn to maintain a peaceful state of mind by following the spiritual path.

The essential point of understanding the mind is that liberation from suffering cannot be found outside the mind. Permanent liberation can be found only by purifying the mind. Therefore, if we want to become free from problems and attain lasting peace and happiness we need to increase our knowledge and understanding of how our mind develops.

There are three different levels of mind: gross, subtle and very subtle. During our dreams, we have dream awareness through which the various kinds of dream things appear to us; this awareness is a subtle mind because it is difficult to recognize. During deep sleep we have only one mental awareness, which perceives emptiness alone. This awareness is called the 'clear light of sleep', and is a very subtle mind because it is extremely difficult to recognize.

During the waking day we have waking awareness through which various kinds of waking things appear to us. This awareness is a gross mind because it is not difficult to recognize. When we fall asleep our gross mind, or waking awareness, dissolves into our subtle mind of sleep. At the same time, all our appearances of the waking world become non-existent; and when we experience deep sleep, our subtle mind of sleep dissolves into our very subtle mind of sleep, the clear light of sleep. At this stage, we have become like a person who has died. Then, because of our maintaining a karmic connection with this life, from our

clear light of sleep our gross mind, or waking awareness, will arise again and various kinds of waking things appear to us again.

The process of sleeping is very similar to the process of dying. The difference between these two is that when we are dying our gross and subtle minds will dissolve into our very subtle mind of death, known as the 'clear light of death'. Then, because of our karmic connection with this life ceasing, our very subtle mind leaves this body, goes to the next life and enters a new body, and then all the various kinds of things of the next life will appear to us. Everything will be completely new.

Living beings experience countless thoughts or minds, all of which are included within two: primary minds and mental factors. A detailed explanation of these can be found in the book *How to Understand the Mind*.

If we understand clearly the nature of our mind, we will definitely realize that the continuum of our mind does not cease when we die, and there will be no basis for doubting the existence of our future lives. If we realize the existence of our future lives, we will naturally be concerned for our welfare and happiness in those lives, and we will use this present life to make the appropriate preparations. This will prevent us from wasting our precious human life on the preoccupations of this life alone. Therefore, a correct understanding of the mind is absolutely essential.

End of preview

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