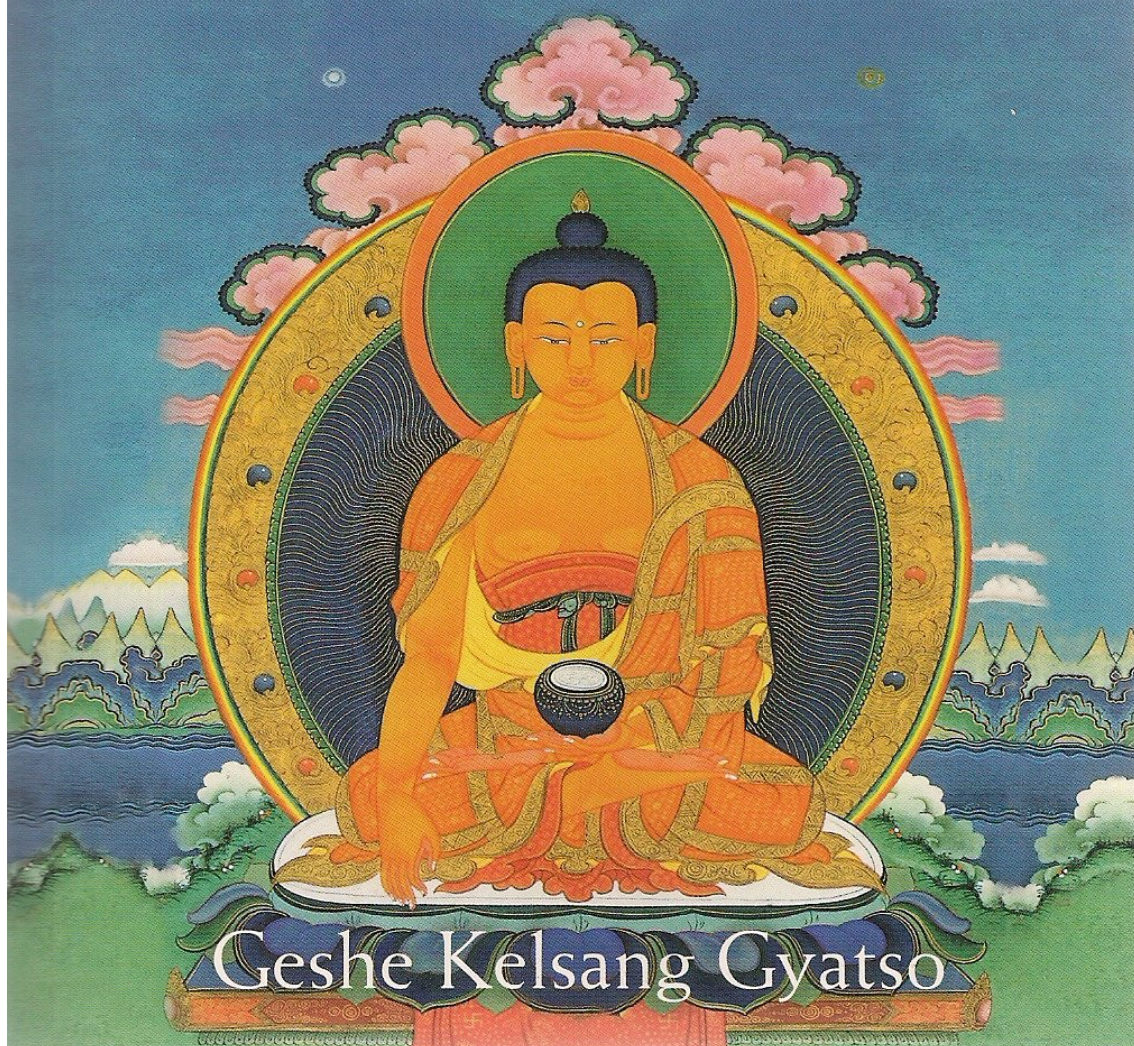


The New Meditation Handbook

Meditations to make our life happy and meaningful

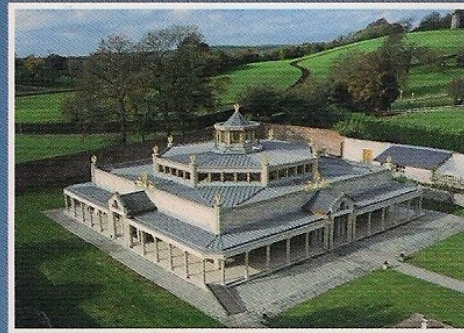


BUDDHISM / MEDITATION

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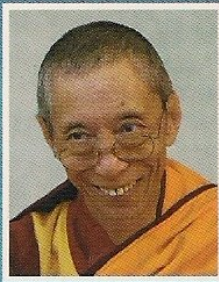
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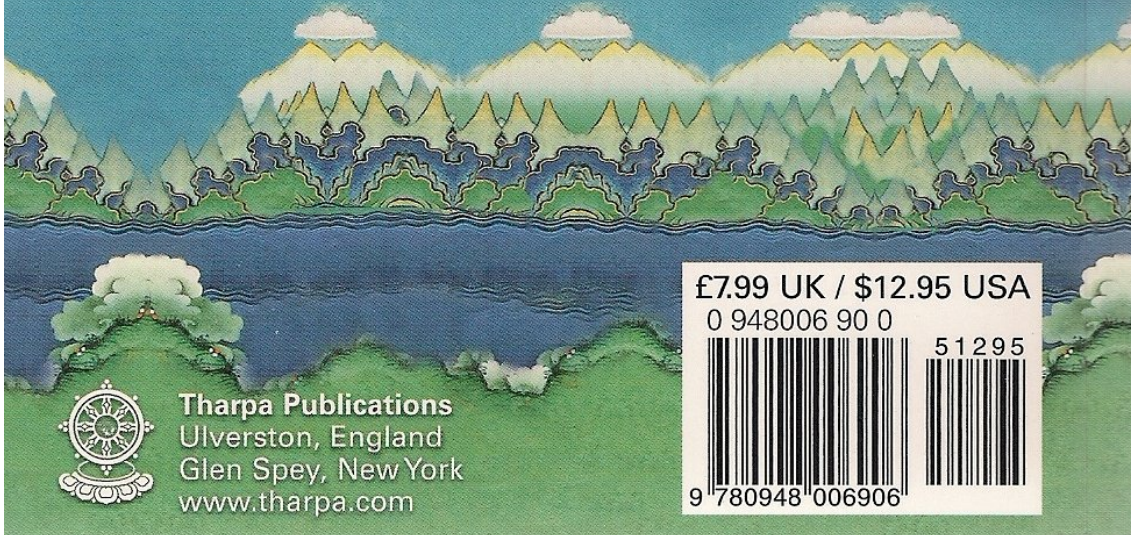


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Geshe Kelsang Gyatso was born in Tibet and is a fully accomplished meditation master and internationally renowned teacher of Buddhism. Resident in the West since 1977, he is the author of 20 highly acclaimed books that transmit perfectly the ancient wisdom of Buddhism to our modern world. He has also founded over 900 Kadampa Meditation Centres and groups throughout the world.



Tharpa Publications
Ulverston, England
Glen Spey, New York
www.tharpa.com

£7.99 UK / \$12.95 USA

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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 *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

INTRODUCTION

The New Meditation Handbook is a practical guide to meditation. It teaches us how to make both ourselves 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 ourselves 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 shall never be happy, even if our external conditions are perfect. For example, when we are enjoying ourselves 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 shall 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 shall 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 shall 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 shall we experience the profound and lasting peace that comes from a permanent cessation of all delusions and their imprints. We shall be free from all faults and mental obscurations, and possess the qualities needed to help all living beings directly. We shall 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 shall 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 shall 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 shall be free from worries and mental discomfort, and so we shall experience true happiness; but if our mind is not peaceful, we shall find it very difficult to be happy, even if we are living in the very best conditions. If we train in meditation, our mind will gradually become more and more peaceful, and we shall experience a purer and purer form of happiness. Eventually we shall 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 shall 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 shall probably become irritated and feel aggrieved, with the result that we shall 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 shall be able to eradicate from our mind the delusions that are the causes of all our problems and suffering. In this way, we shall come to experience permanent inner peace. Then, day and night in life after life, we shall 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 shall experience a sense of inner peace and relaxation. Our mind will feel lucid and spacious and we shall 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 shall be able to reduce this stress. We shall 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 shall 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 is like sowing seeds in that field. Virtuous actions sow seeds of future happiness and non-virtuous actions sow seeds of future suffering. The seeds we have sown in the past remain dormant until the conditions necessary for their germination come together. In some cases, this can be many lifetimes after the original action was performed.

The seeds that ripen when we die are very important because they determine what kind of rebirth we shall take. Which particular seed ripens at death depends upon the state of mind in which we die. If we die with a peaceful mind, this will stimulate a virtuous seed and we shall take a fortunate rebirth; but if we die with an unpeaceful mind, in a state of anger, say, this will stimulate a non-virtuous seed and we shall take an unfortunate rebirth. This is similar to the way in which nightmares are triggered off by our being in an agitated state of mind just before falling asleep.

The analogy of falling asleep is not accidental, for the process of sleeping, dreaming, and waking closely resembles the process of death, intermediate state, and rebirth. When we fall asleep, our gross inner winds gather and dissolve inwards, and our mind becomes progressively more and more subtle until it transforms into the very subtle mind of the clear light of sleep. While the clear light of sleep is manifest, we experience deep sleep, and to others we resemble a dead person. When it ends, our mind becomes gradually more and more gross and we pass through the various levels of the dream state. Finally, our normal powers of memory and mental control are restored and we wake up. When this happens, our dream world disappears and we perceive the world of the waking state.

A very similar process occurs when we die. As we die, our winds dissolve inwards and our mind becomes progressively more and more subtle until the very subtle mind of the clear light of death becomes manifest. The experience of the clear light of death is very similar to the experience of deep sleep. After the clear light of death has ceased, we experience the stages of the intermediate state, or 'bardo' in Tibetan, which is a dream-like state that occurs between death and rebirth. After a few days or weeks, the intermediate state ends and we take rebirth. Just as, when we wake from sleep, the dream world disappears and we perceive the world of the waking state, so, when we take rebirth, the appearances of the intermediate state cease and we perceive the world of our next life.

The only significant difference between the process of sleeping, dreaming, and waking and the process of death, intermediate state, and rebirth is that after the clear light of sleep has ceased, the relationship between our mind and our present body remains intact, whereas after the clear light of death, this relationship is broken.

While we are in the intermediate state, we experience different visions that arise from the karmic seeds that were activated immediately before death. If negative seeds were activated, these visions will be nightmarish, but if positive seeds were activated, they will be predominantly pleasant.

In either case, once the karmic seeds have matured sufficiently, they impel us to take rebirth in one or other of the six realms of samsara.

The six realms are actual places in which we can be reborn. They are brought into existence through the power of our actions, or karma. There are three types of action: bodily actions, verbal actions, and mental actions. Since our bodily and verbal actions are initiated by our mental actions, ultimately the six realms are created by our mind. For example, a hell realm is a place that arises as a result of the worst actions, such as murder or extreme mental or physical cruelty, which depend upon the most deluded states of mind.

To form a mental image of the six realms, we can compare them to the floors of a large, old house. In this analogy, the house represents samsara, the cycle of contaminated rebirth that ordinary beings

undergo without choice or control. The house has three storeys above ground and three below. Deluded sentient beings are like the inhabitants of this house. They are continually moving up and down the house, sometimes living above ground, sometimes below.

The ground floor corresponds to the human realm. Above this, on the first floor, is the realm of the demi-gods -non-human beings who are continually at war with the gods. In terms of power and prosperity, they are superior to human beings, but they are so obsessed with jealousy and violence that their lives have little spiritual value.

On the top floor live the gods. The lower classes of gods, the desire realm gods, live a life of ease and luxury devoting their time to enjoyment and the satisfaction of their desires. Though their world is a paradise and their lifespan is very long, they are not immortal and they eventually fall to lower states. Since their lives are filled with distractions, it is difficult for them to find the motivation to practise Dharma, Buddha's teachings. From a spiritual point of view, a human life is much more meaningful than a god's life.

