



The Second Volume
of the
Stages of Meditation

by

Acharya Kamalashila

In the Indian language, Bhâvanâkrama;
and in the Tibetan language, Gompai Rimpa.
Homage to the youthful Mañjusrî.

I shall briefly explain the stages of meditation for those who follow the system of Mahâyâna sûtras. The intelligent, who wish to actualize omniscience extremely quickly, should make deliberate effort to fulfill its causes and conditions.

What is the mind?

It is not possible for omniscience to be produced without causes, because if it were everything could always be omniscient. If things were produced without reliance on something else, they could exist without constraint—there would be no reason why everything could not be omniscient.

Therefore, since all functional things arise only occasionally, they depend strictly on their causes. Omniscience too is rare because it does not occur at all times and in all places, and everything cannot become omniscient. Therefore, it definitely depends on causes and conditions.

Training the mind

Also from among these causes and conditions, you should cultivate correct and complete causes. If you put the wrong causes into practice, even if you work hard for a long time, the desired goal cannot be achieved. It will be like milking a [cow's]

horn. Likewise, the result will not be produced when all the causes are not put into effect. For example, if the seed or any other cause is missing, then the result, a sprout, and so forth, will not be produced. Therefore, those who desire a particular result should cultivate its complete and unmistakable causes and conditions.

If you ask, “What are the causes and conditions of the final fruit of omniscience?” I, who am like a blind man, may not be in a position to explain [by myself], but I shall employ the Buddha’s own words just as he spoke them to his disciples after his enlightenment. He said, “Vajrapâni, Lord of Secrets, the transcendental wisdom (jñâna) of omniscience has its root in compassion, and arises from a cause—the altruistic thought, the awakening mind of bodhicitta, and the perfection of skillful means (upâya).” Therefore, if you are interested in achieving omniscience, you need to practice these three: compassion, the awakening mind of bodhicitta, and skillful means.

Compassion

Moved by compassion, Bodhisattvas take the vow to liberate all sentient beings.

Then, by overcoming their self-centered outlook, they engage eagerly and continuously in the very difficult practices of accumulating merit and insight.

Having entered into this practice, they will certainly complete the collection of merit and insight. Accomplishing the accumulation of merit and insight is like having omniscience itself in the palm of your hand. Therefore, since compassion is the only root of omniscience, you should become familiar with this practice from the very beginning.

The *Compendium of Perfect Dharma* reads, “O Buddha, a Bodhisattva should not train in many practices. If a Bodhisattva properly holds to one Dharma and learns it perfectly, he has all the Buddha’s qualities in the palm of his hand. And, if you ask what that one Dharma is, it is great compassion (mahâkarunâ).”

The Buddhas have already achieved all their own goals, but remain in the cycle of existence for as long as there are sentient beings. This is because they possess great compassion. They also do not enter the immensely blissful abode of nirvâna like the Hearers. Considering the interests of sentient beings first, they abandon the peaceful abode of nirvâna as if it were a burning iron house. Therefore, great compassion alone is the unavoidable cause of the non-abiding nirvâna of the Buddha.

Developing equanimity, the root of loving-kindness

The way to meditate on compassion will be taught from the outset. Begin the practice by meditating on equanimity. Try to actualize impartiality toward all sentient beings by eliminating attachment and hatred.

All sentient beings desire happiness and do not desire misery. Think deeply about how, in this beginningless cycle of existence, there is not one sentient being who has not been my friend and relative hundreds of times. Therefore, since there is no ground for being attached to some and hating others, I shall develop a mind of equanimity toward all sentient beings.

Begin the meditation on equanimity by thinking of a neutral person, and then consider people who are friends and foes.

After the mind has developed equanimity toward all sentient beings, meditate on loving-kindness. Moisten the mental continuum with the water of loving-kindness and prepare it as you would a piece of fertile ground. When the seed of compassion is planted in such a mind, germination will be swift, proper, and complete. Once you have irrigated the mindstream with loving-kindness, meditate on compassion.

Identifying the nature of suffering

The compassionate mind has the nature of wishing all suffering beings to be free from suffering. Meditate on compassion for all sentient beings, because the beings in the three realms of existence are intensely tortured by the three types of sufferings in various forms. The Buddha has said that heat and other types of pain constantly torture beings in the hells for a very long time. He has also said that hungry ghosts are scorched by hunger and thirst and experience immense physical suffering.

We can also see animals suffering in many miserable ways: they eat each other, become angry, and are hurt and killed.

We can see that human beings, too, experience various acute kinds of pain. Not able to find what they want, they are resentful and harm each other. They suffer the pain of losing the beautiful things they want and confronting the ugly things they do not want, as well as the pain of poverty.

There are those whose minds are bound by various fetters of disturbing emotions like craving desire. Others are in turmoil with different types of wrong views. These are all causes of misery; therefore they are always painful, like being on a precipice.

Gods suffer the misery of change. For example, signs of impending death and their fall to unfortunate states constantly oppress the minds of gods of the desire realm. How can they live in peace?

Pervasive misery is what arises under the power of causes characterized by actions and disturbing emotions. It has the nature and characteristics of momentary disintegration and pervades all wandering beings.

Therefore, see all wandering beings as immersed in a great fire of misery. Think that they are all like you in not desiring misery

at all: ‘Alas! All my beloved sentient beings are in such pain. What can I do to set them free?’ and make their sufferings your own.

Whether you are engaged in one-pointed meditation or pursuing your ordinary activities, meditate on compassion at all times, focusing on all sentient beings and wishing that they all be free from suffering.

