Universal Compassion
Also by Geshe Kelsang Gyatso

Meaningful to Behold
Clear Light of Bliss
Heart of Wisdom
Joyful Path of Good Fortune
Guide to Dakini Land
The Bodhisattva Vow
Heart Jewel
Great Treasury of Merit
Introduction to Buddhism
Understanding the Mind
Tantric Grounds and Paths
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Mahamudra Tantra
Modern Buddhism

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(included at the request of faithful disciples)
Universal Compassion is based on two courses of teachings given by Venerable Geshe Kelsang Gyatso at Manjushri Centre as commentaries to the celebrated root text, *Training the Mind in Seven Points*, an important Mahayana Buddhist scripture written by the great Bodhisattva, Geshe Chekhawa (1102-1176). Inexpressible gratitude is due to Geshe Kelsang, first for the inspired oral commentaries upon which the book is based, and then for his supervision of every stage of the editing process, all carried out with immeasurable wisdom, patience, and kindness. Geshe Kelsang’s great good qualities throughout acted as the mainspring of the entire endeavour, and we are confident that *Universal Compassion* will benefit many people. Such benefit is the sole intention of this great Teacher’s every action.

We would also like to thank all the students of the author who, with great skill and dedication, edited the book and prepared it for publication.

Roy Tyson,  
Administrative Director,  
Manjushri Kadampa Meditation Centre,  
Editorial Note

*Universal Compassion* is a commentary to a twelfth-century text on training the mind, entitled *Training the Mind in Seven Points*, which was composed by the great Tibetan Bodhisattva, Geshe Chekhawa. Throughout the book, the lines from this root text are given in bold. The root text is also presented in full in Appendix I. It is hoped that the serious practitioner will memorize the root text, together with the condensed meaning of the commentary, which can be found in Appendix II.
Every living being has the same basic wish – to be happy and to 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 much time and energy improving external conditions in their search for happiness and a solution to their many problems. What has been the result? Instead of their wishes being fulfilled, human suffering has continued to increase while the experience of happiness and peace is decreasing. This clearly shows that we need to find a true method for gaining pure happiness and freedom from misery.

All our problems and all our unhappiness are created by our uncontrolled mind and our non-virtuous actions. By engaging in the practice of Dharma, we can learn to pacify and control our mind, abandon non-virtuous actions and their root cause, and thereby attain permanent peace, the true cessation of all our suffering.

The supreme Dharma of training the mind (Tib. Lojong) is an unsurpassed method for controlling our mind, and reveals the principal path to enlightenment. There are many different sets of Lojong instructions, such as those contained in the
One Hundred Practices of Training the Mind. The present text, *Universal Compassion*, explains how to put into practice the Lojong instructions given by Bodhisattva Geshe Chekhawa in his root text *Training the Mind in Seven Points*. The seven points are:

1. The preliminary practices of training the mind
2. The main practice: training in the two bodhichittas
3. Transforming adverse conditions into the path to enlightenment
4. How to integrate all our daily practices
5. The measurement of success in training the mind
6. The commitments of training the mind
7. The precepts of training the mind

The first point, the preliminary practices, is the preparation for engaging in the principal path to enlightenment, and the second point is the principal path itself. The five remaining points are the methods for completing the principal path.

To have the opportunity to practise this precious and profound teaching is infinitely more meaningful than being given all the precious jewels in the world. If we understand how extremely worthwhile it is to read, listen to, study, contemplate, and engage in the practice of this very special Dharma, we will do so with great faith and a happy mind.

*Geshe Kelsang Gyatso,*

*Tharpaland,*

*November 1987.*
Buddha Shakyamuni
The Lineage and Qualities of Training the Mind

THE LINEAGE AND PRE-EMINENT QUALITIES OF THESE INSTRUCTIONS

The instructions on training the mind were originally given by Buddha Shakyamuni. He passed them to Manjushri, who transmitted them to Shantideva. From Shantideva they passed in unbroken succession to Elladari, Viravajra, Ratnashri, Serlingpa, Atisha, Dromtonpa, Geshe Potowa, Geshe Sharawa, and Geshe Chekhawa. Geshe Chekhawa composed the text *Training the Mind in Seven Points* and spread the study and practice of training the mind throughout Tibet. He transmitted the instructions to the Bodhisattva Chilbuwa and from him they passed through a succession of realized Masters to Je Tsongkhapa.

