

*The New  
Meditation  
Handbook*

*Also by Venerable Geshe Kelsang  
Gyatso Rinpoche*

Meaningful to Behold  
Clear Light of Bliss  
Universal Compassion  
Joyful Path of Good Fortune  
The Bodhisattva Vow  
Heart Jewel  
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VENERABLE GESHE KELSANG  
GYATSO RINPOCHE

*The New  
Meditation  
Handbook*

MEDITATIONS TO MAKE OUR LIFE  
HAPPY AND MEANINGFUL



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## *Preface*

Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, appeared in this world in 624 BC. Just as doctors give different medicine for people with different illnesses, so Buddha gave different teachings for people with different problems and capacities. In all, he gave 84,000 different types of teaching, or Dharma. One of the most important of these is the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, which in Tibetan has twelve volumes translated from Sanskrit. To help us understand how to integrate these teachings into our daily life, the Buddhist Master Atisha wrote *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, also known as the *Stages of the Path*, or *Lamrim* in Tibetan. Although short, this text contains the entire meaning of the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*.

Later, the Tibetan Buddhist Master Je Tsongkhapa wrote extensive, middling and condensed commentaries to Atisha's Lamrim teachings. I have prepared this new meditation handbook based on Je Tsongkhapa's Lamrim commentaries. The purpose of doing this is to make it easier for people of the modern world to understand and practise this precious holy Dharma known as 'Kadam Lamrim'. Part One of this book presents the basic foundation of the path to enlightenment, and Part Two presents the actual path to enlightenment. Detailed explanations can be found in the books *Modern Buddhism*, *Transform Your Life* and *Joyful Path of Good Fortune*.

If you read this book sincerely with a good motivation free from negative views, I guarantee that you will receive great benefit for your daily happiness.

*Geshe Kelsang Gyatso,  
USA,  
March 2003.*

## PART ONE

# Foundation



*Follow the path to enlightenment*



## INTRODUCTION

*The New Meditation Handbook* is a practical guide to meditation. It teaches us how to make both ourself and others happy. Although we wish to be happy all the time, we do not know how to be, and because of this we usually destroy the happiness we have by developing anger and other delusions. As the Buddhist Master Shantideva says:

... although they wish for happiness,  
Out of ignorance they destroy it like a foe.

We believe that by simply improving external conditions, we can be truly happy. Motivated by this belief, most countries have made remarkable material progress. However, as we can see, this does not really make us happier or reduce our problems but instead creates more problems, suffering and danger. Because we have polluted our environment, water and air, physically we are becoming more unhealthy, and different diseases are spreading throughout the world. Our lives are now more complicated, and mentally we are becoming more unhappy and worried. There are now more problems and greater dangers than ever before. This shows that we cannot make ourself happy by simply improving external conditions. Of course we need basic human conditions because we are human beings, but external conditions can only make us happy if our mind is peaceful. If our mind is not peaceful, we will never be happy, even if our external conditions are perfect. For example, when we are enjoying ourself with our friends at a party, if we become angry for some particular reason, the moment we get angry our happiness disappears. This is because anger has destroyed our inner peace, or mental peace.

Without inner peace, there is no real happiness at all. The more we control our mind, the more our inner peace increases and the happier we become. Therefore, the real method to make ourselves happy is to control our own mind. By controlling our mind – in particular, our anger, our attachment and especially our self-grasping – all of our problems will disappear. We will experience deep inner peace and be happy all the time. Problems, suffering and unhappiness do not exist outside the mind; they are feelings and thus part of our mind. Therefore, it is only by controlling our mind that we can permanently stop our problems and make ourselves and others truly happy.

The meditation practices presented in this book are actual methods to control our mind. Because everyone has different wishes and capacities, many different levels of meditation practice are given. In the beginning we should choose the level we feel most comfortable with, and gradually, through improving our understanding and familiarity, advance progressively to the higher levels. By continuously engaging in these meditations with joy and patience, we will accomplish the ultimate goal of human life.

What is the ultimate goal of human life? What is it that we feel is most important for our happiness? Is it having a more attractive body, or lots of money and a good reputation, or fame and power, or excitement and adventure? We may feel that if we could only find the right place to live, the right possessions, the right work, the right friends, the right partner – the right everything – we would be truly happy. Consequently, we put most of our time and energy into trying to rearrange our world so as to achieve these aims. Sometimes this works, but only up to a point, and only for a short while. No matter how successful we are in creating seemingly perfect external conditions, there are invariably drawbacks; they can never give us the perfect lasting

happiness that all of us long for. If we have made seeking happiness from external conditions the principal meaning of our life, eventually we will be deceived, as none of them can help us at the time of our death. As an end in themselves, worldly attainments are hollow – they are not the real essence of human life.