Begin by meditating on your friends and relatives. Recognize how they experience the various sufferings that have been explained.

Then, having seen all sentient beings as equal, with no difference between them, you should meditate on sentient beings to whom you are indifferent. When the compassion you feel toward them is the same as the compassion you feel toward your friends and relatives, meditate on compassion for all sentient beings throughout the ten directions of the universe.

Just as a mother responds to her small, beloved, and suffering child, when you develop a spontaneous and equal sense of compassion toward all sentient beings, you have perfected the practice of compassion. And this is known as great compassion.

Meditation on loving-kindness begins with friends and people you are fond of. It has the nature of wishing that they meet with happiness. Gradually extend the meditation to include strangers

and even your enemies. Habituating yourself to compassion, you will gradually generate a spontaneous wish to liberate all sentient beings. Therefore, having familiarized yourself with compassion as the basis, meditate on the awakening mind of bodhicitta.

Bodhicitta is of two types: conventional and ultimate. Conventional bodhicitta is the cultivation of the initial thought that aspires to attain unsurpassable and perfectly consummated Buddhahood in order to benefit all wandering sentient beings, after having taken the vow out of compassion to release all of them from suffering. That conventional bodhicitta should be cultivated in a process similar to that described in the chapter on moral ethics in the Bodhisattvabhûmi, generating this mind by taking the Bodhisattva vow before a master who abides by the Bodhisattva precepts.

After generating the conventional awakening mind of bodhicitta, endeavour to cultivate the ultimate awakening mind of bodhicitta. The ultimate bodhicitta is transcendental and free from all elaborations. It is extremely clear, the object of the ultimate, stainless, unwavering, like a butter lamp undisturbed by the wind.

This is achieved through constant and respectful familiarity with the yoga of calm abiding meditation (samatha) and special insight (vipasyanâ) over a long period of time.

The *Unravelling of the Thought (Samdhinirmocana) Sûtra* says: “O Maitreya, you must know that all the virtuous dharmas of Hearers, Bodhisattvas, or Tathâgatas, whether worldly or transcendental, are the fruits of calm abiding meditation and special insight.”

Since all kinds of concentrations (samâdhi) can be included in these two, all yogis must at all times seek calm abiding meditation and special insight. Again the *Unravelling of the Thought Sûtra* says: “The Buddha has said it must be known that the teachings of various types of concentrations sought by his Hearers, Bodhisattvas, and Tathâgatas are all contained in calm abiding meditation and special insight.”

Yogis cannot eliminate mental obscurations merely by familiarizing themselves with calm abiding meditation alone. It will only suppress the disturbing emotions (kleśa) and delusions temporarily. Without the light of wisdom (prajñâ), the latent potential of the disturbing emotions cannot be thoroughly destroyed, and therefore their complete destruction will not be possible. For this reason the *Unravelling of the Thought Sûtra* says, “Concentration (dhyâna) can suppress the disturbing emotions properly, and wisdom can thoroughly destroy their latent potential.”

The *King of Concentration (Samâdhirâja) Sûtra* also says: Even if you meditate with single-pointed concentration,

You will not destroy the misconception of the self
And your disturbing emotions will disturb you again;
This is like Udraka's single-pointed meditation.

When the selflessness of phenomena is examined specifically,
And meditations are performed on the basis of that analysis,
That is the cause of the resultant liberation (nirvâna);
No other cause can bring peace (sânti).

Also the *Bodhisattva Section (Bodhisattvapitaka) Sûtra* says:
“Those who haven't heard these various teachings of the
Bodhisattva Collection and have also not heard the implemented
teaching on Monastic Discipline (vinaya), who think that single-
pointed concentration alone is enough, will fall into the pit of
arrogance due to pride. As such, they cannot gain complete
release from rebirth, old age, sickness, death, misery,
lamentation, suffering, mental unhappiness, and disturbances.
Neither do they gain complete liberation from the cycle of the
six states of existence, nor from the heaps of suffering mental
and physical aggregates. Keeping this in mind, the Tathâgata has
said that hearing the teachings will help you gain liberation from
old age and death.”

For these reasons, those who wish to attain the thoroughly
purified transcendent wisdom by eliminating all obscurations
should meditate on wisdom while remaining in calm abiding
meditation.

Wisdom

The *Heap of Jewels (Ratnakûta) Sûtra* says: “Single-pointed concentration is achieved by adhering to moral ethics (sîla). With the achievement of single-pointed concentration, you meditate on wisdom. Wisdom helps you to attain a pure pristine awareness (jñâna). Through pure pristine awareness your moral conduct is perfected.”

The *Meditation on Faith in the Mahâyâna (Mahâyâna-sraddhâ-bhâvanâ) Sûtra* says: “O child of noble family, if you do not abide by wisdom, I cannot say how you will have faith in the Mahâyâna of the Bodhisattvas, or how you will set forth in the Mahâyâna.”

“O child of noble family, you should know that this is because Bodhisattvas’ faith in the Mahâyâna and setting forth in the Mahâyâna occurs as a result of contemplating the perfect Dharma and reality with a mind free of distraction.”

A yogi’s mind will be distracted to various objects if he cultivates only special insight without developing a calmly abiding mind. It will be unstable, like a butter lamp in wind. Since clarity of pristine awareness will be absent, these two [special insight and a calmly abiding mind] should be cultivated equally.

Therefore, the *Sûtra of the Great and Complete Transcendence of Suffering (Mahâparinirvâna-sûtra)* says: “Hearers cannot

see Buddha-nature because their single-pointed absorption is stronger and wisdom is weaker.”