Several versions of the root text, *Training the Mind in Seven Points*, were compiled from notes taken by Geshe Chekhawa’s disciples. Later, Je Tsongkhapa gave teachings
on Training the Mind in Seven Points and, without contradicting other sources, clarified the meaning of these instructions according to the view and intentions of Geshe Chekhawa and Atisha. The notes of Je Tsongkhapa’s disciples were collected into a text known as Sunrays of Training the Mind, which is regarded as one of the most authoritative commentaries on training the mind. The version of the root text used in this book is the one compiled by Je Phabongkhapa, based on Sunrays of Training the Mind, Essence of Nectar of Training the Mind, and other texts. Thus, from Je Tsongkhapa the instructions on training the mind have come down in an unbroken lineage to present-day Teachers.

Homage to great compassion.
This essence of nectar-like instruction
Is transmitted from Serlingpa.

Geshe Chekhawa begins the root text by paying homage to great compassion. His purpose is to show that, because all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are born from the mother, great compassion, anyone wishing to become a Buddha or Bodhisattva must keep compassion as their main practice.

The second line likens the instructions on training the mind to the essence of nectar. The nectar enjoyed by gods and some humans produces only ordinary happiness, but the instructions on training the mind can provide the extraordinary bliss of full enlightenment.

The third line shows that, from the many different instructions Atisha received and handed down through Dromtonpa and other Teachers to Geshe Chekhawa, this particular instruction came from his Spiritual Guide Serlingpa.
It is said that Geshe Chekhawa originally belonged to the old tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, the Nyingma tradition. Although he was well versed in the teachings of both the old and the new traditions of Dharma, he was not entirely satisfied with his practice. He sought teachings from Rechungpa, one of Milarepa’s main disciples, and later from the Kadampa Teacher Geshe Chagshinpa. One day, when in Geshe Chagshinpa’s room, he found a short text entitled *Eight Verses of Training the Mind*. Two lines in the sixth verse caught his attention:

May I take defeat upon myself  
And offer them the victory.

Even though he already possessed a profound knowledge of Dharma, his mind was deeply affected by these words. Wanting to discover their real meaning, he asked Geshe Chagshinpa the name of the author. Geshe Chagshinpa replied that the text was written by Geshe Langri Tangpa. Immediately upon hearing this, Geshe Chekhawa developed a wish to receive teachings from Geshe Langri Tangpa, and he set out at once for Lhasa where he hoped to meet him. When he arrived he discovered that Geshe Langri Tangpa had passed away, and so he decided to find one of Geshe Langri Tangpa’s disciples who could give him an explanation of this verse. He met a man from the province of Lang Tang, who told him that one of Geshe Langri Tangpa’s main disciples was Geshe Sharawa. Encouraged by this, Geshe Chekhawa set out to find Geshe Sharawa. When he found him, Geshe Sharawa was teaching a course on philosophy to a vast audience. Geshe Chekhawa listened to the teachings,
which went on for several days, but he heard no mention of accepting defeat and offering the victory to others. After the teachings had finished, Geshe Chekhawa approached Geshe Sharawa as he was circumambulating a stupa and, putting his upper garment on the ground as a seat, requested him, ‘Please sit down for a while. I have something to ask you.’ Geshe Sharawa replied rather abruptly, ‘I have just given extensive teachings from the throne. Did you not understand them?’ Geshe Chekhawa answered, ‘I have one special question.’ Geshe Sharawa then sat down and Geshe Chekhawa asked, ‘How important is the practice of accepting defeat and offering the victory to others?’ Geshe Sharawa replied, ‘If you want to attain enlightenment, this practice is essential.’ Geshe Chekhawa then asked where this practice was taught in the scriptures, and Geshe Sharawa replied by quoting two lines from Nagarjuna’s *Precious Garland of Advice for the King*:

May their negative actions ripen upon me  
And may all my virtues ripen upon them.