Higher than the desire realm gods are the gods of the form and formless realms. Having passed beyond sensual desire, the form realm gods experience the refined bliss of meditative absorption and possess bodies made of light. Transcending even these subtle forms, the gods of the formless realm abide without form in a subtle consciousness that resembles infinite space. Though their minds are the purest and most exalted within samsara, they have not overcome the ignorance of self-grasping, which is the root of samsara, and so, after experiencing bliss for many aeons, eventually their lives end and they are once again reborn in the lower states of samsara. Like the other gods, they consume the merit, or good fortune, they have created in the past and make little or no spiritual progress.

The three storeys above ground are called the 'fortunate realms' because the beings who inhabit them have relatively pleasant experiences, which are caused by the practice of virtue. Below ground are the three lower realms, which are the result of negative bodily, verbal, and mental actions. The least painful of these is the animal realm, which, in the analogy, is the first floor beneath the ground. Included in this realm are all mammals apart from human beings, as well as birds, fish, insects, worms - the whole animal kingdom. Their minds are characterized by extreme stupidity, without any spiritual awareness, and their lives by fear and brutality.

On the next floor down live the hungry ghosts, or hungry spirits. The principal causes of rebirth here are greed and negative actions motivated by miserliness. The consequence of these actions is extreme poverty. Hungry spirits suffer hunger and thirst over a long period of time, which they find extremely difficult to bear. Their world is a vast desert. If by chance they come across a drop of water or a scrap of food, it disappears like a mirage or transforms into something repulsive, such as pus or urine. These appearances are due to their negative karma and lack of merit.

The lowest floor is hell. The beings here experience unrelenting torment. Some hells are a mass of fire, others are desolate regions of ice and darkness. Monsters conjured up by the minds of the hell beings inflict terrible tortures on them. The suffering continues unremittingly for what seems an eternity, but eventually the karma that caused the beings to be born in hell is exhausted and the hell beings die and are reborn elsewhere in samsara.

This is a general picture of samsara. We have been trapped in samsara since beginningless time, wandering meaninglessly, without any freedom or control, from the highest heaven to the deepest hell. Sometimes we dwell on the upper storeys as gods, and sometimes we find ourself on the ground floor with a human rebirth, but most of the time we are trapped on the underground floors, experiencing terrible physical and mental suffering.

Although samsara resembles a prison, there is however one door through which we can escape. That door is emptiness, the ultimate nature of phenomena. By training in the spiritual paths described in this book, we shall eventually find our way to this door and, stepping through, discover that the house was

simply an illusion, the creation of our impure mind. Samsara is not an external prison; it is a prison made by our own mind. It will never end by itself but, by diligently practising the true spiritual path and thereby eliminating our self-grasping and other delusions, we can bring our samsara to an end. Once we attain liberation ourselves, we shall then be in a position to show others how to destroy their mental prison by eradicating their delusions.

If we practise the twenty-one meditations presented in this book, we shall gradually overcome the deluded states of mind that keep us imprisoned in samsara and develop all the qualities needed to attain full enlightenment. The first six meditations function principally to help us to develop renunciation, the determination to escape from samsara. The next twelve meditations help us to cultivate heartfelt love and compassion for all living beings, and lead us to the realization that we can liberate others from samsara only by attaining enlightenment first. The principal obstacle that prevents us from attaining liberation and enlightenment is self-grasping, a deeply ingrained misconception of the way things exist. The main function of the next two meditations is to counter, and eventually to eradicate, this misconception. The final meditation is the method to gain deeper experience of the previous twenty meditations.

HOW TO MEDITATE

Each of the twenty-one meditation practices has five parts: preparation, contemplation, meditation, dedication, and subsequent practice. The instructions that explain these twenty-one meditation practices are called the 'stages of the path', or 'Lamrim'. The realizations of these meditations are the actual spiritual paths that lead us to the great liberation of full enlightenment.

The first part, the preparatory practices, prepare us for successful meditation by purifying hindrances caused by our previous negative actions, by accumulating merit (or good fortune), and by enabling us to receive the blessings of enlightened beings. The preparatory practices are very important if we wish to gain deep experience of these meditations. For this purpose, we can begin our meditation with *Prayers for Meditation*, which can be found in Appendix I. A commentary to these practices can be found in Appendix II.

The purpose of the second part, contemplation, or analytical meditation, is to bring to mind the object of placement meditation. We do this by considering various lines of reasoning, contemplating analogies, and reflecting on the meaning of the instructions. It is helpful to memorize the contemplations given in each section so that we can meditate without having to look at the text. The contemplations given here are intended only as guidelines. We should supplement and enrich them with whatever reasons and examples we find helpful.

When, through our contemplations, the object appears clearly, we leave our analytical meditation and concentrate on the object single-pointedly. This single-pointed concentration is the third part, the actual meditation.

When we first start to meditate, our concentration is poor; we are easily distracted and often lose our object of meditation. Therefore, to begin with, we shall probably need to alternate between contemplation and placement meditation many times in each session. For example, if we are meditating on compassion, we begin by contemplating the various sufferings experienced by living beings until a strong feeling of compassion arises in our heart. When this feeling arises, we meditate on it single-pointedly. If the feeling fades, or if our mind wanders to another object, we should return to analytical meditation to bring the feeling back to mind. When the feeling of compassion has been restored, we once again leave our analytical meditation and hold the feeling with single-pointed concentration.

Both contemplation and meditation serve to acquaint our mind with virtuous objects. The more familiar we are with such objects, the more peaceful our mind becomes. By training in meditation, and living in accordance with the insights and resolutions developed during meditation, eventually we shall be able to maintain a peaceful mind continuously, throughout our life. More detailed instructions on the contemplations and on meditation in general can be found in *Transform Your Life* and *Joyful Path of Good Fortune*.

At the end of each session, we dedicate the merit produced by our meditation towards the attainment of enlightenment. If merit is not dedicated, it can easily be destroyed by anger. By reciting the dedication prayers sincerely at the end of each meditation session, we ensure that the merit we created by meditating is not wasted but acts as a cause of enlightenment.

The fifth part of each meditation practice is the subsequent practice. This consists of advice on how to integrate the meditation into our daily life. It is important to remember that Dharma practice is not confined to our activities during the meditation session; it should permeate our whole life. We should not allow a gulf to develop between our meditation and our daily life, because the success of our meditation depends upon the purity of our conduct outside the meditation session. We should keep a watch over our mind at all times by applying mindfulness, alertness, and conscientiousness; and we should try to abandon whatever bad habits we may have. Deep experience of Dharma is the result of practical training over a long period of time, both in and out of meditation. Therefore, we should practise steadily and gently, without being in a hurry to see results.

To summarize, our mind is like a field. Engaging in the preparatory practices is like preparing the field by removing obstacles caused by past negative actions, making it fertile with merit, and watering it with the blessings of the holy beings. Contemplation and meditation are like sowing good seeds, and dedication and subsequent practice are the methods for ripening our harvest of Dharma realizations.

Lamrim instructions are not given merely for the sake of intellectual understanding of the path to enlightenment. They are given to help us to gain deep experience, and should therefore be put into practice. If we train our mind in these meditations every day, eventually we shall gain perfect realizations of all the stages of the path. Until we have reached this stage, we should not tire of listening to oral teachings on Lamrim or reading authentic Lamrim commentaries, and then contemplating and meditating on these instructions. We need continually to expand our understanding of these essential topics and to use this new understanding to enhance our regular meditation.

If we genuinely wish to gain experience of the stages of the path, we should try to meditate every day. On the first day we can meditate on our precious human life, on the second day we can meditate on death and impermanence, and so on, until we complete the whole cycle in twenty-one days. Then we can begin again. Between sessions, we should try to remain mindful of the instructions on subsequent practice. Occasionally, when we have the opportunity, we should do a retreat on Lamrim. A suggested retreat schedule is given in Appendix IV. By practising like this, we use our whole life to further our experience of the stages of the path.

The Initial, Intermediate, and Great Scopes

In *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, Atisha says, 'You should know there are three types of living being: small, middling, and great.' 'Small', 'middling', and 'great' do not refer to their physical appearance, but to their different mental capacity or scope - initial, intermediate, and great. There are two types of small being: ordinary small beings and special small beings. Ordinary small beings are those who seek the happiness of only this life, and special small beings are those who seek the happiness of future lives. Middling beings are those who seek the happiness of liberation, and great beings are those who seek the happiness of enlightenment. Although there are countless living beings, all of them are included within these four types.

We should know which type of being we are now - an ordinary or special small being, a middling being, or a great being. Through the practice of Lamrim instructions, we can progress from the level of an ordinary small being to that of a special small being, and then a middling being, a great being, and finally an enlightened being. The practice of the following twenty-one meditations is the actual method for making this progress.

Through practising these meditations, we shall gain the realizations of all the stages of the path to enlightenment. The realizations of the first five meditations are the stages of the path of a person of initial scope; the realizations of the sixth meditation and the three higher trainings are the stages of the path of a person of intermediate scope; the realizations of the next fourteen meditations are the stages of the path of a person of great scope; and the realization of the last meditation can be a stage of the path of a person of initial, intermediate, or great scope.

1. OUR PRECIOUS HUMAN LIFE

The purpose of this meditation is to encourage ourselves to practise Dharma. Dharma instructions teach us how to make ourselves and others happy, how to control our delusions - especially our self-grasping, the root of all sufferings - and how to begin, make progress on, and complete the path to enlightenment, and are therefore important for everyone. If we put these teachings into practice, we can permanently cure the inner sickness of our delusions and all suffering, and achieve everlasting happiness. Therefore, we need to encourage ourselves to practise Dharma and not waste our human life in meaningless activities. If we do not encourage ourselves, no one will do this for us.

MEDITATION

As the preparatory practice, we recite *Prayers for Meditation* while concentrating on the meaning. Then we engage in the following contemplation:

Our human life is precious, rare, and immensely meaningful. Due to their previous deluded views that denied the value of spiritual practice, those who have taken rebirth as animals, for example, now have no opportunity to understand or practise Dharma. Since it is impossible for them to listen to, contemplate, and meditate on Dharma, their present animal rebirth itself is an obstacle. Only human beings are free from such obstacles and have all the necessary conditions for engaging in spiritual paths, which alone lead to everlasting happiness. This combination of freedom and possession of necessary conditions is the special characteristic that makes our human life so precious.

Although there are many human beings 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. Therefore, for each of us, a human life is 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 shall 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 fulfill all our own and others' wishes. What could be more meaningful than this?

Having repeatedly contemplated these points, we make the strong determination: 'I must practise Dharma.' This determination is the object of our meditation. We then hold this without forgetting it; our mind should remain on this determination single-pointedly for as long as possible. If we lose the object of our meditation, we renew it by immediately remembering our determination or by repeating the contemplation.

At the end of the meditation session, we dedicate the virtues accumulated from this meditation practice towards the realization of the preciousness of our human life and the attainment of enlightenment for the happiness of all living beings.

During the meditation break, we try never to forget our determination to practise Dharma. We should apply strong effort to read Lamrim instructions and memorize their essential points, to recite prayers with strong faith, and to listen to oral teachings again and again and contemplate their meaning. Especially, we should put all the instructions into practice and integrate them into our daily life.

2. DEATH AND IMPERMANENCE

The purpose of this meditation is to eliminate the laziness of attachment, the main obstacle to practising Dharma purely. Because our desire for worldly enjoyment is so strong, we have little or no interest in spiritual practice. From a spiritual point of view, this lack of interest in spiritual practice is a type of laziness called the laziness of attachment'. For as long as we have this laziness, the door to liberation will be closed to us, and consequently we shall continue to experience misery in this life and endless suffering in life after life. The way to overcome this laziness is to meditate on death.

We need to contemplate and meditate on our death again and again until we gain a deep realization of death. Although on an intellectual level we all know that eventually we are going to die, our awareness of death remains superficial. Since our intellectual knowledge of death does not touch our hearts, each and every day we continue to think, 'I shall not die today, I shall not die today.' Even on the day of our death, we are still thinking about what we shall do tomorrow or next week. This mind that thinks every day, 'I shall not die today', is deceptive - it leads us in the wrong direction and causes our human life to become empty. On the other hand, through meditating on death we shall gradually replace the deceptive thought, 'I shall not die today', with the non-deceptive thought, 'I may die today.' The mind that spontaneously thinks each and every day, 'I may die today', is the realization of death. It is this realization that directly eliminates our laziness of attachment and opens the door to the spiritual path.

In general, we may die today or we may not die today -we do not know. However, if we think each day, 'I may not die today', this thought will deceive us because it comes from our ignorance; whereas if instead we think each day, 'I may die today', this thought will not deceive us because it comes from our wisdom. This beneficial thought will prevent our laziness of attachment, and will encourage us to prepare for the welfare of our countless future lives or to put great effort into entering the path to liberation. In this way, we shall make our human life meaningful.