“Bodhisattvas can see it, but not clearly, because their wisdom is stronger and their single-pointed concentration is weaker. Whereas, Tathâgatas can see all, because they possess a calmly abiding mind and special insight to an equal degree.”

Due to the power of calm abiding meditation, the mind will not be disturbed by the wind of conceptual thoughts, like a butter lamp undisturbed by the breeze. Special insight eliminates every stain of wrong views, thus you will not be affected by [the views of] others. The *Moon Lamp Sûtra* says: “By the force of calm abiding meditation, the mind will become unwavering, and with special insight it will become like a mountain. Therefore, maintain a yogic practice of them both.”

Common prerequisites for meditating on calm-abiding and special insight

Initially the yogi should seek the prerequisites that can assist him in actualizing calm abiding meditation and special insight quickly and easily.

The prerequisites necessary for the development of calm abiding meditation are: to live in a conducive environment; to limit your desires and practice contentment; to not be involved in too many activities; to maintain pure moral ethics; and to

fully eliminate attachment and all other kinds of conceptual thoughts.

A conducive environment should be known by five characteristics: providing easy access to food and clothes; being free of evil beings and enemies; being free from disease; containing good friends who maintain moral ethics and who share similar views; and being visited by few people in the daytime and with little noise at night.

Limiting your desires refers to not being excessively attached to many or good clothes, such as religious robes, and so forth. The practice of contentment means always being satisfied with any little thing, like inferior religious robes, and so forth. Not being involved in many activities refers to giving up ordinary activities like business, avoiding too close association with householders and monks, and totally abandoning the practice of medicine and astrology.

What is pure discipline (*sīla*)? It is not to contravene the foundation of the training—the two vows together with the avoidance of misdeeds whether natural or proscribed; and whenever you fail through lack of carefulness, to regret that lapse swiftly, and to repair it according to the teachings. Even in the case of the statement that a transgression of the Hearers' vows cannot be restored, if there is regret and an awareness of the intention not to repeat it, and an awareness of the lack of a

true identity of the mind that performed the action, or familiarity with the lack of a true identity of all phenomena, that person's morality can be said to be pure. This should be understood from the *Sûtra on the Elimination of Ajâtasatru's Regret* (*Ajâtasatrukaukrtyavinodana- sûtra*). You should overcome your regret and make special effort in meditation (bhâvanâ).

Being mindful of the various defects of attachment in this life and future lives helps eliminate misconceptions in this regard. Some common features of both beautiful and ugly things in the cycle of existence are that they are all unstable and subject to disintegration. It is beyond doubt that you will be separated from all of these things without delay. So, meditate on why you should be so excessively attached to these things and then discard all misconceptions.

What are the prerequisites of special insight? They are: to rely on holy persons; to seek seriously extensive instruction; and to contemplate properly.

What type of holy person should you rely upon? One who has heard many [teachings], who expresses himself clearly, who is endowed with compassion, and able to withstand hardship.

What is meant by seriously seeking extensive instruction? This is to listen seriously with respect to the definitive and interpretable meaning of the twelve branches of the Buddha's

teachings. The *Unravelling of the Thought Sûtra* says: “Not listening to superior beings’ teachings as you wish is an obstacle to special insight.” The same sûtra says, “Special insight arises from its cause, correct view, which in turn arises from listening and contemplation.”

The *Questions of Nârâyana (Nârâyanapariprcchâ)* says, “Through the experience of listening [to teachings] you gain wisdom, and with wisdom disturbing emotions are thoroughly pacified.”

What is meant by proper contemplation? It is properly establishing the definitive and interpretable sûtras. When Bodhisattvas are free of doubt, they can meditate single-pointedly. Otherwise, if doubt and indecision beset them, they will be like a man at a crossroads uncertain of which path to follow.

Yogis should at all times avoid fish, meat, and so forth, should eat with moderation, and avoid foods that are not conducive to health.

Thus, Bodhisattvas who have assembled all the prerequisites for calm abiding meditation and special insight should enter into meditation.

When meditating, the yogi should first complete all the

preparatory practices. He should go to the toilet and in a pleasant location free of disturbing noise he should think, ‘I will deliver all sentient beings to the state of enlightenment.’ Then he should manifest great compassion, the thought wishing to liberate all sentient beings, and pay homage to all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the ten directions by touching the five limbs of his body to the ground.

He should place an image of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, such as a painting, in front of him or in some other place. He should make as many offerings and praises as he can. He should confess his misdeeds and rejoice in the merit of all other beings.

Then, he should sit in the full lotus posture of Vairocana, or the half lotus posture, on a comfortable cushion. The eyes should not be too widely opened or too tightly closed. Let them focus on the tip of the nose. The body should not be bent forward or backward. Keep it straight and turn the attention inwards. The shoulders should rest in their natural position and the head should not lean back, forward, or to either side. The nose should be in line with the navel. The teeth and lips should rest in their natural state with the tongue touching the upper palate. Breathe very gently and softly without causing any noise, without labouring, and without unevenness. Inhale and exhale naturally, slowly, and unnoticeably.

The practice of calm-abiding:

Calm abiding meditation should be achieved first. Calm abiding is that mind which has overcome distraction to external objects, and which spontaneously and continuously turns toward the object of meditation with bliss and pliancy.

That which properly examines suchness from within a state of calm abiding is special insight. The *Cloud of Jewels (Ratnamegha) Sûtra* reads, “Calm abiding meditation is a single-pointed mind; special insight makes specific analysis of the ultimate.”

