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Stages of Meditation

The Dalai Lama

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About the Author

His Holiness the Dalai Lama is the spiritual and political leader of Tibet. Today, he lives in exile in Northern India and works tirelessly on behalf of the Tibetan people, as well as travelling the world to give spiritual teachings to sell-out audiences. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.

Also by the Dalai Lama

The Good Heart

The Dalai Lama's Book of Wisdom

The Little Book of Wisdom

The Dalai Lama's Book of Daily Meditations

The Little Book of Buddhism

How to Practise

STAGES OF MEDITATION

The Dalai Lama

root text by

Kamalashila

translated by

Venerable Geshe Lobsang Jordhen,
Losang Choephel Ganchenpa,
and Jeremy Russell



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PREFACE

We are happy to be able to present here a translation of the intermediate *Stages of Meditation* by Kamalashila with a commentary by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. When His Holiness gave this commentary at Manali in 1989, we were inspired by a strong wish to make it available as a book. Since then we have worked on it when we could and are happy that it has now finally come to fruition.

Acharya Kamalashila was a great scholar-saint of the ninth century and a disciple of the great abbot Shantarakshita. It was due to the compassionate activities of such great teachers as these that a complete and unmistakable form of the Buddha's teaching flourished in Tibet. Kamalashila played a unique role in this because he was the first Indian scholar-saint to compose a significant text in Tibet with a view to the needs of the Tibetan people and with the intention of dispelling the misunderstandings then prevailing there. Unfortunately, due to the turmoil of our times, and particularly the tragedy that has befallen Tibet, serious students and practitioners have long been deprived of the opportunity of listening to, reading, thinking about, or meditating on such important texts. Realizing this, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has, despite the many pressing calls on his attention, made serious efforts to preserve this tradition, which fosters studying and putting into practice the meaning of important and rare texts such as this. Consequently he has taught *Stages of Meditation* on several occasions.

We are pleased to make available the commentary he gave in Manali, the small town at the head of the Kullu

Valley in Himachal Pradesh that has longstanding links with Tibetans and the people of the Indo-Tibetan border region. It is our sincere wish that our humble efforts will contribute to the preservation of the unblemished teaching of Acharya Kamalashila. We hope that whatever positive imprints readers may derive from it may contribute to all sentient beings achieving the ultimate happiness of Buddhahood.

We dedicate whatever merit may be created through this work to the flourishing of the Buddhadharma, to peace among sentient beings, and to the long life of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and other great spiritual teachers and practitioners. We are grateful to Susan Kyser, our editor at Snow Lion, for her invaluable suggestions that have improved the final copy, and to everyone who has directly or indirectly contributed to bringing this project to fulfillment.

This book has been translated and edited by the following team: Geshe Lobsang Jordhen, a graduate of the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics, Dharamsala, who since 1989 has been religious assistant and personal translator to His Holiness the Dalai Lama; Losang Choephel Ganchenpa, who also trained at the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics and has worked as a Buddhist translator for over a decade, first at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, and later in Australia; and Jeremy Russell, who is editor of *Chö-Yang, the Voice of Tibetan Religion & Culture*, published by the Norbulingka Institute, Dharamsala.

PROLOGUE

In the Indian language *Bhavanakrama*, and in the Tibetan language *Gompai Rimpa*.

Homage to the youthful Manjushri. I shall briefly explain the stages of meditation for those who follow the system of Mahayana sutras. The intelligent who wish to actualize omniscience extremely quickly should make deliberate effort to fulfill its causes and conditions.

The great spiritual master Kamalashila composed this text called the *Stages of Meditation* in three parts: the initial *Stages of Meditation*, the intermediate *Stages of Meditation*, and the last *Stages of Meditation*. Here I am explaining the intermediate *Stages of Meditation*. The essential subjects of this treatise are the awakening mind of bodhichitta and the perfect view. The spiritual paths that lead to the ultimate goal of Buddhahood are two: method and wisdom. These two qualities produce the physical body, or rupakaya, and the wisdom body, or dharmakaya, respectively. The first represents perfection of working for the welfare of other sentient beings and the second represents the perfection of one's own purposes. The methods for generating bodhichitta and the wisdom realizing emptiness together form the foundation of the Buddhist teachings, and this text provides a clear exposition of these two aspects of the Buddhist path to enlightenment.

When we take a closer look at these teachings, we come to understand that compassionate thought is the root of bodhichitta, or awakening mind. This thought of enlightenment must be put into practice in conjunction with the wisdom that realizes the ultimate nature of all phenomena, emptiness. This wisdom should be a union of special insight and a calmly abiding mind single-pointedly focused on its object, emptiness.