MEDITATION

As the preparatory practice, we recite *Prayers for Meditation* while concentrating on the meaning. Then we engage in the following contemplation:

I shall definitely die. There is no way to prevent my body from finally decaying. Day by day, moment by moment, my life is slipping away. I have no idea when I shall die; the time of death is completely uncertain. Many young people die before their parents, some die the moment they are born -there is no certainty in this world. Furthermore, there are so many causes of untimely death. The lives of many strong and healthy people are destroyed by accidents. There is no guarantee that I shall not die today.

Having repeatedly contemplated these points, we mentally repeat over and over again, 'I may die today, I may die today', and concentrate on the feeling it evokes. Eventually we shall come to a conclusion: 'Since I shall soon have to depart from this world, there is no sense in my becoming attached to the things of this life. Instead, I will devote my whole life to the practice of Dharma.' This determination is the object of our meditation. We then hold this without forgetting it; our mind should remain on this determination single-pointedly for as long as possible. If we lose the object of our meditation, we renew it by immediately remembering our determination or by repeating the contemplation.

At the end of the meditation session, we dedicate the virtues accumulated from this meditation practice towards our realization of death and the attainment of enlightenment for the happiness of all living beings.

During the meditation break, we try to practise Dharma without laziness. Realizing that worldly pleasures are deceptive, and that they distract us from using our life in a meaningful way, we should abandon attachment to them. In this way, we can eliminate the main obstacle to pure Dharma practice.

3. THE DANGER OF LOWER REBIRTH

The purpose of this meditation is to encourage us to seek protection from the dangers of lower rebirth. If we do not prepare for protection from lower rebirth now, while we have a human life with its freedoms and endowments, once we have taken any of the three lower rebirths it will be extremely difficult to obtain a precious human life again. It is said to be easier for human beings to attain enlightenment than it is for beings in the lower realms, such as animals, to attain a human rebirth. This meditation encourages us to abandon non-virtue, to practise virtue, and to go for refuge to the holy beings, which is the actual protection from taking lower rebirth. Creating non-virtue is the main cause of taking lower rebirth, whereas practising virtue and going for refuge to the holy beings are the main causes of taking higher rebirth.

MEDITATION

As the preparatory practice, we recite *Prayers for Meditation* while concentrating on the meaning. Then we engage in the following contemplation:

When the oil of an oil lamp is exhausted, the flame goes out because the flame is produced from the oil; but when our body dies, our consciousness is not extinguished, because consciousness is not produced from the body. When we die, our mind has to leave this present body, which is just a temporary abode, and find another body, rather like a bird leaving one nest to fly to another. Our mind has no freedom to remain and no choice about where to go. We are blown to the place of our next rebirth by the winds of our karma. If the karma that ripens at our death time is negative, we shall definitely take a lower rebirth. Heavy negative karma causes rebirth in hell, less negative karma causes rebirth as a hungry spirit, and the least negative karma causes rebirth as an animal.

It is very easy to commit heavy negative karma. For example, simply by swatting a mosquito out of anger we create the cause to be reborn in hell. Throughout this and all our countless previous lives, we have committed many heavy negative actions. Unless we have already purified these actions by practising sincere confession, their potentialities remain in our mental continuum, and any one of these negative potentialities could ripen when we die. Bearing this in mind, we should ask ourself. 'If I die today, where shall I be tomorrow? It is quite possible that I shall find myself in the animal realm, among the hungry spirits, or in hell. If someone were to call me a stupid cow today, I would find it difficult to bear, but what shall I do if I actually become a cow, a pig, or a fish?'

Having repeatedly contemplated these points, and understood how beings in the lower realms, such as animals, experience suffering, we generate a strong fear of taking rebirth in the lower realms. This feeling of fear is the object of our meditation. We then hold this without forgetting it; our mind should remain on this feeling of fear single-pointedly for as long as possible. If we lose the object of our meditation, we renew the feeling of fear by immediately remembering it or by repeating the contemplation.

At the end of the meditation session, we dedicate the virtues accumulated from this meditation practice towards the realization of the danger of our taking lower rebirth and the attainment of enlightenment for the happiness of all living beings.

During the meditation break, we try never to forget our feeling of fear of taking rebirth in the lower realms. In general, fear is meaningless, but the fear generated through the above contemplation and meditation has immense meaning, as it arises from wisdom and not ignorance. This fear is the main cause of going for refuge, which is the actual protection from such dangers, and helps us to be mindful and conscientious in avoiding non-virtuous actions.

4. REFUGE PRACTICE

The purpose of this meditation is to enable us to attain permanent liberation from lower rebirth. At present we are human and free from lower rebirth, but this is only a temporary and not a permanent liberation from lower rebirth. Until we gain a deep realization of refuge, we shall have to take lower rebirth again and again in countless future lives. We attain permanent liberation from lower rebirth by sincerely relying upon the Three Jewels: Buddha - the source of all refuge, Dharma - the realization of Buddha's teachings, and Sangha - pure Dharma practitioners who help us with our spiritual practice. Dharma is like medicine that prevents the sufferings of the three lower realms, Buddha is the doctor who gives us this medicine, and the Sangha are the nurses who assist us. Understanding this, we go for refuge to Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

MEDITATION

As the preparatory practice, we recite *Prayers for Meditation* while concentrating on the meaning. Then we engage in the following contemplation:

Through receiving Buddha's blessings and help from the Sangha, I shall accomplish profound Dharma realizations. Through this, I shall attain permanent liberation from lower rebirth.

Having repeatedly contemplated this valid reason for going for refuge, we make the strong determination: 'I must rely upon Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha as my ultimate refuge.' This determination is the object of our meditation. We then hold this without forgetting it; our mind should remain on this determination single-pointedly for as long as possible. If we lose the object of our meditation, we renew it by immediately remembering our determination or by repeating the contemplation.

At the end of the meditation session, we dedicate the virtues accumulated from this meditation practice towards our realization of refuge and the attainment of enlightenment for the happiness of all living beings.

During the meditation break, we should practise the twelve commitments of refuge, which are explained in detail in Appendix V. Keeping the refuge commitments helps us to strengthen our refuge practice so that it quickly bears fruit.

5. ACTIONS AND THEIR EFFECTS

The purpose of this meditation is to encourage us to purify non-virtues, and to accumulate virtues that cause us to take human rebirth possessing freedoms and endowments in our future lives. In this context, 'freedom' means freedom from physical and mental obstacles as well as those that arise from lacking conditions necessary for studying and practising Dharma. 'Endowments' refers to having all the conditions needed for studying and practising Dharma.

An action, whether of body, speech, or mind, is called 'karma' in Sanskrit. Engaging in the correct actions necessary for the welfare of our future lives depends upon a correct understanding of actions and their effects. All our actions of body, speech, and mind are causes and all our experiences are their effects. The law of karma explains why each individual has a unique mental disposition, a unique physical appearance, and unique experiences. These are the various effects of the countless actions that each individual has performed in the past. We cannot find any two people who have created exactly the same history of actions throughout their past lives, and so we cannot find two people with identical states of mind, identical experiences, or identical physical appearances. Each person has a different individual karma, which means they have different karmic experiences resulting from their own past actions. Some people enjoy good health, while others are constantly ill. Some people are very beautiful, while others are very ugly. Some people have a happy disposition that is easily pleased, while others have a sour disposition and are rarely delighted by anything. Some people easily understand the meaning of spiritual teachings, while others find them difficult and obscure.

It is because of our karma or actions that we are born in this impure, contaminated world and experience so many difficulties and problems. Our actions are impure because our mind is contaminated by the inner poison of self-grasping. This is the fundamental reason why we experience suffering. Suffering is created by our own actions or karma - it is not given to us as a punishment. We suffer because we performed many non-virtuous actions in our previous lives, such as killing, stealing, deceiving others, destroying others' happiness, and holding wrong views. The source of these non-virtuous actions is our own delusions, such as anger, attachment, and self-grasping ignorance.

Once we have purified our mind of self-grasping and all other delusions, all our actions will naturally be pure. As a result of our pure actions or pure karma, everything we experience will be pure. We shall abide in a pure world, with a pure body, enjoying pure enjoyments and surrounded by pure beings. There will no longer be the slightest trace of suffering, impurity, or problems. This is how to find true happiness from within our mind.

MEDITATION

As the preparatory practice, we recite *Prayers for Meditation* while concentrating on the meaning. Then we engage in the following contemplation:

If I purify all my non-virtues, there will be no basis for me to take lower rebirth. By accumulating virtue, I shall take a human rebirth possessing freedoms and endowments in future lives. Thus, I can make progress along the path to enlightenment continually, life after life.

Having repeatedly contemplated these points, we make the strong determination: 'I must purify all my non-virtues by sincerely engaging in the practice of confession, and I must put great effort into accumulating virtue.' This determination is the object of our meditation. We then hold this without forgetting it; our mind should remain on this determination single-pointedly for as long as possible. If we lose the object of our meditation, we renew it by immediately remembering our determination or by repeating the contemplation.

At the end of the meditation session, we dedicate the virtues accumulated from this meditation practice towards our realization of karma and the attainment of enlightenment for the happiness of all living beings.

During the meditation break, we should conscientiously avoid even small non-virtuous actions, apply great effort to purifying the non-virtuous actions we have already created, and practise the virtuous actions of moral discipline, giving, patience, effort, concentration, and wisdom. These virtuous actions are the main causes of attaining a future human life possessing freedoms and endowments. Buddha said that a human rebirth comes from the practice of moral discipline, wealth comes from giving, a beautiful body comes from patience, the fulfillment of spiritual wishes comes from making effort in our Dharma study and practice, inner peace comes from concentration, and liberation comes from wisdom.

The Intermediate Scope

Taking rebirth in a fortunate realm, such as the human realm, is only like taking a short holiday if afterwards we have to descend to lower realms and once again experience extreme suffering for an inconceivably long time.

We experience suffering because we are in samsara. If we think deeply about this, we shall realize that if we want real freedom and happiness we must abandon samsara. By practising the stages of the path of a person of intermediate scope, we shall abandon samsara and attain permanent inner peace, completely free from all sufferings, fears, and their causes. This is real liberation.

6. DEVELOPING RENUNCIATION FOR SAMBARA

The purpose of this meditation is to develop the realization of renunciation - the spontaneous wish to attain liberation from samsara, the cycle of contaminated rebirth. Renunciation is the gateway through which we enter the path to liberation, or nirvana - the permanent inner peace attained through completely abandoning the ignorance of self-grasping.

In itself, our human rebirth is a true suffering; it is precious and valuable only when we use it to train in spiritual paths. We experience various types of suffering because we have taken a rebirth that is contaminated by the inner poison of delusions. This experience has no beginning, because we have taken contaminated rebirths since beginningless time, and it will have no end until we attain the supreme inner peace of nirvana. If we contemplate and meditate on how we experience sufferings and difficulties throughout this life, and in life after life, we shall come to the strong conclusion that every single one of our sufferings and problems arises because we have taken contaminated rebirth. We shall then develop a strong wish to abandon the cycle of contaminated rebirth, samsara. This is the first step towards attaining the happiness of nirvana. From this point of view, contemplating and meditating on suffering has great meaning.

For as long as we remain in this cycle of contaminated rebirth, suffering and problems will never end; we shall have to experience them over and over again every time we take rebirth. Although we cannot remember our experience while we were in our mother's womb or during our very early childhood, the sufferings of human life began from the time of our conception. Everyone can observe that a newborn baby experiences anguish and pain. The first thing a baby does when it is born is scream. Rarely has a baby ever been born in complete serenity, with a peaceful, smiling expression on its face. In the following contemplations, we think about the various sufferings experienced in the human realm, but we should bear in mind that the sufferings of other realms are generally far worse.

Birth

When our consciousness first enters the union of our father's sperm and our mother's ovum, our body is a hot, watery substance like white yoghurt tinted red. In the first moments after conception, we have no gross feelings but, as soon as these develop, we begin to experience pain. Our body gradually becomes harder and harder and, as our limbs grow, it feels as if our body is being stretched out on a rack. Inside our mother's womb it is hot and dark. Our home for nine months is this small, tightly compressed space full of unclean substances. It is like being squashed inside a small water tank full of filthy liquid with the lid tightly shut so that no air or light can come through.