Also, from the *Unravelling of the Thought Sûtra*:

“Maitreya asked, ‘O Buddha, how should [people] thoroughly search for calm abiding meditation and gain expertise in special insight?’ The Buddha answered, ‘Maitreya, I have given the following teachings to Bodhisattvas: Sûtras, Melodious Praises, Prophetic teachings, Verses, Specific Instructions, Advice from Specific Experiences, Expressions of Realization, Legends, Birth Tales, Extensive Teachings, Established Doctrine, and Instructions.

‘Bodhisattvas should properly listen to these teachings, remember their contents, train in verbal recitation, and thoroughly examine them mentally. With perfect comprehension, they should go alone to remote areas and reflect on these teachings and continue to focus their minds upon them.

They should focus mentally only on those topics that they have reflected about and maintain this continuously. That is called mental engagement.

‘When the mind has been repeatedly engaged in this way and physical and mental pliancy have been achieved, that mind is called calm abiding. This is how Bodhisattvas properly seek the calmly abiding mind.

‘When the Bodhisattva has achieved physical and mental pliancy and abides only in them, he eliminates mental distraction. The phenomenon that has been contemplated as the object of inner single-pointed concentration should be analysed and regarded as like a reflection. This reflection or image, which is the object of single-pointed concentration, should be thoroughly discerned as an object of knowledge. It should be completely investigated and thoroughly examined. Practice patience and take delight in it. With proper analysis, observe and understand it. This is what is known as special insight. Thus, Bodhisattvas are skilled in the ways of special insight.’”

The yogis who are interested in actualizing a calmly abiding mind should initially concentrate closely on the fact that the twelve sets of scriptures—with sections for Sûtras, Melodious Praises, and so forth— can be summarized as all leading to suchness (tathatâ), that they will lead to suchness, and that they have led to suchness.

One way of doing this meditation is to set the mind closely on the mental and physical aggregates (skandha), as an object that includes all phenomena (dharma). Another way is to place the mind on an image of the Buddha. The *King of Meditative Stabilization Sûtra* says:

“With his body gold in colour,
The lord of the universe is extremely beautiful.
The Bodhisattva who places his mind on this object,
Is referred to as one in meditative absorption.”

In this way place the mind on the object of your choice and, having done so, repeatedly and continuously place the mind. Having placed the mind in this way, examine it and check whether it is properly focused on the object. Also check for dullness and see whether the mind is being distracted to external objects.

If the mind is found to be dull due to sleepiness and mental torpor or if you fear that dullness is approaching, then the mind should attend to a supremely delightful object such as an image of the Buddha, or a notion of light. In this process, having dispelled dullness the mind should try to see the object very clearly.

You should recognize the presence of dullness when the mind cannot see the object very clearly, when you feel as if you are blind or in a dark place or that you have closed your eyes. If, while you are in meditation, your mind chases after qualities of

external objects such as form, or turns its attention to other phenomena, or is distracted by desire for an object you have previously experienced, or if you suspect distraction is approaching, reflect that all composite phenomena are impermanent. Think about suffering and so forth, topics that will temper the mind.

In this process, distraction should be eliminated and with the rope of mindfulness and alertness the elephant-like mind should be fastened to the tree of the object of meditation. When you find that the mind is free of dullness and excitement and that it naturally abides on the object, you should relax your effort and remain neutral as long as it continues thus.

You should understand that calm abiding is actualized when you enjoy physical and mental pliancy through prolonged familiarity with the meditation, and the mind gains the power to engage the object as it chooses.

Actualizing special insight

After realizing calm abiding, meditate on special insight, thinking as follows: ‘All the teachings of the Buddha are perfect teachings, and they directly or indirectly reveal and lead to suchness with utmost clarity. If you understand suchness, you will be free of all the nets of wrong views, just as darkness is dispelled when light appears. Mere calm abiding meditation cannot purify pristine awareness, nor can it eliminate the

darkness of obscurations.

When I meditate properly on suchness with wisdom, pristine awareness will be purified. Only with wisdom can I realize suchness. Only with wisdom can I effectively eradicate obscurations. Therefore, engaging in calm abiding meditation I shall search for suchness with wisdom. And I shall not remain content with calm abiding alone.’

What is suchness (*tattva*, *tathatâ*) like? It is the nature of all phenomena that ultimately they are empty of the self of persons and the self of phenomena. This is realized through the perfection of wisdom (*prajñâpâramitâ*) and not otherwise. The *Unravelling of the Thought Sûtra* reads: “ ‘O Tathâgata, by which perfection do Bodhisattvas apprehend the identitylessness of phenomena?’ ‘Avalokiteûvara, it is apprehended by the perfection of wisdom.’ ” Therefore, meditate on wisdom while engaging in calm abiding.

Yogis should analyse in the following manner: a person is not observed as separate from the mental and physical aggregates, the elements (*dhâtu*) and sense powers. Nor is a person of the nature of the aggregates and so forth, because the aggregates and so forth have the entity of being many and impermanent. Others have imputed the person as permanent and single.

The person as a phenomenon cannot exist except as one or many, because there is no other way of existing. Therefore, we must conclude that the assertion of the worldly “I” and “mine” is wholly mistaken.

Meditation on the selflessness of phenomena should also be done in the following manner: phenomena, in short, are included under the five aggregates, the twelve sources of perception (âyatana), and the eighteen elements. The physical aspects of the aggregates, sources of perception, and elements are, in the ultimate sense, nothing other than aspects of the mind. This is because when they are broken into subtle particles and the nature of the parts of these subtle particles is individually examined, no definite identity (svabhâva) can be found.