Implicit in these words is the wish to accept defeat oneself and offer the victory to others. Geshe Sharawa gave further sources that convinced Geshe Chekhawa that this teaching was authentic. Geshe Chekhawa then requested Geshe Sharawa to give him full instructions on this practice. Geshe Sharawa replied, ‘If you stay with me for several years, I will teach you.’ Geshe Chekhawa stayed with Geshe Sharawa for twelve years, and within six years he had become very skilled at training his mind. Other Kadampa Geshes recognized that he had attained the Mahayana path of seeing by completely abandoning self-cherishing.
Until this time, the instructions on training the mind had not been taught openly but had remained a secret lineage. Since it was necessary to possess a certain degree of faith before practising these instructions, Geshe Chekhawa at first taught them only to his closest and most receptive disciples.

This was a time when leprosy was widespread in Tibet because doctors were unable to cure it. One day, Geshe Chekhawa met some lepers and decided to instruct them in the practice of training the mind, and especially in the practice of taking and giving. Through engaging in these practices, many of the lepers were quickly cured of their disease. News of this spread rapidly and many other sufferers came to see Geshe Chekhawa, whose home soon took on the appearance of a hospital. As a result, Geshe Chekhawa’s teachings became known among Tibetans as the ‘Dharma for leprosy’.

Geshe Chekhawa had a brother who disliked Dharma intensely and had no faith in Geshe Chekhawa himself. One day, he happened to overhear some of the teachings on training the mind that Geshe Chekhawa was giving to the lepers and was impressed by what he heard. Some time later, Geshe Chekhawa noticed from his brother’s behaviour that he was practising the instructions on training the mind. Geshe Chekhawa thought that if a disbeliever such as his brother could benefit from these teachings, many other beings could also be helped by them, and so he decided that it was no longer appropriate to keep the instructions secret. Accordingly, with a sincere wish to help all living beings, he composed the text *Training the Mind in Seven Points*. Because of his great kindness in composing this text and
teaching it openly, we now have an opportunity to receive these instructions and put them into practice. Therefore, we should remember with gratitude the kindness of Geshe Chekhawa.

**It is like a diamond, like the sun, and like a medicinal tree.**

The fourth line of Geshe Chekhawa’s text explains the good qualities of the instructions on training the mind, likening them to a diamond, the sun, and a medicinal tree. Most precious things become valueless if they are broken, but if a diamond is cut into little pieces, each fragment, however small, is still valuable. In this respect, the instructions on training the mind are like a diamond because, while it is most valuable to practise all the instructions on training the mind, it is still very worthwhile to practise just some of them. Just as we would take care not to lose even the smallest fragment of a diamond, so we should not disregard any part of the instructions on training the mind, however small.

Just as full sunlight completely dispels all darkness but even a few rays provide a measure of light, so, if we complete the practice of training the mind, we will totally dispel the darkness of our ignorance, but if we engage in only some parts of the practice, this will still help to reduce our ignorance and self-cherishing.

Just as every part of a medicinal tree – the roots, trunk, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit – provides medicine and is useful in curing disease, so every part of the instructions on training the mind can cure the mental disease of the delusions. Ordinary medicines can cure only physical disease,
but the panacea of training the mind cures sicknesses of both body and mind. This is why the practice is sometimes called the ‘unsurpassed medicine’.

How can we be sure that the instructions on training the mind really possess all these good qualities? This question is answered by Geshe Chekhawa in the fifth line of the root text:

**The meaning of this text should be known.**

Once we have understood the meaning of these instructions, we should put them into practice. Then we will come to understand all the excellent qualities of training the mind through our own experience. Unless we practise in this way, we will never know for ourself how these instructions are ‘like a diamond, like the sun, and like a medicinal tree.’