While we are in our mother's womb, we experience much pain and fear all on our own. We are extremely sensitive to everything our mother does. When she walks quickly, it feels as if we are falling from a high mountain and we are terrified. If she has sexual intercourse, it feels as if we are being crushed and suffocated between two huge weights and we panic. If our mother makes just a small jump, it feels as if we are being dashed against the ground from a great height. If she drinks anything hot, it feels like boiling water scalding our skin, and if she drinks anything cold, it feels like an icy-cold shower in midwinter.

When we are emerging from our mother's womb, it feels as if we are being forced through a narrow crevice between two hard rocks, and when we are newly born our body is so delicate that any kind of contact is painful. Even if someone holds us very tenderly, his or her hands feel like thorn bushes piercing our flesh, and the most delicate fabrics feel rough and abrasive. By comparison with the softness and smoothness of our mother's womb, every tactile sensation is harsh and painful. If someone picks us up, it feels as if we were being swung over a huge precipice and we feel frightened and insecure. We have forgotten all that we knew in our previous life; we bring only pain and confusion from our mother's womb. Whatever we hear is as meaningless as the sound of wind and we cannot comprehend anything we perceive. In the first few weeks, we are like someone who is blind, deaf, and dumb, and suffering from profound amnesia. When we are hungry we cannot say, 'I need food', and when we are in pain we cannot say, 'This is hurting me.' The only signs we can make are hot tears and furious gestures. Our mother often has no idea what pains and discomforts we are experiencing. We are completely helpless and have to be taught everything - how to eat, how to sit, how to walk, how to talk.

Although we are most vulnerable in the first few weeks of our life, our pains do not cease as we grow up. We continue to experience various kinds of suffering throughout our life. Just as when we light a fire in a large house, the heat from the fire pervades the whole house and all the heat in the house comes from the fire, so, when we are born in samsara, suffering pervades our whole life and all the miseries we experience arise because we took a contaminated rebirth.

Since we have been born as a human being, we cherish our human body and mind and cling to them as our own. In dependence upon observing our body and mind, we develop self-grasping, which is the root of all delusions. Our human rebirth is the basis of our human suffering; without this basis, there are no human problems. The pains of birth gradually turn into the pains of sickness, ageing, and death - they are one continuum.

Sickness

Our birth gives rise to the sufferings of sickness. Just as the wind and snow of winter take away the glory of green meadows, trees, forests, and flowers, so sickness takes away the youthful splendour of our body, destroying its strength and the power of our senses. If we are usually fit and well, when we become sick we are suddenly unable to engage in all our normal physical activities. Even a champion boxer who is usually able to knock out all his opponents becomes completely helpless when sickness strikes.

When we fall ill, we are like a bird that has been soaring in the sky and is suddenly shot down. When a bird is shot, all its glory and power are immediately destroyed and it falls straight to the ground like a lump of lead. In a similar way, when we become ill we are suddenly incapacitated. If we are seriously ill, we may become completely dependent upon others and lose the ability to control even our bodily functions. This transformation is hard to bear, especially for those who pride themselves on their independence and physical well-being.

When we are ill, we feel frustrated as we cannot do our usual work or complete all the tasks we have set ourselves. We easily become impatient with our illness and depressed about all the things we cannot do. We cannot enjoy the things that usually give us pleasure, such as sport, dancing, drinking, eating

rich foods, or the company of our friends. All these limitations make us feel even more miserable, and, to add to our unhappiness, we have to endure all the physical pains the illness brings.

When we are sick, not only do we have to experience all the unwanted pains of the illness itself, but we also have to experience all sorts of other unwished for things. For example, we have to take whatever cure is prescribed, whether it be a foul-tasting medicine, a series of injections, a major operation, or abstinence from something we like very much. If we are to have an operation, we have to go to hospital and accept all the conditions there. We may have to eat food we do not like and stay in bed all day long with nothing to do, and we may feel anxiety about the operation. Our doctor may not explain to us exactly what the problem is and whether or not he or she expects us to survive.

If we learn that our sickness is incurable, and we have no spiritual experience, we shall suffer anxiety, fear, and regret. We may become depressed and give up hope, or we may become angry with our illness, feeling that it is an enemy that has maliciously deprived us of all joy.

Ageing

Our birth also gives rise to the pains of ageing. Ageing steals our beauty, our health, our good figure, our fine complexion, our vitality, and our comfort. Ageing turns us into objects of contempt. It brings many unwanted pains and takes us swiftly to our death.

As we grow old, we lose all the beauty of our youth, and our strong, healthy body becomes weak and burdened with illness. Our once firm and well-proportioned figure becomes bent and disfigured, and our muscles and flesh shrink so that our limbs become like thin sticks and our bones poke out. Our hair loses its colour and shine and our complexion loses its lustre. Our face becomes wrinkled and our features grow distorted. Milarepa said:

How do old people get up? They get up as if they were heaving a stake out of the ground. How do old people walk about? Once they are on their feet, they have to walk gingerly, like bird-catchers. How do old people sit down? They crash down like heavy luggage whose harness has snapped.

We can contemplate the following poem on the sufferings of growing old:

When we are old, our hair becomes white,
But not because we have washed it clean;
It is a sign we shall soon encounter the Lord of
Death.

We have wrinkles on our forehead,
But not because we have too much flesh;
It is a warning from the Lord of Death:
'You are about to die.'

Our teeth fall out,
But not to make room for new ones;

It is a sign we shall soon lose the ability to eat
human food.

Our faces are ugly and unpleasant,
But not because we are wearing masks;
It is a sign we have lost the mask of youth.

Our heads shake to and fro,
But not because we are in disagreement;
It is the Lord of Death striking our head with the
stick he holds in his right hand.

We walk bent and gazing at the ground,
But not because we are searching for lost needles;
It is a sign we are searching for our lost beauty
and memories.

We get up from the ground using all four limbs,
But not because we are imitating animals;
It is a sign our legs are too weak to support our bodies.

We sit down as if we had suddenly fallen,
But not because we are angry;
It is a sign our body has lost its strength.

Our body sways as we walk,
But not because we think we are important;
It is a sign our legs cannot carry our body.

Our hands shake,
But not because they are itching to steal;
It is a sign the Lord of Death's itchy fingers are
stealing our possessions.

We eat very little,
But not because we are miserly;
It is a sign we cannot digest our food.

We wheeze frequently,
But not because we are whispering mantras to the sick;
It is a sign our breathing will soon disappear.

When we are young, we can travel around the whole world, but when we are old we can hardly make it to our own front gate. We become too weak to engage in many worldly activities, and our spiritual activities are often curtailed. For example, we have little physical strength to perform virtuous actions, and mentally we have less energy to memorize, contemplate, and meditate. We cannot attend teachings that are given in places that are hard to reach or uncomfortable to inhabit. We cannot help others in ways that require physical strength and good health. Deprivations such as these often make old people very sad.

When we grow old, we become like someone who is blind and deaf. We cannot see clearly, and we need stronger and stronger glasses until we can no longer read. We cannot hear clearly, and so it becomes more and more difficult to listen to music or to the television or to hear what others are saying. Our memory fades. All activities, worldly and spiritual, become more difficult. If we practise meditation, it becomes harder for us to gain realizations, because our memory and concentration are too weak. We cannot apply ourself to study. Thus, if we have not learnt and trained in spiritual practices when we were younger, the only thing to do when we grow old is to develop regret and wait for the Lord of Death to come.

When we are old, we cannot derive the same enjoyment from the things we used to enjoy, such as food, drink, and sex. We are too weak to play games and we are often too exhausted even for entertainments. As our lifespan runs out, we cannot join young people in their activities. When they travel about, we have to stay behind. No one wants to take us with them when we are old and no one wants to visit us. Even our own grandchildren do not want to stay with us for very long. Old people often think to themselves, 'How wonderful it would be if young people would stay with me. We could go out for walks and I could show them things'; but young people do not want to be included in their plans. As their life draws to an end, old people experience the sorrow of abandonment and loneliness. They have many special sorrows.

Death

Our birth also gives rise to the sufferings of death. If during our life we have worked hard to acquire possessions, and if we have become very attached to them, we shall experience great suffering at the time of death, thinking, 'Now I have to leave all my precious possessions behind.' Even now, we find it difficult to lend one of our most treasured possessions to someone else, let alone to give it away. No wonder we become so miserable when we realize that, in the hands of death, we must abandon everything.

When we die, we have to part from even our closest friends. We have to leave our partner, even though we may have been together for years and never spent a day apart. If we are very attached to our friends, we shall experience great misery at the time of death, but all we shall be able to do is hold their hands. We shall not be able to halt the process of death, even if they plead with us not to die. Usually, when we are very attached to someone, we feel jealous if he or she leaves us on our own and spends time with someone else, but when we die we shall have to leave our friends with others forever. We shall have to leave everyone, including our family and all the people who have helped us in this life.

When we die, this body that we have cherished and cared for in so many ways will have to be left behind. It will become mindless like a stone and will be buried in the ground or cremated. If we do not have the inner protection of spiritual experience, at the time of death we shall experience fear and distress, as well as physical pain.

When our consciousness departs from our body at death, all the potentialities we have accumulated in our mind by performing virtuous and non-virtuous actions will go with it. Other than these, we cannot take anything else out of this world. All other things deceive us. Death ends all our activities - our conversation, our eating, our meeting with friends, our sleep. Everything draws to a close on the day

of our death and we must leave all things behind, even the rings on our fingers. In Tibet, beggars carry a stick to defend themselves against dogs. To understand the complete deprivation of death, we should remember that at the time of death beggars have to leave even this old stick, the most meagre of human possessions. All over the world, we can see that names carved on stone are the only possessions of the dead.

Other types of suffering

We also have to experience the sufferings of separation, having to encounter what we do not like, and failing to satisfy our desires. Before the final separation at the time of death, we often have to experience temporary separation from the people and things we like, which causes us mental pain. We may have to leave our country where all our friends and relatives live, or we may have to leave the job we like. We may lose our reputation. Many times in this life we have to experience the misery of departing from the people we like, or forsaking and losing the things we find pleasant and attractive, but when we die we have to part forever from all the companions and enjoyments of this life.

We often have to meet and live with people whom we do not like or encounter situations that we find unpleasant. Sometimes we may find ourselves in a very dangerous situation such as in a fire or a flood, or where there is violence such as in a riot or a battle. Our lives are full of less extreme situations that we find annoying. Sometimes we are prevented from doing the things we want to do. On a sunny day, we may set off for the beach but find ourselves stuck in a traffic jam. We continually experience interference from our inner demon of delusions, which disturbs our mind and our spiritual practices. There are countless conditions that frustrate our plans and prevent us from doing what we want. It is as if we were naked and living in a thorn bush - whenever we try to move, we are wounded by circumstances. People and things are like thorns piercing our flesh and no situation ever feels entirely comfortable. The more desires and plans we have, the more frustrations we experience. The more we want certain situations, the more we find ourselves stuck in situations we do not want. Every desire seems to invite its own obstacle. Undesired situations befall us without our looking for them. In fact, the only things that come effortlessly are the things we do not want. No one wants to die, but death comes effortlessly. No one wants to be sick, but sickness comes effortlessly. Since we have taken rebirth without freedom or control, we have an impure body and inhabit an impure environment, and so undesirable things pour in upon us. In samsara, this kind of experience is entirely natural.

We have countless desires but, no matter how much effort we make, we never feel that we have satisfied them. Even when we get what we want, we do not get it in the way we want. We possess the object but we do not derive satisfaction from possessing it. For example, we may dream of becoming wealthy, but, if we actually become wealthy, our life is not the way we imagined it would be and we do not feel that we have fulfilled our desire. This is because our desires do not decrease as our wealth increases. The more wealth we have, the more we desire. The wealth we seek is unfindable because we seek an amount that will satiate our desires and no amount of wealth can do that. To make things worse, in obtaining the object of our desire we create new occasions for discontent. With every object we desire come other objects we do not want. For example, with wealth come taxes, insecurity, and complicated financial affairs. These unwished for accessories prevent us from ever feeling fully satisfied. Similarly, we may dream of having a holiday in the South Seas, and we may actually go there on holiday, but the experience is never quite what we expect, and with our holiday come other things such as sunburn and great expense.

If we examine our desires, we shall see that they are inordinate. We want all the best things in samsara - the best job, the best partner, the best reputation, the best house, the best car, the best holiday. Anything that is not the best leaves us with a feeling of disappointment - still searching for but not finding what we want. No worldly enjoyment, however, can give us the complete and perfect satisfaction we desire. Better things are always being produced. Everywhere, new advertisements announce that the very best thing has just arrived on the market, but a few days later another best thing arrives that is better than the best thing of a few days ago. There is no end of new things to captivate our desires.