Therefore, due to grasping tightly and incorrectly at such things as form and so forth over beginningless time, the mind itself appears to ordinary people as form and so forth, separate and external, just like the appearance of form and so forth that are perceived in a dream. That in the ultimate sense form and so forth do not exist separately from being an aspect of mind should be analysed. But, he who has the thought that the realms are just mind, having understood that everything that is designated as phenomena is only mind, comes to think, when this mind is analysed specifically, that it is an analysis of the nature of all phenomena. Thus, he would specifically analyse the nature or mind. Such a person analyses in this way.

In the ultimate sense, the mind too cannot be real. How can the mind that apprehends only the false nature of physical form and so forth, and appears in various aspects, be real? Just as physical forms and so forth are false, since the mind does not exist separately from physical forms and so forth, which are false, it too is false. Just as physical forms and so forth possess various aspects, and their identities are neither one nor many, similarly, since the mind is not different from them, its identity too is neither one nor many. Therefore, the mind by nature is like an illusion (mâyâ).

Analyse that, just like the mind, the nature of all phenomena, too, is like an illusion. In this way, when the identity of the mind is specifically examined by wisdom, in the ultimate sense it is perceived neither within nor without. It is also not perceived in the absence of both. Neither the mind of the past, nor that of the future, nor that of the present, is perceived.

When the mind is born, it comes from nowhere, and when it ceases it goes nowhere because it is inapprehensible, indemonstrable, and non-physical. If you ask, ‘What is the entity of that which is inapprehensible, indemonstrable, and non-physical?’, the *Heap of Jewels (Ratnakûta)* states: “O Kâsyapa, when the mind is thoroughly sought, it cannot be found. What is not found cannot be perceived. And what is not perceived is neither past nor future nor present.”

Through such analysis, the beginning of the mind is ultimately not seen, the end of the mind is ultimately not seen, and the middle of the mind is ultimately not seen.

All phenomena should be understood as lacking an end and a middle, just as the mind does not have an end or a middle. With the knowledge that the mind is without an end or a middle, no identity of the mind is perceived. What is thoroughly realized by the mind, too, is realized as being empty.

By realizing that, the very identity, which is established as the aspect of the mind, like the identity of physical form, and so forth, is also ultimately not perceived.

In this way, when the person does not ultimately see the identity of all phenomena through wisdom, he will not analyse whether physical form (*rûpa*) is permanent or impermanent, empty or not empty, contaminated or not contaminated, produced or non-produced, and existent or non-existent.

Just as physical form is not examined, similarly feeling, recognition, compositional factors, and consciousness are not examined. When the object does not exist, its characteristics also cannot exist. So how can they be examined?

In this way, when the person does not firmly apprehend the entity of a thing as ultimately existing, having investigated it with

wisdom, the practitioner engages in non-conceptual single-pointed concentration. And thus the identitylessness of all phenomena is realized.

Those who do not meditate with wisdom by analysing the entity of things specifically, but merely meditate on the elimination of mental activity, cannot avert conceptual thoughts and also cannot realize identitylessness because they lack the light of wisdom.

If the fire of consciousness knowing phenomena as they are is produced from individual analysis of suchness, then like the fire produced by rubbing wood it will burn the wood of conceptual thought. The Buddha has spoken in this way.

The *Cloud of Jewels (Ratnamegha)* also states:

“One skilled in discerning the faults engages in the yoga of meditation on emptiness in order to get rid of all conceptual elaborations. Such a person, due to his repeated meditation on emptiness (sūnyatā), when he thoroughly searches for the object and the identity of the object, which delights the mind and distracts it, realizes them to be empty. When that very mind is also examined, it is realized to be empty. When the identity of what is realized by this mind is thoroughly sought, this too is realized as empty. Realizing in this way one enters into the yoga of signlessness.”

This shows that only those who have engaged in complete analysis can enter into the yoga of signlessness. It has been explained very clearly that through mere elimination of mental activity, without examining the identity of things with wisdom, it is not possible to engage in non-conceptual meditation.

Thus, concentration is done after the actual identity of things like physical form and so forth has been perfectly analysed with wisdom, and not by concentrating on physical form and so forth. Concentration is also not done by abiding between this world and the world beyond, because physical forms and so forth are not perceived. It is thus called the non-abiding concentration.

[Such a practitioner] is then called a meditator of supreme wisdom, because by specifically examining the identity of all things with wisdom he has perceived nothing. This is as stated in the *Sûtra of the Dialogue with Gaganagañja* (*Gaganagañjapariprcchâ*) and the *Jewel in the Crown Sûtra* (*Ratnacûda*), and so forth.

In this way, by entering into the suchness of the selflessness of persons and phenomena, you are free from concepts and analysis because there is nothing to be thoroughly examined and observed. You are free from expression, and with single-pointed mental engagement you automatically enter into meditation without exertion. Thus, you very clearly meditate on suchness and abide in it.

While abiding in that meditation, the continuity of the mind should not be distracted. When the mind is distracted to external objects due to attachment, and so forth, such distraction should be noted. Quickly pacify the distraction by meditating on the repulsive aspect of such objects and swiftly replace the mind on suchness.

If the mind appears to be disinclined to do that, reflecting on the advantages of single-pointed concentration, meditate with delight. The disinclination should be pacified by also seeing the defects of distraction.

If the function of the mind becomes unclear and starts sinking, or when there is a risk of it sinking due to being overpowered by mental torpor or sleep, then as before quickly attempt to overcome such dullness by focusing the mind on supremely delightful things. Then the object, suchness, should be held in very tight focus.

At times when the mind is observed to be excited or tempted to become distracted by the memory of past events of laughter and play, then as in the earlier cases, pacify the distraction by reflecting on such things as impermanence, and so forth, which will help subdue the mind. Then, again endeavour to engage the mind on suchness without applying counter forces.