The sixth and seventh lines of the root text reveal the power of training the mind to transform adverse conditions into the path to enlightenment:

**The development of the five impurities**

**Will be transformed into the path to enlightenment.**

It is said that this present age has five impurities: the impurity of time, the impurity of living beings, the impurity of view, the impurity of delusions, and the impurity of life span. The impurity of time is the relative poverty of spiritual practice at this time. There has been a great decline in spirituality through the ages, and human beings are now very poor in terms of their spiritual development compared with beings in the past. In ancient times, many beings were spiritually so advanced that they could see Buddhas and Bodhisattvas
directly. Many attained tranquil abiding and different kinds of clairvoyance, such as eye clairvoyance (the ability to see distant forms and subtle forms), ear clairvoyance (the ability to hear distant sounds far beyond the normal range), the mental power of knowing others’ minds directly, and the mental power of knowing past and future lives. Many also possessed miracle powers, such as the ability to emanate different forms or the ability to fly. During this time, countless beings attained liberation and enlightenment.

With the passing of time, however, fewer and fewer beings have been able to see Buddhas and Bodhisattvas directly or to attain other high spiritual accomplishments. These days, no ordinary being can see enlightened beings directly. The fact that we see everyone as ordinary is, in itself, a sign of the impurity of our times. However, if we practise training the mind purely, we can turn these faults and imperfections of our times – which usually cause great difficulties and suffering – into causes of spiritual paths.

The impurity of living beings is the beings themselves. Living beings today experience very little peace and happiness, whereas external dangers to life are increasing greatly. Our natures are much grosser, and our sufferings and difficulties far worse, than those of beings in the past. With every passing generation, living beings become more and more unhappy, more and more unruly, and more and more disturbed. We are now very skilled at producing all kinds of weapons for waging war and harming each other, but we lack the skills to create peace and happiness. Even though we long for peace and happiness, we busily lay the foundations for conflict and suffering. We have made great advances in
producing material things but these do not bring true peace, nor do they eradicate our sufferings permanently. However, if we practise training the mind purely, we can transform all these adversities into causes of the path to enlightenment.

The impurity of view is the strong tendency of people these days to accept and foster mistaken or distorted views, such as views that deny past and future lives, the existence of enlightened beings, the functioning of karma, or the effectiveness of Dharma. If we practise training the mind purely, we can eliminate all wrong views.

The impurity of delusions means that our anger, attachment, and ignorance are much stronger and more harmful than the delusions experienced by people of earlier times, and consequently our sufferings are far worse. Moreover, because we find it difficult to control our delusions, our spiritual practice produces very few results. However, if we engage sincerely in the practice of training the mind, we can transform the faults of these delusions into causes of spiritual paths.

The fifth impurity is impurity of life span. It is said that when Buddha Krakuchchanda appeared in this world human beings lived for long periods of time – about eighty thousand years. By the time of the second Buddha, Buddha Kanakamuni, life expectancy had diminished to forty thousand years, by the time of the third Buddha, Buddha Kashyapa, it had fallen to twenty thousand years, and by the time of the fourth Buddha, Buddha Shakyamuni, it was about one hundred years. In the scriptures, it is said that this decline will continue until the average human life span is only ten years. However, if we use our human life to practise
training the mind sincerely, we will be able to attain the highest goal of full enlightenment within this short life.

The main reason for practising these instructions on training the mind is to fulfil our deepest wish – to attain lasting happiness and complete freedom from suffering. These cannot be attained by external means, such as the acquisition of material wealth. No matter how many possessions we acquire, they will not provide us with any lasting happiness and freedom. On the contrary, it is often our pursuit of material possessions that causes our problems. If we want ultimate happiness and freedom from suffering, we must engage in the supreme practices of training the mind. There is no other way.

All living beings have Buddha seed, or Buddha nature. The method that causes this seed to ripen is putting the instructions on training the mind into practice. The actual experiences, or realizations, of training the mind are the paths to enlightenment; therefore, it is essential for all beings to gain experience of this practice. At the very end of the Condensed Perfection of Wisdom Sutra, Buddha says:

I have explained the paths to enlightenment so that all living beings might attain them.
End of preview

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