Children at school can never satisfy their own or their parents' ambitions. Even if they come top of their class, they feel they cannot be content unless they do the same the following year. If they go on to be successful in their jobs, their ambitions will be as strong as ever. There is no point at which they can rest, feeling that they are completely satisfied with what they have done.

We may think that at least people who lead a simple life in the country must be content, but, if we look at their situation, we shall find that even farmers search for but do not find what they want. Their lives are full of problems and anxieties and they do not enjoy real peace and satisfaction. Their livelihoods depend upon many uncertain factors beyond their control, such as the weather. Farmers have no more freedom from discontent than businessmen who live and work in the city. Businessmen look smart and efficient as they set off to work each morning carrying their briefcases but, although they look so smooth on the outside, in their hearts they carry many dissatisfactions. They are still searching for but not finding what they want.

If we reflect on this situation, we may decide that we can find what we are searching for by abandoning all our possessions. We can see, however, that even poor people are looking for but not finding what they seek, and many poor people have difficulty in finding even the most basic necessities of life.

We cannot avoid the suffering of dissatisfaction by frequently changing our situation. We may think that if we keep getting a new partner or a new job, or keep travelling about, we shall eventually find what we want; but even if we were to travel to every place on the globe, and have a new lover in every town, we would still be seeking another place and another lover. In samsara, there is no real fulfilment of our desires.

Whenever we see anyone in a high or low position, male or female, they differ only in appearance, dress, behaviour, and status. In essence they are all equal - they all experience problems in their lives. Whenever we have a problem, it is easy to think that it is caused by our particular circumstances and that, if we were to change our circumstances, our problem would disappear. We blame other people, our friends, our food, our government, our times, the weather, society, history, and so forth. However, external circumstances such as these are not the main causes of our problems. We need to recognize that these painful experiences are the consequences of our taking a rebirth that is contaminated by the inner poison of delusions. Human beings have to experience human sufferings because they took a contaminated human rebirth. Animals have to experience animal suffering, and hungry spirits and hell beings similarly have to experience their own particular sufferings because they took a contaminated rebirth. Even gods are not free from suffering, because they too have taken a contaminated rebirth.

MEDITATION

As the preparatory practice, we recite *Prayers for Meditation* while concentrating on the meaning. Then we engage in the following contemplation:

Unless I attain liberation from samsara - the cycle of contaminated rebirth - I shall have to experience again and again, in life after life, endlessly, the sufferings of birth, sickness, ageing, death, having to part with what I like, having to encounter what I do not like, and failing to satisfy my desires.

Having repeatedly contemplated this point, we make the strong determination: 'I must abandon samsara and attain the supreme inner peace of liberation.' This determination is the object of our meditation. We then hold this without forgetting it; our mind should remain on this determination single-pointedly for as long as possible. If we lose the object of our meditation, we renew it by immediately remembering our determination or by repeating the contemplation.

At the end of the meditation session, we dedicate the virtues accumulated from this meditation practice towards our realization of renunciation and the attainment of enlightenment for the happiness of all living beings.

During the meditation break, we try never to forget our determination to abandon samsara and attain liberation. When we meet with difficult circumstances, or see others experiencing difficulties, we should use these to remind ourselves of the disadvantages of samsara. When things are going well, we should not be deceived, but recall that samsaric pleasures are short-lived and deceptive. In this way, we can use all our experiences of daily life to strengthen our practice of renunciation.

The actual method to abandon samsara and to attain liberation is the practice of the three higher trainings - the trainings in moral discipline, concentration, and wisdom, motivated by renunciation. Using the body of moral discipline, the hand of concentration, and the axe of wisdom realizing emptiness, we can cut the poisonous tree of our self-grasping and thus destroy all its branches, our other delusions. Through this, we shall experience permanent inner peace - actual liberation, nirvana.

The Great Scope

We should maintain renunciation - the wish to abandon samsara and attain liberation - day and night. It is the main path to liberation and the basis of more advanced realizations. However, we should not be content with seeking merely our own liberation; we need also to consider the welfare of other living beings. There are countless beings trapped in the prison of samsara experiencing an unlimited variety of sufferings. Whereas each one of us is just one single person, other people are countless in number; therefore, the happiness of others is much more important than our own happiness. For this reason, we must enter the Mahayana path, the supreme method for benefiting all living beings. Mahayana means the 'great vehicle to enlightenment'. The gateway through which we enter the Mahayana path is by generating the mind that spontaneously wishes to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all living beings. This precious mind is called 'bodhichitta'.

7. DEVELOPING EQUANIMITY

The purpose of this meditation is to free our mind from unbalanced attitudes, which are the main obstacle to developing the essential Mahayana realizations of unbiased love, compassion, and bodhichitta. Our feelings towards others are normally unbalanced. When we see a friend or someone we find particularly attractive, we feel pleased; when we see an enemy or an unattractive person, we feel dislike for him or her; and when we see a stranger or someone we find neither attractive nor unattractive, we feel indifference. For as long as we have these unbalanced attitudes, our mind will be like a rocky field that cannot support the growth of Mahayana realizations. Our first task, therefore, is to free our mind from these unbalanced attitudes and develop genuine equanimity - an equally warm and friendly attitude towards all living beings.

MEDITATION

As the preparatory practice, we recite *Prayers for Meditation* while concentrating on the meaning. Then we engage in the following contemplation:

There is no sense in feeling attached to someone who appears attractive, feeling aversion towards someone who appears unattractive, or feeling indifferent towards someone who is neither attractive nor unattractive. Someone who appears attractive to me can be an object of aversion to others; someone who appears unattractive to me can be an object of attachment to others; and someone to whom I feel indifferent can be an object of attachment or aversion to others. There is no certainty. The appearances of attractiveness, unattractiveness, and indifference are only my own mistaken projections; they make my mind unbalanced and unpeaceful, and destroy my happiness.

Having repeatedly contemplated these points, we make the strong determination: I must stop these unbalanced minds, and develop and maintain equanimity - an equally warm and friendly attitude towards all living beings. With this determination, we generate a warm and friendly feeling towards all living beings without exception. This feeling of equanimity is the object of our meditation. We then hold this without forgetting it; our mind should remain on this feeling of equanimity single-pointedly for as long as possible. If we lose the object of our meditation, we renew it by immediately remembering our determination or by repeating the contemplation.

At the end of the meditation session, we dedicate the virtues accumulated from this meditation practice towards our realization of equanimity and the attainment of enlightenment for the happiness of all living beings.

During the meditation break, we maintain this feeling of equanimity day and night, keeping in our heart a warm feeling towards everyone we meet or think about. If we do this, there will be no basis for the problems of attachment or anger to arise, and our mind will remain at peace all the time.

8. RECOGNIZING THAT ALL LIVING BEINGS ARE OUR MOTHERS

Generating bodhichitta, the main path to enlightenment, depends upon universal compassion and cherishing love, which in turn depend upon affectionate love. To enhance our affectionate love for all living beings, we begin by contemplating how they are all our mothers.

Since it is impossible to find a beginning to our mental continuum, it follows that we have taken countless rebirths in the past, and, if we have had countless rebirths, we must have had countless mothers. Where are all these mothers now? They are all the living beings alive today.

It is incorrect to reason that our mothers of former lives are no longer our mothers just because a long time has passed since they actually cared for us. If our present mother were to die today, would she cease to be our mother? No, we would still regard her as our mother and pray for her happiness. The same is true of all our previous mothers - they died, yet they remain our mothers. It is only because of the changes in our external appearance that we do not recognize each other.

In our daily life, we see many different living beings, both human and non-human. We regard some as friends, some as enemies, and most as strangers. These distinctions are made by our mistaken minds; they are not verified by valid minds. Rather than following such mistaken minds, it would be better to regard all living beings as our mothers. Whoever we meet, we should think, "This person is my mother. In this way, we shall feel equally warm towards all living beings.

If we regard all living beings as our mothers, we shall find it easy to develop pure love and compassion, our everyday relationships will become pure and stable, and we shall naturally avoid negative actions such as killing or harming living beings. Since it is so beneficial to regard all living beings as our mothers, we should adopt this way of thinking without hesitation.

MEDITATION

As the preparatory practice, we recite *Prayers for Meditation* while concentrating on the meaning. Then we engage in the following contemplation:

Since it is impossible to find a beginning to my mental continuum, it follows that I have taken countless rebirths in the past, and, if I have had countless rebirths, I must have had countless mothers. Where are all these mothers now? They are all the living beings alive today.

Having repeatedly contemplated this point, we generate a strong recognition that all living beings are our mothers. This recognition is the object of our meditation. We then hold this without forgetting it; our mind should remain on this recognition single-pointedly for as long as possible. If we lose the object of our meditation, we renew it by immediately remembering our recognition or by repeating the contemplation.

At the end of the meditation session, we dedicate the virtues accumulated from this meditation practice towards the realization that all living beings are our mothers and the attainment of enlightenment for the happiness of all living beings.

During the meditation break, we maintain this recognition day and night. We should regard everyone we meet as our mother. This applies even to animals and insects, as well as to our enemies. Instead of identifying people as friends, enemies, or strangers, we should try to view them all equally as being our mother. In this way, we shall overcome the harmful attitudes of attachment, hatred, and indifference.

9. REMEMBERING THE KINDNESS OF LIVING BEINGS

Having become convinced that all living beings are our mothers, we contemplate the immense kindness we have received from each of them when they were our mother, as well as the kindness they have shown us at other times.

When we were conceived, had our mother not wanted to keep us in her womb she could have had an abortion. If she had done so, we would not now have this human life. Through her kindness she allowed us to stay in her womb, and so we now enjoy a human life and experience all its advantages. When we were a baby, had we not received her constant care and attention we would certainly have had an accident and could now be handicapped, crippled, or blind. Fortunately, our mother did not neglect us. Day and night, she gave us her loving care, regarding us as more important than herself. She saved our life many times each day. During the night she allowed her sleep to be interrupted, and during the day she forfeited her usual pleasures. She had to leave her job, and when her friends went out to enjoy themselves she had to stay behind. She spent all her money on us, giving us the best food and the best clothes she could afford. She taught us how to eat, how to walk, how to talk. Thinking of our future welfare, she did her best to ensure that we received a good education. Due to her kindness, we are now able to study whatever we choose. It is principally through the kindness of our mother that we now have the opportunity to practise Dharma and eventually to attain enlightenment.

Since there is no one who has not been our mother at some time in our previous lives, and since when we were their child they treated us with the same kindness as our present mother has treated us in this life, all living beings are very kind.

The kindness of living beings is not limited to the times when they have been our mother. All the time, our day-today needs are provided through the kindness of others. We brought nothing with us from our former life, yet, as soon as we were born, we were given a home, food, clothes, and everything we needed - all provided through the kindness of others. Everything we now enjoy has been provided through the kindness of other beings, past or present.

We are able to make use of many things with very little effort on our own part. If we consider facilities such as roads, cars, trains, aeroplanes, ships, houses, restaurants, hotels, libraries, hospitals, shops, money, and so on, it is clear that many people worked very hard to provide these things. Even though we make little or no contribution towards the provision of these facilities, they are all available for us to use. This shows the great kindness of others.

Both our general education and our spiritual training are provided by others. All our Dharma realizations, from our very first insights up to our eventual attainment of liberation and enlightenment, will be attained in dependence upon the kindness of others.

MEDITATION

As the preparatory practice, we recite *Prayers for Meditation* while concentrating on the meaning. Then, focusing on all living beings, we engage in the following contemplation:

In previous lives, when I was their child, all living beings treated me with the same kindness as my present mother has treated me in this life. The kindness of these living beings is not limited to the times when they have been my mother; all the time, my day-to-day needs are provided through their kindness. My general education, my spiritual training, and all my Dharma realizations - from my very first insights up to my eventual attainment of liberation and enlightenment - are attained in dependence upon the kindness of these living beings.

Having repeatedly contemplated the kindness of all living beings, we generate a strong feeling of affectionate love for them. This feeling is the object of our meditation. We then hold this without forgetting it; our mind should remain on this feeling of affectionate love for all living beings single-pointedly for as long as possible. If we lose the object of our meditation, we renew it by immediately remembering our feeling of affectionate love or by repeating the contemplation.