In the past when human beings had more abundant merit, it is said that there were wish-granting jewels that had the power to grant wishes. But even these most precious worldly possessions could only fulfil wishes for contaminated happiness – they could never bestow the pure happiness that comes from a pure mind. Moreover, these wish-granting jewels only had the power to grant wishes in one life and could not protect their owners in future lives, so ultimately even they were deceptive.

Only the attainment of full enlightenment will never deceive us. What is enlightenment? It is omniscient wisdom free from all mistaken appearances. A person who possesses this wisdom is an enlightened being, a 'Buddha'. All beings other than Buddhas experience mistaken appearances all the time, day and night, even during sleep.

Whatever appears to us, we perceive as existing from its own side. This is mistaken appearance. We perceive 'I' and 'mine' as existing from their own side, and our mind grasps strongly at this appearance, believing it to be true – this is the mind of self-grasping ignorance. Due to this, we perform many inappropriate actions that lead us to experience suffering. This is the fundamental reason why we suffer. Enlightened beings are completely free from mistaken appearances and the sufferings they produce.

It is only by attaining enlightenment that we can fulfil our deepest wish for pure and lasting happiness, for nothing in this impure world has the power to fulfil this wish. Only when we become a fully enlightened Buddha will we

experience the profound and lasting peace that comes from a permanent cessation of all delusions and their imprints. We will be free from all faults and mental obscurations, and possess the qualities needed to help all living beings directly. We will then be an object of refuge for all living beings.

Through this understanding, we can clearly see that the attainment of enlightenment is the ultimate goal and real meaning of our precious human life. Since our main wish is to be happy all the time and to be completely free from all faults and suffering, we must develop the strong intention to attain enlightenment. We should think, 'I need to attain enlightenment because in this impure world there is no real happiness anywhere.'

### WHAT IS MEDITATION?

Meditation is a mind that concentrates on a virtuous object, and that is the main cause of mental peace. The practice of meditation is a method for acquainting our mind with virtue. The more familiar our mind is with virtue, the calmer and more peaceful it becomes. When our mind is peaceful, we are free from worries and mental discomfort, and we experience true happiness. If we train our mind to become peaceful we will be happy all the time, even in the most adverse conditions; but if our mind is not peaceful, then even if we have the most pleasant external conditions we will not be happy. Therefore, it is important to train our mind through meditation.

Whenever we meditate, we are performing an action that causes us to experience inner peace in the future. Day and night, throughout our life, we usually experience delusions, which are the opposite to mental peace. However, sometimes

we naturally experience inner peace. This is because in our previous lives we concentrated on virtuous objects. A virtuous object is one that causes us to develop a peaceful mind when we concentrate on it. If we concentrate on an object that causes us to develop an unpeaceful mind, such as anger or attachment, this indicates that for us the object is non-virtuous. There are also many neutral objects that are neither virtuous nor non-virtuous.

There are two types of meditation: analytical meditation and placement meditation. Analytical meditation involves contemplating the meaning of a spiritual instruction that we have heard or read. By contemplating such instructions deeply, eventually we reach a definite conclusion or cause a specific virtuous state of mind to arise. This is the object of placement meditation. We then concentrate single-pointedly on this conclusion or virtuous state of mind for as long as possible to become deeply acquainted with it. This single-pointed concentration is placement meditation. Often, analytical meditation is called 'contemplation' and placement meditation is called 'meditation'. Placement meditation depends upon analytical meditation, and analytical meditation depends upon listening to or reading spiritual instructions.

## THE BENEFITS OF MEDITATION

The purpose of meditation is to make our mind calm and peaceful. As mentioned earlier, if our mind is peaceful we will be free from worries and mental discomfort, and so we will experience true happiness; but if our mind is not peaceful, we will find it very difficult to be happy, even if we are living in the very best conditions. If we train in



*Cut the root of suffering*



meditation, our mind will gradually become more and more peaceful, and we will experience a purer and purer form of happiness. Eventually we will be able to stay happy all the time, even in the most difficult circumstances.

Usually we find it difficult to control our mind. It seems that our mind is like a balloon in the wind – blown here and there by external circumstances. If things go well, our mind is happy, but if they go badly, it immediately becomes unhappy. For example, if we get what we want, such as a new possession, a new position or a new partner, we become excited and cling to it tightly. However, since we cannot have everything we want, and since we will inevitably be separated from the friends, position and possessions we presently enjoy, this mental stickiness, or attachment, serves only to cause us pain. On the other hand, if we do not get what we want, or if we lose something that we like, we become despondent or irritated. For example, if we are forced to work with a colleague whom we dislike, we will probably become irritated and feel aggrieved, with the result that we will be unable to work with him or her efficiently and our time at work will become stressful and unrewarding.