If and when the mind spontaneously engages in meditation on suchness, free of sinking and mental agitation, it should be left naturally and your efforts should be relaxed. If effort is applied when the mind is in meditative equipoise, it will distract the mind. But if effort is not applied when the mind becomes dull, it will become like a blind man due to extreme dullness and you will not achieve special insight.

So, when the mind becomes dull, apply effort, and when in absorption, effort should be relaxed. When, by meditating on special insight, excessive wisdom is generated and calm abiding is weak, the mind will waver like a butter lamp in the wind and you will not perceive suchness very clearly. Therefore, at that time meditate on calm abiding. When calm abiding meditation becomes excessive, meditate on wisdom.

Unifying method and wisdom

When both are equally engaged, keep still, effortlessly, so long as there is no physical or mental discomfort. If physical or mental discomfort arises, see the whole world like an illusion, a mirage, a dream, a reflection of the moon in water, and an apparition. And think: ‘These sentient beings are very troubled in the cycle of existence due to their not understanding such profound knowledge.’ Then generate great compassion and the awakening mind of bodhicitta, thinking: ‘I shall earnestly endeavour to help them understand suchness.’

Take rest. Again, in the same way, engage in a single-pointed concentration on the non-appearance of all phenomena. If the mind is discouraged, then similarly take rest. This is the path of engaging in a union of calm abiding meditation and special insight. It focuses on the image conceptually and non-conceptually.

Thus, through this progress, a yogi should meditate on suchness for an hour, or half a session in the night, or one full session, or for as long as is comfortable. This is the meditative stabilization thoroughly discerning the ultimate as taught in the *Descent into Lanka (Lankâvatâra) Sûtra*.

Then, if you wish to arise from the concentration, while your legs are still crossed think as follows:

‘Although ultimately all these phenomena lack identity, conventionally they definitely exist. If this were not the case, how would the relationship between cause and effect, and so forth, prevail?’ The Buddha has also said,

“Things are produced conventionally,
but ultimately they lack intrinsic identity.”

‘Sentient beings with a childish attitude exaggerate phenomena, thinking of them as having an intrinsic identity when they lack it. Thus attributing intrinsic existence to those things that lack it confuses their minds, and they wander in the cycle of existence

for a long time. For these reasons, I shall endeavour without fail to achieve the omniscient state by accomplishing the unsurpassable accumulations of merit and insight in order to help them realize suchness.’

Then slowly arise from the crosslegged position and make prostrations to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the ten directions. Make them offerings and sing their praises. And make vast prayers by reciting the *Prayer of Noble Conduct*, and so forth. Thereafter, engage in conscious efforts to actualize the accumulations of merit and insight by practicing generosity and so forth, which are endowed with the essence of emptiness and great compassion.

If you act thus, your meditative stabilization will actualize that emptiness that possesses the best of all qualities. The *Jewel in the Crown Sûtra (Ratnacûda)* states: “Donning the armour of lovingkindness, while abiding in the state of great compassion, practice meditative stabilization that actualizes the emptiness possessing the best of all qualities.

What is the emptiness possessing the best of all qualities? It is that which is not divorced from generosity, from ethics, from patience, from effort, from meditative stabilization, from wisdom, nor divorced from skillful means.”

Bodhisattvas must rely on virtuous practices like generosity as

means to thoroughly ripen all sentient beings and in order to perfect the place, body, and manifold retinue. If it were not so, what would be the causes of these fields, the field of Buddhas and so forth that the Buddha spoke about? The omniscient wisdom possessing the best of all qualities can be accomplished through generosity and other skilful means. Therefore, the Buddha has said that omniscient wisdom is perfected by skilful means.

Therefore, Bodhisattvas should also cultivate generosity and other skilful means and not only emptiness.

The *Extensive Collection of All Qualities Sûtra* also says:

“ ‘O Maitreya, Bodhisattvas thoroughly accomplish the six perfections in order to attain the final fruit of Buddhahood. But to this the foolish respond: “Bodhisattvas should train only in the perfection of wisdom. What is the need for the rest of the perfections?” They repudiate the other perfections. Maitreya, what do you think of this: when the king of Kâsi offered his flesh to the hawk for the sake of a pigeon was it a corruption of wisdom?’ Maitreya replied, ‘This is not so.’”

The Buddha said, ‘Maitreya, Bodhisattvas accumulated roots of merit through their deeds in conjunction with the six perfections. Are these roots of merit harmful?’ Maitreya replied, ‘O Buddha, this is not so.’ The Buddha further spoke, ‘Maitreya, you have also correctly practiced the perfection of generosity for sixty

aeons, the perfection of ethics for sixty aeons, the perfection of patience for sixty aeons, the perfection of enthusiastic perseverance for sixty aeons, the perfection of meditative stabilization for sixty aeons, and the perfection of wisdom for sixty aeons. To this the foolish respond: “There is only one way to attain Buddhahood, and that is the way of emptiness.” Their practice is completely mistaken.”

A Bodhisattva possessing wisdom but not skilful means would be like the Hearers, who are unable to engage in the deeds of Buddhas. But they can do so when supported by skilful means. As the *Heap of Jewels* says, “Kâsyapa, it is like this. For instance, kings who are supported by ministers can accomplish all their purposes. Similarly, [when] the wisdom of a Bodhisattva is thoroughly supported by skilful means, such a Bodhisattva also performs all the activities of a Buddha.”