At the end of the meditation session, we dedicate the virtues accumulated from this meditation practice towards our realization of affectionate love for all living beings and the attainment of enlightenment for their happiness.

During the meditation break, throughout all our activities we maintain the feeling of affectionate love for every living being we meet or think about. Maintaining this special feeling will prevent us from harming others out of anger or attachment.

10. EQUALIZING SELF AND OTHERS

To equalize self and others is to cherish others as much as we cherish ourself. Until now, we have cherished only ourself. The purpose of this meditation is to share our feeling of cherishing so that we come to cherish ourself and all living beings equally.

MEDITATION

As the preparatory practice, we recite *Prayers for Meditation* while concentrating on the meaning. Then we engage in the following contemplation:

I will cherish myself and others equally because: All living beings have shown me great kindness in both this and previous lives. Just as I wish to be free from suffering and experience only happiness, so do all other beings. In this respect, I am no different from any other being; we are all equal. I am only one, whereas others are countless, so how can I cherish myself alone while I neglect to cherish others? My happiness and suffering are insignificant when compared with the happiness and suffering of all other living beings.

Having repeatedly contemplated these points, we generate a feeling of cherishing all living beings equally. This feeling is the object of our meditation. We then hold this without forgetting it; our mind should remain on this feeling single-pointedly for as long as possible. If we lose the object of our meditation, we renew it by immediately remembering our feeling of cherishing all living beings equally or by repeating the contemplation.

At the end of the meditation session, we dedicate the virtues accumulated from this meditation practice towards our realization of equalizing self and others and the attainment of enlightenment for the happiness of all living beings.

During the meditation break, whenever we meet or think of any living being, we try to cherish them sincerely, always regarding their happiness and freedom as very important. If we train in this way, many of the problems we experience in daily life will disappear because most of our problems arise from regarding ourself as more important than others.

11. THE DISADVANTAGES OF SELF-CHERISHING

When we think I and 'mine', we perceive an inherently existent I, and we cherish it and believe that its happiness and freedom are the most important. This is self-cherishing. Self-cherishing is our normal view that believes 'I am important' and 'My happiness and freedom are important', and that neglects others' happiness and freedom. It is part of our ignorance because in reality there is no inherently existent I. Our self-cherishing mind nevertheless cherishes this I and believes it to be the most important. It is a foolish and deceptive mind that always interferes with our inner peace, and it is a great obstacle to our accomplishing the real meaning of our human life.

We have had this self-cherishing mind in life after life since beginningless time, even while asleep and dreaming. To fulfill our selfish intentions, we previously committed many non-virtuous actions that caused others to experience suffering and problems. As a result of these actions, we now experience suffering and many problems.

In *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, Shantideva says:

... all the suffering there is in this world arises from wishing oneself to be happy.

Sufferings are not given to us as a punishment. They all come from our self-cherishing mind, which wishes oneself to be happy while neglecting the happiness of others. There are two ways to understand this. First, the self-cherishing mind is the creator of all our suffering and problems; and second, self-cherishing is the basis for experiencing all our suffering and problems.

We suffer because we have performed actions that caused others to experience suffering. These actions were created by selfish intentions - our self-cherishing. As a result of these actions, we experience our present suffering and problems. Therefore, the real creator of all our suffering and problems is our self-cherishing mind.

Our present experience of particular suffering and problems has a special connection with particular actions we performed in our previous lives. This is very subtle. We cannot see this hidden connection with our eyes, but we can understand it through using our wisdom, and in particular through relying upon Buddha's teachings. In general, everyone knows that if they perform bad actions they will experience bad results and if they perform good actions they will experience good results.

The self-cherishing mind is also the basis for experiencing all our suffering and problems. For example, when people are unable to fulfill their wishes, many experience depression, discouragement, unhappiness, and mental pain, and some even want to kill themselves. This is because their self-cherishing believes that their own wishes are so important. It is therefore their self-cherishing that is mainly responsible for their unhappiness. Without self-cherishing, there would be no basis for experiencing such suffering and problems.

When we are ill, we find it difficult to accept our suffering, but illness harms us only because we cherish ourselves. If another person is experiencing a similar illness, we have no problem. Why? Because we do not cherish him or her. However, if we cherished others as we cherish ourselves, we would

find it difficult to bear his suffering. This is compassion. As Shantideva says:

The suffering I experience
Does not harm others,
But I find it hard to bear
Because I cherish myself.

Likewise, the suffering of others
Does not harm me,
But, if I cherish others,
I shall find their suffering hard to bear.

In life after life, since beginningless time, we have tried to fulfil the wishes of our self-cherishing mind, believing its view to be true. We have put great effort into seeking happiness from external sources, but have nothing to show for it now. Because self-cherishing has deceived us, we have wasted countless previous lives. It has driven us to work for our own purpose, but we have gained nothing. This foolish mind has made all our previous lives empty - when we took this human rebirth, we brought nothing with us but delusions. In every moment of every day, this self-cherishing mind continues to deceive us.

MEDITATION

As the preparatory practice, we recite *Prayers for Meditation* while concentrating on the meaning. Then, remembering the many faults and disadvantages of self-cherishing as mentioned above, we think:

Nothing causes me greater harm than the demon of my self-cherishing. It is the source of all my negativity, misfortune, problems, and suffering.

Having repeatedly contemplated this point, we make the strong determination: I must abandon my self-cherishing. This determination is the object of our meditation. We then hold this without forgetting it; our mind should remain on this determination single-pointedly for as long as possible. If we lose the object of our meditation, we renew it by immediately remembering our determination or by repeating the contemplation.

At the end of the meditation session, we dedicate the virtues accumulated from this meditation practice towards our realization of the disadvantages of self-cherishing and the attainment of enlightenment for the happiness of all living beings.

During the meditation break, we should be ever mindful of the faults of self-cherishing and, by repeatedly recalling the determination we made in meditation, try gradually to abandon it. Whenever we experience difficulties or suffering, we should not blame other people or the external situation - rather, we should remember that ultimately all our problems arise from self-cherishing. Therefore, when things go wrong, we should blame only our self-cherishing mind. By practising in this way, our self-cherishing, the root of all faults, will gradually diminish and eventually cease altogether.

12. THE ADVANTAGES OF CHERISHING OTHERS

When we think that others are important, and that their happiness and freedom are important, we are cherishing others. If we cherish others, we shall naturally perform actions that will cause them to be happy. This will make our daily life peaceful, happy, harmonious, and meaningful. We can begin this practice with our family, friends, and those who surround us, and then gradually extend this to all living beings without exception. In this way, we shall show the best example of pure Dharma practice.

In *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, Shantideva says:

All the happiness there is in this world
Arises from wishing others to be happy.

If we think carefully, we shall realize that all our present and future happiness depends upon our cherishing others -upon our wanting others to be happy. In our past lives, because we cherished others, we practised moral discipline, such as refraining from killing or harming others and abandoning stealing from them. Sometimes, out of fondness for them, we practised giving and patience. As a result of these positive actions, we have now obtained this precious human life. Moreover, because sometimes in the past we helped others and gave them protection, we ourselves now receive help and enjoy pleasant conditions.

If we sincerely practise cherishing others, we shall experience many benefits in this and future lives. The immediate effect will be that many of our problems, such as those that arise from anger, jealousy, and selfish behaviour, will disappear, and our mind will become calm and peaceful. Since we shall act in considerate ways, we shall please others and not become involved in quarrels or disputes. If we cherish others, we shall be concerned to help rather than to harm them, so we shall naturally avoid negative actions. Instead, we shall practise positive actions, such as love, patience, and generosity, and thus create the cause to gain a precious human life in the future.

If we make cherishing others our main practice, we shall gradually develop very special minds of great compassion and bodhichitta and, as a result, we shall eventually come to enjoy the ultimate happiness of full enlightenment.

MEDITATION

As the preparatory practice, we recite *Prayers for Meditation* while concentrating on the meaning. Then we engage in the following contemplation:

The precious mind that cherishes all living beings protects both myself and others from suffering, brings happiness, and fulfils our wishes.

Having repeatedly contemplated this point, we make the strong determination: I must always cherish all living beings. This determination is the object of our meditation. We then hold this without forgetting it; our mind should remain on this determination single-pointedly for as long as possible. If

we lose the object of our meditation, we renew it by immediately remembering our determination or by repeating the contemplation.

At the end of the meditation session, we dedicate the virtues accumulated from this meditation practice towards our realization of cherishing others and the attainment of enlightenment for the happiness of all living beings.

During the meditation break, we never forget our determination and always put it into practice. We should always keep in mind the great advantages of cherishing others, and continually improve our consideration, respect, and love for them.

13. EXCHANGING SELF WITH OTHERS

The purpose of this meditation is to exchange self with others, which means changing the object of our cherishing so that we give up cherishing ourself and cherish only others.

MEDITATION

As the preparatory practice, we recite *Prayers for Meditation* while concentrating on the meaning. Then we engage in the following contemplation:

Since beginningless time, in life after life, I have been a slave to my self-cherishing mind. I have trusted it implicitly and obeyed its every command, believing that the way to solve my problems and find happiness is to put myself before everyone else. I have worked so hard and for so long for my own sake, but what do I have to show for it? Have I solved all my problems and found the lasting happiness I desire? No. It is clear that pursuing my own selfish interests has deceived me. After having indulged my self-cherishing for so many lives, now is the time to realize that it simply does not work. Now is the time to switch the object of my cherishing from myself to all living beings.

Having repeatedly contemplated these points, we make the strong determination: I must abandon self-cherishing and cherish only others. This determination is the object of our meditation. We then hold this without forgetting it; our mind should remain on this determination single-pointedly for as long as possible. If we lose the object of our meditation, we renew it by immediately remembering our determination or by repeating the contemplation.

At the end of the meditation session, we dedicate the virtues accumulated from this meditation practice towards our realization of exchanging self with others and the attainment of enlightenment for the happiness of all living beings.

During the meditation break, we maintain the determination made in meditation and put it into practice. We should try not to follow our habitual self-cherishing attitude, but instead cherish others sincerely. When we are familiar with exchanging self with others, we shall be able to accept happily any pain or difficulty, such as illness, loss, or criticism, and to offer all our success and good conditions to others.

14. GREAT COMPASSION

Great compassion is a mind that sincerely wishes to liberate all living beings from suffering. If, on the basis of cherishing all living beings, we contemplate their physical suffering and mental pain, their inability to fulfil their wishes, their lack of freedom, and how, by engaging in negative actions, they sow seeds for future suffering, we shall develop deep compassion for them. We need to empathize with them and feel their pain as keenly as we feel our own.

No one actually wants to suffer, yet living beings create the causes of suffering because they are controlled by their delusions. We should therefore feel equal compassion for all living beings - for those who are creating the causes of suffering, as much as for those who are already suffering the consequences of their unskillful actions. There is not a single living being who is not a suitable object of our compassion.

Living beings suffer because they take samsaric contaminated rebirths. Human beings have no choice but to experience immense human sufferings because they have taken human rebirth, which is contaminated by the inner poison of delusions. Similarly, animals have to experience animal suffering, and hungry spirits and hell beings have to experience all the sufferings of their respective realms. If living beings were to experience all this suffering for just one single life, it would not be so bad, but the cycle of suffering continues life after life, endlessly.

MEDITATION

As the preparatory practice, we recite *Prayers for Meditation* while concentrating on the meaning. We imagine that our parents of this life are beside us, and that they are surrounded by all living beings of the six realms in human aspect. Then, while focusing on all these living beings, we engage in the following contemplation:

I cannot bear the suffering of these countless mother beings. Trapped in the prison of samsara, they have to experience again and again, in life after life, endlessly, the immense sufferings of birth, sickness, ageing, and death, having to part with what they like, having to encounter what they do not like, and failing to satisfy their desires.

Having repeatedly contemplated this point, we generate a strong wish to release all living beings from contaminated rebirth and suffering. This wish is the object of our meditation. We then hold this mind of great, or universal, compassion without forgetting it; our mind should remain on it single-pointedly for as long as possible. If we lose the object of our meditation, we renew it by immediately remembering our wish to release all living beings from suffering or by repeating the contemplation.

At the end of the meditation session, we dedicate the virtues accumulated from this meditation practice towards our realization of great compassion and the attainment of enlightenment for the happiness of all living beings.

During the meditation break, we try to maintain a compassionate heart day and night. Whenever we see or hear of others' suffering, we should try to strengthen our compassion. We must also try to help in practical ways wherever possible. For example, we can rescue animals whose lives are in danger, comfort those who are distressed, or relieve the pain of those who are sick.