Such fluctuations of mood arise because we are too closely involved in the external situation. We are like a child making a sandcastle who is excited when it is first made, but who becomes upset when it is destroyed by the incoming tide. By training in meditation, we create an inner space and clarity that enable us to control our mind regardless of the external circumstances. Gradually we develop mental equilibrium, a balanced mind that is happy all the time, rather than an unbalanced mind that oscillates between the extremes of excitement and despondency.

If we train in meditation systematically, eventually we will be able to eradicate from our mind the delusions that are

the causes of all our problems and suffering. In this way, we will come to experience permanent inner peace. Then, day and night in life after life, we will experience only peace and happiness.

At the beginning, even if our meditation does not seem to be going well, we should remember that simply by applying effort to training in meditation, we are creating the mental karma to experience inner peace in the future. The happiness of this life and of our future lives depends upon the experience of inner peace, which in turn depends upon the mental action of meditation. Since inner peace is the source of all happiness, we can see how important meditation is.

## HOW TO BEGIN MEDITATION

The first stage of meditation is to stop distractions and make our mind clearer and more lucid. This can be accomplished by practising a simple breathing meditation. We choose a quiet place to meditate and sit in a comfortable position. We can sit in the traditional cross-legged posture or in any other position that is comfortable. If we wish, we can sit on a chair. The most important thing is to keep our back straight to prevent our mind from becoming sluggish or sleepy.

We sit with our eyes partially closed and turn our attention to our breathing. We breathe naturally, preferably through the nostrils, without attempting to control our breath, and we try to become aware of the sensation of the breath as it enters and leaves the nostrils. This sensation is our object of meditation. We should try to concentrate on it to the exclusion of everything else.

At first our mind will be very busy, and we might even feel that the meditation is making our mind busier; but in

reality we are just becoming more aware of how busy our mind actually is. There will be a great temptation to follow the different thoughts as they arise, but we should resist this and remain focused single-pointedly on the sensation of the breath. If we discover that our mind has wandered and is following our thoughts, we should immediately return it to the breath. We should repeat this as many times as necessary until the mind settles on the breath.

If we practise patiently in this way, gradually our distracting thoughts will subside and we will experience a sense of inner peace and relaxation. Our mind will feel lucid and spacious and we will feel refreshed. When the sea is rough, sediment is churned up and the water becomes murky, but when the wind dies down the mud gradually settles and the water becomes clear. In a similar way, when the otherwise incessant flow of our distracting thoughts is calmed through concentrating on the breath, our mind becomes unusually lucid and clear. We should stay with this state of mental calm for a while.

Even though breathing meditation is only a preliminary stage of meditation, it can be quite powerful. We can see from this practice that it is possible to experience inner peace and contentment just by controlling the mind, without having to depend at all upon external conditions. When the turbulence of distracting thoughts subsides and our mind becomes still, a deep happiness and contentment naturally arises from within. This feeling of contentment and well-being helps us to cope with the busyness and difficulties of daily life. So much of the stress and tension we normally experience comes from our mind, and many of the problems we experience, including ill health, are caused or aggravated by this stress. Just by doing breathing meditation for ten or fifteen minutes each day, we will be able to reduce this stress. We will experience a calm, spacious feeling in the mind,

and many of our usual problems will fall away. Difficult situations will become easier to deal with, we will naturally feel warm and well disposed towards other people, and our relationships with others will gradually improve.

We should train in this preliminary meditation until we reduce our gross distractions, and then train in the twenty-one meditations explained in *The New Meditation Handbook*. When we do these meditations, we begin by calming the mind with breathing meditation as just explained, and then we proceed to the stages of analytical and placement meditation according to the specific instructions for each meditation.

## **BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED FOR MEDITATION**

Since the meditations presented in this book assume a belief in rebirth, or reincarnation, and in karma, or actions, a brief description of the process of death and rebirth, and the places in which we can be reborn, may be helpful.

The mind is neither physical, nor a by-product of physical processes, but is 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, the very subtle mind; and the continuum of the very subtle mind has no beginning and no end. It is this mind that, when thoroughly purified, transforms into the omniscient mind of a Buddha.

Every action we perform leaves an imprint on our very subtle mind, and each imprint eventually gives rise to its own effect. Our mind is like a field, and performing actions

## *End of preview*

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