Most of you who are listening to this come from the Lahaul, Kinnaur, and Spiti regions of India, and most of you have a certain amount of education. However, the teaching technique I shall employ here is primarily oriented to those who don't believe in religion. In the process, I want to show how one can generate interest in religion in general and Buddhism in particular. There are many lines of reasoning that can help us develop interest in religion. In this way we may realize that religion is not based on mere faith, but that faith arises in conjunction with reason and logic. Basically there are two types of faith: that which is not based on any special reason and that which is backed by reason. In the case of the second type of faith, an individual examines the object of his or her belief and investigates its relevance to his or her needs and requirements. Faith is generated after seeing the reasons why it is advantageous. In Buddhism in general, and in the Mahayana path in particular, we examine the contents of the teachings and accept those that are logical and reasonable and reject those that are illogical. As such there are occasions when teachings that are in the Buddha's own words should not be taken literally, but need interpretation. Scriptural teachings that cannot stand logical analysis should not be taken literally, but require interpretation. On the other hand, scriptural teachings that can stand logical analysis should be taken literally. However, if we search for another scriptural authority to distinguish those scriptures that are to be understood literally and those that are to be

interpreted, we will fall into the fallacy of infinite regress. We must examine both types of scriptural teachings with logic. Therefore, we can see that in the study of Buddhist scriptures, logical analysis has a very important place.

Before you embark on your investigation, it is essential that you study the techniques for testing the object of your analysis. For people who want to follow the Buddha's teachings in practice, mere faith is not enough. Faith should be backed by reason. When you study, follow a logical method. While I am teaching, I want you to pay good attention; make notes or use other means to be able to retain what I teach.

Let me begin by explaining what we mean by blessing when we talk about a lama's blessing or the blessing of the Dharma in the Buddhist context. Blessing must arise from within your own mind. It is not something that comes from outside, even though we talk about a lama's blessing or the blessing of the Three Objects of Refuge. When the positive qualities of your mind increase and negativities decrease, that is what blessing means. The Tibetan word for blessing [*byin rlab*, pronounced "chin-lap"] can be broken into two parts—*byin* means "magnificent potential," and *rlab* means "to transform." So *byin rlab* means transforming into magnificent potential. Therefore, blessing refers to the development of virtuous qualities that you did not previously have and the improvement of those good qualities that you have already developed. It also means decreasing the defilements of the mind that obstruct the generation of wholesome qualities. So actual blessing is received when the mind's virtuous attributes gain strength and its defective characteristics weaken or deteriorate.

The text says, "The intelligent who wish to actualize omniscience extremely quickly should make deliberate effort to fulfill its causes and conditions." What this means is that this book primarily deals with the procedures and practice of meditation, rather than an elaborate analysis of

the objects that are refuted or presented in a more philosophical work. It is not that there are two separate and unrelated sets of Buddhist treatises—that some treatises are only the subject of discourse and others are only manuals of practice. All scriptures contain teachings to help tame and control the mind. Nevertheless, there can definitely be different levels of emphasis. Certain practices and texts are primarily suited to study and contemplation, and there are other texts that are taught with special emphasis on meditational procedures. This text is one of the latter. Therefore, in accordance with its content, it is called *Stages of Meditation*. And, as the title suggests, the text describes how a spiritual path can be developed in the mindstream of a meditator in a proper sequence, and not in a scattered piece-meal fashion.

Among the three parts of the *Stages of Meditation*, this is the middle part. Acharya Kamalashila initially taught it in his own Indian language. The text begins with its Sanskrit title, mention of which is intended to benefit the reader by creating an aptitude for this sacred language in her or his mind. Citing the title in the literary language of India has a historical dimension as well. Since the dawn of civilization in the Snowy Land of Tibet, and with the gradual development of the Tibetan nation, there has been a natural association with neighboring countries. In retrospect it appears that Tibetans have adopted many good socio-cultural elements from their neighbors. For instance, India, our neighbor to the south, was the source of religion and cultural systems and subjects that enrich the mind. Similarly, other ancient cultures and sciences like medicine, Buddhist philosophy, Sanskrit, etc., were introduced from India, home of many great scholars. Thus we Tibetans have a tradition of revering India as the Holy Land. China was known for its good food and its great variety of vegetables. In the Tibetan language we use the same word for vegetable as in Chinese, and even today we

continue to use Chinese words for many vegetables. This is what we imported from China. Similarly, because Mongolian garments are well suited to a cold climate, Tibetans have copied some of their styles. So, over the centuries that Tibetans have been in contact with their neighbors, we have imported many good things and developed our own distinctive socio-cultural characteristics. When the text begins with the phrase, “In the Indian language,” it indicates the authenticity of the text—that it originated in the treatises of Indian masters.