15. TAKING

The purpose of this meditation is to purify our mind of self-cherishing and negative actions, to accumulate great merit, and, in particular, to strengthen our compassionate activities. Taking, in this context, means taking the suffering of others upon oneself - both mentally and physically - motivated by great compassion. During meditation, we mentally take the suffering of others upon oneself, using imagination. Having gained deep experience of this meditation, we shall then be able happily to accept our own suffering in order to release all other living beings from their suffering. In this way, we are physically taking the suffering of others upon oneself.

MEDITATION

As the preparatory practice, we recite *Prayers for Meditation* while concentrating on the meaning. Then we engage in the following practice:

We begin by generating the superior intention: I myself will liberate all living beings from their suffering. Motivated by this superior intention, we pray: 'May all the suffering, fears, and obstacles of every living being ripen upon me, and may they thereby be freed from all problems'. We then strongly believe that the suffering, fears, and obstacles of all living beings gather in the aspect of black smoke, which dissolves into our heart, destroying our self-cherishing mind and freeing all living beings from their suffering.

This belief is the object of our meditation. We then hold this without forgetting it; our mind should remain on this belief single-pointedly for as long as possible. If we lose the object of our meditation, we renew it by immediately remembering our belief or by repeating the practice.

At the end of the meditation session, we dedicate the virtues accumulated from this meditation practice towards our realization of taking and the attainment of enlightenment for the happiness of all living beings.

During the meditation break, we put our superior intention - the wish to take the suffering of others upon oneself - into practice. We should alleviate others' suffering whenever we can and happily accept our own suffering as a method to release all other living beings from their suffering. In this way, both our compassion and our merit will increase, our self-cherishing will gradually diminish, and the power of our compassionate activities will strengthen.

16. WISHING LOVE

Having generated affectionate and cherishing love for all living beings, if we now contemplate how living beings lack true happiness we shall naturally develop wishing love - the strong wish that all beings experience pure and everlasting happiness. The main purpose of this meditation is to gain the actual power to bestow pure happiness upon all living beings.

MEDITATION

As the preparatory practice, we recite *Prayers for Meditation* while concentrating on the meaning. Then, focusing on all living beings, we engage in the following contemplation:

These living beings wish to be happy all the time, but they do not know how to fulfil this wish. The happiness they experience from worldly enjoyments is not real happiness - it is just changing suffering, a temporary reduction of previous manifest suffering. None of these countless living beings experiences real and everlasting happiness.

Having repeatedly contemplated this point, we generate the strong wish that all living beings experience real and everlasting happiness. This wish is the object of our meditation. We then hold this without forgetting it; our mind should remain on this wish single-pointedly for as long as possible. If we lose the object of our meditation, we renew it by immediately remembering our wish for all living beings to experience happiness or by repeating the contemplation.

At the end of the meditation session, we dedicate the virtues accumulated from this meditation practice towards our realization of wishing love and the attainment of enlightenment for the happiness of all living beings.

During the meditation break, we always maintain our wishing love and, with this pure intention, make prayers and dedicate our virtues for all living beings to find real and everlasting happiness. We should continually strive to improve our wisdom and compassion so that we can gain the actual power to bestow pure happiness upon all living beings.

The purpose of this meditation is to learn how to put our wishing love into practice. In this meditation, we give pure happiness to all living beings, using our imagination. By putting this meditation into practice, we shall gain the actual ability to bestow pure and everlasting happiness upon all living beings.

17. GIVING

The purpose of this meditation is to learn how to put our wishing love into practice. In this meditation, we give pure happiness to all living beings, using our imagination. By putting this meditation into practice, we shall gain the actual ability to bestow pure and everlasting happiness upon all living beings.

MEDITATION

As the preparatory practice, we recite *Prayers for Meditation* while concentrating on the meaning. Then, focusing on all living beings, we engage in the following practice:

We first think: 'All these mother living beings are seeking happiness in life after life. They all want to be happy, but there is no real happiness anywhere in samsara. I will now give them the supreme happiness of permanent inner peace. We then imagine that through the power of our pure intention of wishing love and great accumulation of merit, our body transforms into the nature of a wishfulfilling jewel, which has the power to fulfil the wishes of each and every living being. Infinite light rays radiate from our body and pervade the entire universe, reaching the bodies and minds of all living beings and bestowing upon them, the supreme happiness of permanent inner peace. We strongly believe that all living beings experience this inner peace.'

This belief is the object of our meditation. We then hold this without forgetting it; our mind should remain on this belief single-pointedly for as long as possible. If we lose the object of our meditation, we renew it by immediately remembering our belief or by repeating the practice.

At the end of the meditation session, we dedicate the virtues accumulated from this meditation practice towards our realization of the practice of giving and the attainment of enlightenment for the happiness of all living beings.

During the meditation break, we try to practise giving love, giving Dharma, giving fearlessness, and giving material things. Whenever we can, we try to be of service to others. We should also make prayers and dedicate our merit so that all living beings obtain pure happiness. In this way, our wishing love, as well as our merit, will quickly increase.

18. BODHICHITTA

'Bodhichitta' literally means 'mind of enlightenment' - 'bodhi' is the Sanskrit word for 'enlightenment' and 'chitta' the word for 'mind'. Bodhichitta is defined as a mind, motivated by compassion for all living beings, that spontaneously seeks enlightenment. It is born from great compassion, which itself depends upon cherishing love. Cherishing love can be likened to a field, compassion to the seeds, taking and giving to perfect conditions for enabling the seeds to grow, and bodhichitta to the harvest. Bodhichitta is the supreme good heart. This profoundly compassionate mind is the very essence of spiritual training. Developing the good heart of bodhichitta enables us to perfect all our virtues, solve all our problems, fulfil all our wishes, and develop the power to help others in the most appropriate and beneficial ways. Bodhichitta is the best friend we can have and the greatest quality we can develop.

MEDITATION

As the preparatory practice, we recite *Prayers for Meditation* while concentrating on the meaning. Then we recall the superior intention generated in the meditations on taking and giving and engage in the following contemplation:

I have assumed responsibility for liberating all living beings from suffering, but how can I do this without first attaining enlightenment myself? Only enlightened beings have the power to protect all living beings and to bestow upon them pure and everlasting happiness. Therefore, to fulfil my wish to liberate all living beings from their suffering, I must become a Buddha, a fully enlightened being.

Having repeatedly contemplated these points, we generate the strong wish to attain enlightenment to free all living beings from their suffering. This wish is the object of our meditation. We then hold this without forgetting it; our mind should remain on this wish single-pointedly for as long as possible. If we lose the object of our meditation, we renew it by immediately remembering our wish or by repeating the contemplation.

At the end of the meditation session, we dedicate the virtues accumulated from this meditation practice towards our realization of bodhichitta and the attainment of enlightenment for the happiness of all living beings.

During the meditation break, we try to maintain the precious mind of bodhichitta day and night. In particular, we should try to ensure that whatever actions we undertake are motivated by bodhichitta. In this way, all our actions become powerful causes of Buddhahood.

Having gained some experience of bodhichitta, we should bring it to completion by practising the three higher trainings of the Mahayana: training in the perfection of moral discipline by keeping the Bodhisattva vows purely; training in the perfection of mental stabilization by striving to attain tranquil abiding; and training in the perfection of wisdom by developing superior seeing. A detailed explanation of the Bodhisattva vows can be found in the book *The Bodhisattva Vow*.

19. TRANQUIL ABIDING

Bodhichitta and the wisdom directly realizing emptiness are like the two wings of a bird that can carry us to our destination, the ground of enlightenment. To realize emptiness directly, we need to attain tranquil abiding. Without tranquil abiding, our mind is unstable, like a candle flame exposed to the wind, and so we are not able to realize clearly and directly subtle objects such as emptiness. It is not just the direct realization of emptiness that depends upon tranquil abiding; we also need tranquil abiding to attain spontaneous realizations of renunciation and bodhichitta, and pure clairvoyance and miracle powers.

In general, whenever we experience pure concentration on any of the objects of the twenty-one meditations, our mind abides in a tranquil state, free from distractions. This is the function of pure concentration. However, actual tranquil abiding is a special concentration that is attained by completing the training in the nine levels of concentration known as the 'nine mental abidings', and that is conjoined with a special bliss of mental and physical suppleness. To train in tranquil abiding, we first need to choose an object of meditation. We can use any one of the objects of the twenty-one meditations. If we choose an object such as equanimity, love, compassion, or bodhichitta, we first transform our mind into that particular state of mind by using the appropriate contemplations, and then hold that state of mind with single-pointed concentration. If we choose an object such as emptiness, impermanence, or the preciousness of this human life, we first attain a clear mental image of the object by relying upon the appropriate contemplations, and then concentrate single-pointedly on that image.

The instructions that follow explain how to begin to train in tranquil abiding using great compassion as the object. If we choose a different object, we can modify the instructions accordingly.

MEDITATION

As the preparatory practice, we recite *Prayers for Meditation* while concentrating on the meaning. Then we engage in the following practice:

Remembering our affectionate and cherishing love for all living beings, we think: I cannot bear that these countless mother beings, trapped in the prison of samsara, have to experience again and again, in life after life, endlessly, the immense sufferings of birth, sickness, ageing, and death, having to part with what they like, having to encounter what they do not like, and failing to satisfy their desires.

When as a result of this contemplation a strong feeling of compassion for all living beings arises in our mind, we have found the object of our tranquil abiding meditation. Having transformed our mind into compassion, we then stop contemplating and, with strong concentration, hold this mind of compassion for all living beings.

This concentration is the first of the nine mental abidings. When the object fades, or our mind wanders to another object, we return to the contemplation to bring the object back to mind. Then once again we discontinue our contemplation and hold the object with single-pointed concentration. We continue in this way, alternating between contemplation and meditation, for the rest of the session.

We continue to improve our concentration in this way until we are able to remain concentrated on our object for five minutes. At this point, we shall have advanced to the second mental abiding. By continually improving our concentration, we shall attain tranquil abiding.

At the end of the meditation session, we dedicate the virtues accumulated from this meditation practice towards our realization of tranquil abiding and the attainment of enlightenment for the happiness of all living beings.

During the meditation break, our principal practice is to observe pure moral discipline carefully by relying upon mindfulness and conscientiousness. In this way, we avoid distracting thoughts that obstruct our training in tranquil abiding. Again and again we should think about the benefits of attaining tranquil abiding to increase our enthusiasm for the practice, and to improve our understanding we should read authentic instructions on tranquil abiding such as those found in *Joyful Path of Good Fortune* and *Meaningful to Behold*.

Once we have attained the fourth mental abiding, we are ready to do a strict retreat on tranquil abiding. In some cases, at this stage it is possible to attain actual tranquil abiding within six months. For our retreat on tranquil abiding to be successful, we need to find a suitable place that is very quiet and has all the necessary conditions. We must have few desires and be able to remain content all the time.

During the retreat, we should refrain from worldly activities and keep moral discipline purely, thereby reducing distracting conceptions. In brief, we must free ourselves from all obstacles to developing concentration, and obtain all conducive internal and external conditions.

20. SUPERIOR SEEING

In this context, 'superior seeing' refers to a profound wisdom that sees the way things really are and that is attained through tranquil abiding. With this wisdom, we are able to abandon our self-grasping ignorance - the root of all our suffering - and all our mistaken appearances, so that we can enjoy the supreme inner peace of enlightenment. The object of this wisdom is emptiness. Therefore, in this session we emphasize meditation on emptiness.

Emptiness is not nothingness but is the real nature of phenomena; it is the way things really are. Emptiness is the way things exist as opposed to the way they appear. We naturally believe that the things we see around us, such as tables, chairs, and houses, are truly existent, because we believe that they exist in exactly the way that they appear. However, the way things appear to our senses is deceptive and completely contradictory to the way in which they actually exist. Things appear to exist from their own side, without depending upon our mind. We feel that this book that appears to our mind, for example, can exist without our mind; we do not feel that our mind is in any way involved in bringing the book into existence. This way of existing independent of our mind is variously called 'true existence', 'inherent existence', and 'existence from its own side'.