The philosophical view of the path of Bodhisattvas is different and the philosophical paths of the non-Buddhists and Hearers are also different. For example, since the philosophical view of the path of non-Buddhists perversely observes a [truly existent] self, and so forth, such a path is completely and always divorced from wisdom. Therefore, they cannot attain liberation.

The Hearers are separated from great compassion and devoid of skilful means. Therefore, they single-mindedly endeavour to achieve nirvâna.

In their path, Bodhisattvas enshrine wisdom and skilful means, so they endeavour to achieve the non-abiding nirvâna.

The Bodhisattva path consists of wisdom and skilful means and, therefore, [they] attain the non-abiding nirvâna. Because of the power of wisdom, [they] do not fall into the cycle of existence; due to the power of skilful means, [they] do not fall to nirvâna.

The *Hill of Gaya Head (Gâyâsîrsa) Sûtra* says, “The Bodhisattva path, in short, is twofold. The two are skillful means and wisdom.” The *First Among the Supreme and Glorious (Srîparamâdi)* also says, “The perfection of wisdom is the mother and expertise in skillful means is the father.”

The *Sûtra of the Teaching of Vimalakîrti (Vimalakîrti-nirdesa)* also says, “What is bondage for Bodhisattvas and what is liberation? Upholding a life in the cycle of existence devoid of skillful means is bondage for Bodhisattvas. [But] to lead a life in the cycle of existence with skillful means is liberation. Upholding a life in the cycle of existence devoid of wisdom is bondage for Bodhisattvas. [But] to lead a life in the cycle of existence with wisdom is liberation. Wisdom not conjoined with skillful means is bondage, [but] wisdom conjoined with skilful means is liberation. Skilful means not conjoined with wisdom is bondage, [but] skillful means conjoined with wisdom is liberation.”

If Bodhisattvas cultivate mere wisdom, [they] fall to the nirvâna desired by Hearers. Thus, it is like bondage. And [they] cannot achieve non-abiding nirvâna.

So wisdom separated from skilful means is bondage for Bodhisattvas. Therefore, just as a person chilled by the wind seeks the comfort of fire, so Bodhisattvas cultivate the wisdom of emptiness along with skilful means to eliminate the wind of wrong view. [But they] do not [endeavour] to actualize it as the Hearers do. The *Ten Qualities (Dasadharmaka) Sûtra* says: “O child of good family, it is like this. For instance, a person who is thoroughly devoted to fire, who respects it and regards it as guru, will not think: ‘Because I respect, honour, and venerate fire, I should hold it in both hands.’ This is because he realizes that to do so would give him physical pain and cause mental discomfort. Similarly, Bodhisattvas also are aware of nirvâna, but also do not try to actualize it. This is because [Bodhisattvas] realize that by doing so one would be turning away from enlightenment.”

If they rely merely on skilful means, Bodhisattvas will not transcend the ordinary level and thus there will only be bondage. Therefore, [they] cultivate skilful means along with wisdom. By the power of wisdom, Bodhisattvas can transform even the disturbing emotions into nectar, like poison under a tantric spell. There is no need to express [the goodness] of generosity, and so forth, which leads to naturally elevated states of existence.

The *Heap of Jewels* states: “Kaceyapa, it is like this. Due to the power of mantra and medicine, a poison may not cause death. Similarly, since the disturbing emotions of Bodhisattvas are under the power of wisdom, they cannot cause them downfalls. ‘Therefore, due to the power of skilful means Bodhisattvas do not abandon the cycle of existence; they do not fall to nirvâna. Due to the power of wisdom, [they] eliminate all objects [misconceived as truly existent] and therefore [they] do not fall into the cycle of existence. Thus, they attain the non-abiding nirvâna of Buddhahood alone.’”

The *Space Treasure (Gaganagañja) Sutra* also says, “Because of the knowledge of wisdom, Bodhisattvas eliminate all disturbing emotions, and due to their knowledge of skilful means they do not abandon sentient beings.”

The *Unravelling of the Thought Sûtra* also says, “I have not taught that someone who is not concerned for the welfare of sentient beings and who is not inclined to realize the nature of all composite phenomena will achieve unsurpassable and perfectly accomplished Buddhahood.” Therefore, those interested in Buddhahood must cultivate both wisdom and skillful means.

While you are meditating on transcendental wisdom or while you are in a deep meditative absorption, you cannot engage in skillful means such as practicing generosity. But skillful means

can be cultivated along with wisdom during the preparatory and post-meditative periods. That is the way to engage in wisdom and skillful means simultaneously.

Moreover, this is the path of Bodhisattvas in which they engage in an integrated practice of wisdom and skillful means. This is cultivating the transcendental path that is thoroughly imbued with great compassion focusing on all sentient beings. And while practicing skillful means, after arising from meditative absorption, you practice generosity and other skillful means without misconception, like a magician.

The *Teaching of Aksayamati (Aksayamati-nirdesa) Sûtra* says: “What are a Bodhisattva’s skillful means and what wisdom is actualized? The Bodhisattva’s skillful means are thinking and placing the mind closely on sentient beings with great compassion while in meditative absorption. And engaging in meditative equipoise with peace and extreme peace is wisdom.”

There are many more such references. The *Chapter on Controlling Evil Forces* also says:

“Furthermore, the perfect activities of Bodhisattvas refer to conscious efforts by the mind of wisdom and the collection of all meritorious Dharma by the mind of skillful means. The mind of wisdom also leads to selflessness, the non-existence of [inherently existent] sentient beings, and of life, sustenance, and the person. And the mind of skillful means leads to

thoroughly ripening all sentient beings.”