Then the text says, “In the Tibetan language,” and the Tibetan title is provided. This indicates that the text was translated into the language of another country, Tibet. The Tibetan language is rich enough to accurately express great treatises, including the sutras and their commentaries. Over the centuries the Tibetan language has been a major medium both for the discourse and the practice aspects of Buddhism. Even today, it appears that Tibetan is almost the only language in the world that can fully communicate the entire Buddhist teachings contained in the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Tantric canons. Tibetan is therefore a very important language and it is especially valuable in relation to Buddhism.

“Homage to the youthful Manjushri.” This is the verse of obeisance and supplication by the translator. The translators start their work by paying homage so that they will be able to complete their work without facing any obstacles. It also represents their aspiration to fulfill their temporary and ultimate purposes. Supplication is made to Manjushri following a decree promulgated by the religious kings in the past. The intention was to clearly indicate to which of the three divisions [the *pitakas*, or baskets] of the Buddha’s teachings any sutra or commentary belongs. Supplication is made to all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas if a text belongs to the Collection of Discourses. And if a text belongs to the Collection of Knowledge, supplication is

made to Manjushri. In order to indicate that a certain text belongs to the Collection of Discipline, supplication is made to the Omniscient Ones. So the supplication by the translator conforms to traditional practice. The main thesis of this treatise concerns establishing selflessness by relying on that single-pointed concentration which is a union of special insight and a calmly abiding mind. And as it belongs to the Collection of Knowledge, supplication is made to Manjushri.

With the phrase, “for those who follow the system of Mahayana sutras,” the author briefly reveals the process of meditation for those who study this treatise. Now the question arises: What is the ultimate goal of those who practice the Mahayana teachings? And the answer is Buddhahood. What does Buddhahood mean? One who possesses a transcendental all-knowing wisdom is a Buddha, and this state is referred to as Buddhahood. Since the final goal of the Mahayana teachings is to attain this omniscient state, the practitioner needs to investigate closely the means and methods that lead to this realization. Through such investigation, he or she must strive to pursue the correct and complete course for realizing the omniscient state. This is a brief summary of the theme of this book.

INTRODUCTION

In the words of the Superior Nagarjuna,

If you wish to attain the unsurpassed
enlightenment
For yourself and the world,
The root is generation of an altruistic thought
That is stable and firm like a mountain,
An all-embracing compassion,
And a transcendent wisdom free of duality.

Those of us who desire happiness for others and ourselves temporarily and in the long term should be motivated to attain the omniscient state. Compassion, altruistic thought, and the perfect view are the fundamentals and lifeblood of the path to highest enlightenment. At this juncture, we have faith in the doctrine of Lord Buddha and have access to his teachings. We are free from the major obstacles and have met the contributory factors such that we can study the vast and profound aspects of Buddha's teaching, contemplate their contents, and meditate on their meaning. We must therefore use all these opportunities so that we won't have cause for regret in the future and so that we don't prove unkind to ourselves. What Kadam Geshe Sangpuwa has said strikes at the central theme. This verse greatly moves me from the very heart:

Teaching and listening are proper when they are
beneficial to the mind. Controlled and disciplined

behavior is the sign of having heard teachings. Afflictions are reduced as a sign of meditation. A yogi is the one who understands reality.

One thing that should be very clear is that Dharma teachings have only one purpose: to discipline the mind. Teachers should pay attention and see to it that their teachings benefit the minds of their students. Their instructions must be based upon their personal experience of understanding the Dharma. Students, too, should attend teachings with a desire to benefit their minds. They must make an all-out effort to control their undisciplined minds. I might therefore urge that we should be diligent in following the instructions of the great Kadampa Geshe. They have advised that there should be integration of the mind and Dharma. On the other hand, if knowledge and practice are treated as unrelated and distinct entities, then the training can prove ineffective. In the process of our spiritual practice, we must examine ourselves thoroughly and use Dharma as a mirror in which to see reflected the defects of our body, speech, and mind. Both the teacher and student must be motivated to benefit themselves and others through the practice of the teachings. As we find in the *lam rim* prayers:

Motivated by powerful compassion,
May I be able to expound the treasure of
Buddhadharma,
Conveying it to new places
And places where it has degenerated.

The Buddha's doctrine is not something physical. Therefore, the restoration and spread of Buddhism depends on our inner spirit, or the continuum of our mind. When we are able to reduce the defects of the mind, its good qualities increase. Thus, effecting positive transformations