Although things appear directly to our senses to be truly, or inherently, existent, in reality all phenomena lack true, or inherent, existence. This book, our body, we ourselves, and the entire universe are in reality just appearances to mind, like things seen in a dream. If we dream of an elephant, the elephant appears vividly in all its detail - we can see it, hear it, smell it, and touch it - but when we wake up we realize that it was just an appearance to mind. We do not wonder, 'Where is the elephant now?', because we understand that it was simply a projection of our mind and had no existence outside our mind. When the dream awareness that apprehended the elephant ceased, the elephant did not go anywhere - it simply disappeared, for it was just an appearance to the mind and did not exist separately from the mind. Buddha said that the same is true for all phenomena; they are mere appearances to mind, totally dependent upon the minds that perceive them.

The world we experience when we are awake and the world we experience when we are dreaming are very similar, for both are mere appearances to mind that arise from our karma. If we want to say that the dream world is false, we also have to say that the waking world is false; and if we want to say that the waking world is true, we also have to say that the dream world is true. The only difference between them is that the dream world is an appearance to our subtle dreaming mind whereas the waking world is an appearance to our gross waking mind. The dream world exists only for as long as the dream awareness to which it appears exists, and the waking world exists only for as long as the waking awareness to which it appears exists. When we die, our gross waking minds dissolve into our very subtle mind and the world we experienced when we were alive simply disappears. The world as others perceive it will continue, but our personal world will disappear as completely and irrevocably as the world of last night's dream.

Buddha said that all phenomena are like illusions. There are many different types of illusion, such as mirages, rainbows, or drug-induced hallucinations. In ancient times, there used to be magicians who would cast a spell over their audience, causing them to see objects, such as a piece of wood, as something else, such as a tiger. Those deceived by the spell would see what appeared to be a real tiger and develop fear, but those who arrived after the spell had been cast would simply see a piece of wood. What all illusions have in common is that the way they appear does not coincide with the way they exist. Buddha likened all phenomena to illusions because, through the force of the imprints of

self-grasping ignorance accumulated since beginningless time, whatever appears to our mind naturally appears to be truly existent and we instinctively assent to this appearance, but in reality everything is totally empty of true existence. Like a mirage that appears to be water but is not in fact water, things appear in a deceptive way. Not understanding their real nature, we are fooled by appearances, and grasp at books and tables, bodies and worlds as truly existent. This grasping mind is self-grasping. The result of grasping at phenomena in this way is that we develop self-cherishing, attachment, hatred, jealousy, and other delusions, our mind becomes agitated and unbalanced, and our inner peace is destroyed. We are like travellers in a desert who exhaust themselves running after mirages, or like someone walking down a road at night mistaking the shadows of the trees for criminals or wild animals waiting to attack.

To understand how all phenomena are empty of true, or inherent, existence, we should consider our own body. Once we have understood how our body lacks true existence, we can easily apply the same reasoning to other objects.

On one level we know our body very well - we know whether it is healthy or unhealthy, tall or short, and so forth. However, we never examine it more deeply, asking ourselves: 'What precisely is my body? Where is my body? What is its real nature?' If we did examine our body in this way, we would not be able to find it - instead of finding our body, the result of this examination would be that our body disappears. This clearly shows that our body is empty of true or inherent existence, and this is also true of our I, our world, and all other phenomena.

MEDITATION

As the preparatory practice, we recite *Prayers for Meditation* while concentrating on the meaning. Then we recall the meaning of the above explanation and think:

My body is empty of true, or inherent, existence because, when I search for it, it disappears like a mirage.

Having repeatedly contemplated this point, when we see clearly that our body is empty of true existence we have found the object of our meditation, the emptiness of our body. We then hold this emptiness without forgetting it; our mind should remain on the emptiness of a truly existent body single-pointedly for as long as possible. If we lose the object of our meditation, we renew it by immediately remembering the emptiness of our body or by repeating the contemplation.

At the end of the meditation session, we dedicate the virtues accumulated from this meditation practice towards our realization of superior seeing and the attainment of enlightenment for the happiness of all living beings.

Having gained some experience of the meditation on the emptiness of our body, we can then apply the above contemplation and meditation to our I, our world, and all other phenomena. In this way, we meditate on the emptiness of all phenomena, and we shall develop a special feeling that all our ordinary daily appearances are dissolving into an ocean of emptiness. Through this, our self-grasping and other delusions will gradually diminish and our inner peace will continually increase.

During the meditation break, we try to recognize that whatever appears to our mind lacks true or inherent existence. In a dream, things appear vividly to the dreamer, but, when the dreamer wakes, he or she immediately realizes that the objects that appeared in the dream were just mental appearances that did not exist from their own side. We should view all phenomena in a similar way. Though they appear vividly to our mind, they lack inherent existence.

A detailed explanation of emptiness can be found in *Transform Your Life*, and a traditional explanation of how to contemplate and meditate on the emptiness of the I and the body is given in Appendix VI.

21. RELYING UPON A SPIRITUAL GUIDE

The purpose of this meditation is to enable us to receive the powerful blessings of all enlightened beings through our Spiritual Guide so that our meditation practice will be successful. Sick people rely upon doctors who temporarily liberate them from particular illnesses, so there is no doubt that we need to rely upon a qualified Spiritual Guide who will lead us to permanent liberation from the sufferings of both inner and outer sickness.

By relying upon a qualified Spiritual Guide with strong faith, we can remove all our confusion about Dharma, increase our Dharma wisdom, and receive the powerful blessings of all enlightened beings. Buddha said that relying upon a qualified Spiritual Guide is the root of the spiritual path, and that by relying upon our Spiritual Guide we shall receive the following benefits:

1. He or she will lead us along the spiritual path, which is the only way to solve all our problems and make our life meaningful.
2. His or her blessings will gradually draw us closer to the attainment of full enlightenment.
3. All the Buddhas will be delighted with us.
4. We shall be protected from harm caused by humans or non-humans.
5. We shall find it easy to abandon our delusions and non-virtuous actions.
6. Our practical experience of the spiritual path will increase.
7. We shall never be born in lower realms.
8. In all our future lives, we shall meet qualified Spiritual Guides.
9. All our virtuous wishes for beneficial conditions within samsara, as well as for liberation and enlightenment, will be fulfilled.

MEDITATION

As the preparatory practice, we recite *Prayers for Meditation* while concentrating on the meaning. Then we engage in the actual meditation:

Having repeatedly contemplated all the benefits of relying upon a Spiritual Guide mentioned above, we make the strong determination: I must sincerely rely upon a Spiritual Guide.

This determination is the object of our meditation. We then hold this without forgetting it; our mind should remain on this determination single-pointedly for as long as possible. If we lose the object of our meditation, we renew it by immediately remembering our determination or by repeating the contemplation.

At the end of the meditation session, we dedicate the virtues accumulated from this meditation practice towards our realization of relying upon a Spiritual Guide and the attainment of enlightenment for the happiness of all living beings.

During the meditation break, we put our determination into practice. A detailed explanation of the qualifications of a Spiritual Guide and how to become a qualified student can be found in *Joyful Path of Good Fortune* and *Great Treasury of Merit*.

This meditation can be either the first or the last of the twenty-one meditations. In this book, I have chosen to put it last.

Conclusion

Having developed the supreme good heart of bodhichitta, we should engage in the practices of giving, moral discipline, patience, effort, concentration, and wisdom. When motivated by bodhichitta, these practices are called the 'six perfections'. By training in the six perfections, and especially in the perfections of concentration and wisdom, we shall fulfil our bodhichitta wishes.

Advice from Atisha's Heart

When Venerable Atisha came to Tibet, he first went to Ngari, where he remained for two years giving many teachings to the disciples of Jangchub O. After two years had passed, he decided to return to India, and Jangchub O requested him to give one last teaching before he left. Atisha replied that he had already given them all the advice they needed, but Jangchub O persisted in his request and so Atisha accepted and gave the following advice.

How wonderful!

Friends, since you already have great knowledge and clear understanding, whereas I am of no importance and have little wisdom, it is not suitable for you to request advice from me. However because you dear friends, whom I cherish from my heart, have requested me, I shall give you this essential advice from my inferior and childish mind.

Friends, until you attain enlightenment the Spiritual Teacher is indispensable, therefore rely upon the holy Spiritual Guide.

See all living beings as your father or mother, and love them as if you were their child.

Always keep a smiling face and a loving mind, and speak truthfully without malice.

If you talk too much with little meaning, you will make mistakes, therefore speak in moderation, only when necessary.

If you engage in many meaningless activities, your virtuous activities will degenerate, therefore stop activities that are not spiritual.

It is completely meaningless to put effort into activities that have no essence.

If the things you desire do not come, it is due to karma created long ago, therefore keep a happy and relaxed mind.

Beware, offending a holy being is worse than dying, therefore be honest and straightforward.

Since all the happiness and suffering of this life arise from previous actions, do not blame others.

All happiness comes from the blessings of your Spiritual Guide, therefore always repay his kindness.

Since you cannot tame the minds of others until you have tamed your own, begin by taming your own mind.

Since you will definitely have to depart without the wealth you have accumulated, do not accumulate negativity for the sake of wealth.

Distracting enjoyments have no essence, therefore sincerely practise giving.

Always keep pure moral discipline for it leads to beauty in this life and happiness hereafter.

Since hatred is rife in these impure times, don the armour of

patience, free from anger.

You remain in samsara through the power of laziness, therefore ignite the fire of the effort of application.

Since this human life is wasted by indulging in distractions, now is the time to practise concentration.

Being under the influence of wrong views, you do not realize the ultimate nature of things, therefore investigate correct meanings.

Friends, there is no happiness in this swamp of samsara, so move to the firm ground of liberation.

Meditate according to the advice of your Spiritual Guide and dry up the river of samsaric suffering.

You should consider this well because it is not just words from the mouth, but sincere advice from the heart.

If you practise like this, you will delight me, and you will bring happiness to yourself and others.

I who am ignorant request you to take this advice to heart.

This is the advice that the holy being Venerable Atisha gave to Venerable Jangchub O.

The Three Principal Aspects of the Path

Homage to the venerable Spiritual Guide.

I shall explain to the best of my ability
The essential meaning of all the Conqueror's teachings,
The path praised by the holy Bodhisattvas,
And the gateway for fortunate ones seeking liberation.

You who are not attached to the joys of samsara,
But strive to make your freedom and endowment
 meaningful,
O Fortunate Ones who apply your minds to the path that
 pleases the Conquerors,
Please listen with a clear mind.

Without pure renunciation, there is no way to pacify
Attachment to the pleasures of samsara;
And since living beings are tightly bound by desire for
 samsara,

Begin by seeking renunciation.

Freedom and endowment are difficult to find, and there
 is no time to waste.

By acquainting your mind with this, overcome attachment to
this life;

And by repeatedly contemplating actions and effects
And the sufferings of samsara, overcome attachment to
 future lives.

When, through contemplating in this way, the desire for
 the pleasures of samsara

Does not arise, even for a moment,
But a mind longing for liberation arises throughout the
day and the night,
At that time, renunciation is generated.

However, if this renunciation is not maintained
By completely pure bodhichitta,
It will not be a cause of the perfect happiness of
unsurpassed enlightenment;
Therefore, the wise generate a supreme bodhichitta.

Swept along by the currents of the four powerful rivers,
Tightly bound by the chains of karma, so hard to release,
Ensnared within the iron net of self-grasping,
Completely enveloped by the pitch-black darkness of
ignorance,

Taking rebirth after rebirth in boundless samsara,
And unceasingly tormented by the three sufferings –
Through contemplating the state of your mothers in
conditions such as these,
Generate a supreme mind [of bodhichitta].

But, even though you may be acquainted with
renunciation and bodhichitta,
If you do not possess the wisdom realizing the way
things are,
You will not be able to cut the root of samsara;
Therefore, strive in the means for realizing dependent
relationship.

Whoever negates the conceived object of self-grasping
Yet sees the infallibility of cause and effect

Of all phenomena in samsara and nirvana,
Has entered the path that pleases the Buddhas.

Dependent-related appearance is infallible
And emptiness is inexpressible;
For as long as the meaning of these two appear to be separate,
You have not yet realized Buddha's intention.

When they arise as one, not alternating but simultaneous,
From merely seeing infallible dependent relationship
Comes certain knowledge that destroys all grasping at objects.
At that time, the analysis of view is complete.

Moreover, when the extreme of existence is dispelled by
appearance,
And the extreme of non-existence is dispelled by emptiness,
And you know how emptiness is perceived as cause and effect,
You will not be captivated by extreme views.

When, in this way, you have correctly realized the
essential points
Of the three principal aspects of the path,
Dear One, withdraw into solitude, generate strong effort,
And quickly accomplish the final goal.