The *Extensive Collection of All Qualities Sûtra* also states:

“Just as a magician endeavours
To let his creation go,
Since he already knows the [nature of his] creation,
He has no attachment to it.
Similarly, the three worlds are like an illusion,
Which the wise Buddha knew about
Long before he knew the sentient beings in these worlds
And had undertaken efforts to help them.”

It is because of the Bodhisattva’s practice of wisdom and skillful means that it is said: In their activities they remain in the cycle of existence, but in their thoughts they abide in nirvâna.

In this way, become familiar with generosity and other skillful means that are dedicated to unsurpassable and perfectly accomplished enlightenment, having the essence of emptiness and great compassion. In order to generate the ultimate awakening mind of bodhicitta, as was done earlier, practice calm abiding meditation and special insight as much as you can in regular sessions. As it was taught in the *Pure Field of Engagement Sûtra*, always familiarize yourself with skilful means by closely placing mindfulness on the good qualities of Bodhisattvas who work for the welfare of sentient beings at all times.

Those who become familiar with compassion, skilful means, and the awakening mind of bodhicitta in this way will undoubtedly excel in this life. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will always be seen in dreams, and other pleasant dreams will also occur, and appreciative gods will protect you. There will be immense accumulation of merit and insight at every moment. Disturbing emotions and other bad states of existence will be purified. You will enjoy much happiness and mental peace at all times and a great many beings will cherish you. Physically, too, you will be free of disease. You will attain supreme mental facility, and thus you will achieve special qualities like clairvoyance.

Then you will travel by miraculous power to innumerable worlds, make offerings to the Buddhas and listen to teachings from them.

At the time of death, too, you will undoubtedly see Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. In future lives you will be reborn in special families and places, where you will not be separated from Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Thus, you will effortlessly accomplish all accumulations of merit and insight. You will have great wealth, a large following, and many attendants. Possessing a sharp intelligence, you will be able to ripen the mindstreams of many beings. In all lives such a person will be able to recall past lives. Try to understand such immeasurable advantages that are also described in other sūtras.

In this way, if you meditate on compassion, skilful means, and the awakening mind of bodhicitta for a long time with great admiration, the mindstream will gradually become thoroughly purified and ripened. Then, like producing fire by rubbing together pieces of wood, you will accomplish your meditation on the perfect reality. You will thus achieve an extremely clear knowledge of the sphere of phenomena (*dharmadhātu*) free from conceptual elaborations, the transcendental wisdom free of the impeding nets of conceptual thought. This wisdom of ultimate bodhicitta is stainless like an unwavering butter-lamp undisturbed by the wind. Thus, such a mind in the entity of ultimate bodhicitta is included within the path of seeing, which apprehends the selfless nature of all phenomena.

Through this achievement you enter into the path focusing on the reality of things and you are then born in the family of Tathâgatas; you enter the stainless state of a Bodhisattva, turn away from all wandering births, abide in the suchness of Bodhisattvas, and attain the first Bodhisattva level. You can find more details of these advantages in other texts such as the *Ten Spiritual Levels (Dasabhûmika)*.

This is how meditative stabilization focusing on suchness is taught in the *Descent into Lanka Sûtra*. This is how Bodhisattvas enter into the non-conceptual meditation free from elaborations.

The texts emphasize that, at the aspirational level of practice, it

is by the power of aspiration that one engages with that state, not by fabricating it. It is when that wisdom arises that one will have truly entered it.

In this way, a person who has entered the first level, later, on the path of meditation, familiarizes himself with the two wisdoms of the transcendental state and the subsequent wisdom and skilful means. In this way he gradually purifies the subtlest accumulation of obscurations that are the object of purification of the path of meditation. And in order to achieve higher qualities he thoroughly purifies the lower spiritual levels. All purposes and objectives are completely fulfilled by entering the transcendental wisdom of the Tathâgatas and by entering the ocean of omniscience.

In this way, by gradual practice, the mindstream is thoroughly purified. The *Descent into Lankâ* explains this. The *Unravelling of the Thought*, too, reads, “In order to achieve those higher levels, the mind should be purified just as you refine gold, until you realize the unsurpassable and perfectly consummated Buddhahood.”

Entering the ocean of omniscience, you possess impeccable jewel-like qualities to sustain sentient beings, and these fulfil your previous positive prayers. The individual then becomes the embodiment of compassion, possessing various skilful means that function spontaneously and work in various

emanations in the interest of all wandering beings. In addition, all marvellous attributes are perfected with total elimination of all defilements and their latent potential. All Buddhas abide to help every sentient being. Through such realization, generate faith in the Buddhas, the source of all wonderful knowledge and qualities. Everyone should endeavour to actualize these qualities.

The Buddha thus said. “The omniscient transcendental wisdom is produced with compassion as its root, the awakening mind of bodhicitta as its cause, and is perfected by skilful means.”

The wise distance themselves from jealousy and other stains;
Their thirst for knowledge is unquenchable like an ocean.
They retain only what is proper through discrimination,
Just like swans extracting milk from water.

Thus, scholars should distance themselves
From divisive attitudes and bigotry.
Even from a child
Good words are received.

Whatever merit I derive
From the exposition of this Middle Path,
I dedicate for all beings
To actualize the Middle Path.

The Second Volume of the Stages of Meditation by Acharya Kamalashila is here completed.

Translated and edited in Tibetan by the Indian abbot Prajna Verma and the monk Yeshe De. Translated and edited in English by Ven. Geshe Lobsang Jordhen, Lobsang Choephel Gangchenpa and Jeremy Russell.

Originally published in The Stages of Meditation by Snow Lion publications, Ithaca, NY

