

# Chapter One: Kamalashīla, Compassion, and the Mind of Awakening

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This evening I will say a few things about the Buddhadharma. I wish to thank all of you for regarding this as something important and for coming to hear what I have to say. I will begin by offering a supplication. Please listen with faith in the Buddha and the Dharma. After that I will begin to explain the text.

[Thrangu Rinpoche chants]

This evening I will be speaking about the stages of meditation that were taught by the great Indian master Kamalashīla. In Tibet we have both Sūtra and Mantra. The stages of meditation that Kamalashīla explained in his text on that topic are mainly those of Sūtra.

In the seventh century, King Songtsen Gampo ruled in Tibet; later, Trisong Detsen ruled there also. Both caused the teachings of the Buddha to develop in Tibet. Trisong Detsen invited the Indian master Shāntarakṣhita, who has come to be known as the Bodhisattva Abbot, to come to Tibet. He accepted the king's invitation and established the Buddha's teachings newly in Tibet. Having disseminated the Buddha's teachings, while in Tibet Shāntarakṣhita entered nirvāṇa. Not long before dying, he said,

I have planted the authentic Buddhadharma in Tibet. However, in the future there will be trouble for the Buddhadharma in Tibet. Generally, when there is trouble for the Buddhadharma, it comes from those who are not Buddhists, but that is not what will happen in Tibet. The trouble will come from someone who is a Buddhist but who will speak falsely. When trouble comes, you should invite my student Kamalashīla, who lives in India. He will quell the troublemaker, which will allow the authentic Buddhadharma to remain for a long time.

In that way, Shāntarakṣhita foretold what was to happen in the future.

Later, in accordance with the great Abbot Shāntarakṣhita's prophecy, a man named Hwa Shang Mahāyāna came from China to Tibet and taught dharma. The dharma that he taught was a little different from the dharma taught by the great master Shāntarakṣhita. Hwa Shang Mahāyāna said that just as black clouds cover space and the sun, so white clouds also cover space and the sun. Also, just as when a black dog bites, the bite causes pain and hardship, so when a white dog bites, the bite wounds and causes pain. The two dog bites are the same in that way. Similarly, both nonvirtuous thoughts and virtuous thoughts obstruct clear seeing. Therefore, we should remain without any thoughts at all. Hwa Shang Mahāyāna said that that was the main point.

When Hwa Shang Mahāyāna taught this slightly different dharma, everyone became confused. They did not know how to practice dharma. They did not know how to enter the paths. Thus, trouble arose. When the king realized that trouble had come to those who practiced dharma, he convened a meeting so as to determine what would remedy the situation. At the meeting, one of the great Abbot Shāntarakṣhita's students reminded the assembly of the prophecy that Shāntarakṣhita had given at the time of his death. Since things had come about as Shāntarakṣhita had foretold, the Tibetans invited Kamalashīla to come to Tibet, as Shāntarakṣhita had recommended.

When, having come to Tibet, Kamalashīla met Hwa Shang Mahāyāna for the first time, Kamalashīla thought, “If he has knowledge, we can meet in debate. If he is a fool, we cannot meet in debate.” In order to see whether or not Hwa Shang Mahāyāna had knowledge, Kamalashīla circled Hwa Shang Mahāyāna’s head three times with a stick, thereby posing the question, “From what cause do the three realms of cyclic existence arise?” Because Hwa Shang Mahāyāna had great knowledge and good qualities, he understood the gesture that Kamalashīla had made and withdrew his hands inside the sleeves of his robe, thereby replying, “The three realms of cyclic existence arise from the ignorance that conceives of the apprehended and the apprehender.”

In dependence upon that, Kamalashīla knew that Hwa Shang Mahāyāna possessed knowledge and that they could meet in debate. Thereafter, people gathered for the debate. The king, a witness, Kamalashīla, and Hwa Shang Mahāyāna were sitting together, and the king placed one garland of flowers in the hands of Kamalashīla and another in the hands of Hwa Shang Mahāyāna. The king then said, “Two systems of dharma have arisen: the dharma of sudden realization and the dharma of gradual realization. Because of that, people have become confused about how to practice dharma. To clarify that confusion, please debate. When you have debated, the loser should, without pride, offer his garland of flowers to the victor. Then, whoever loses should leave Tibet and return to his own country.”

Then they debated. Kamalashīla asked questions and defeated Hwa Shang Mahāyāna. Having lost, Hwa Shang Mahāyāna offered his garland of flowers to Kamalashīla, did not remain in Tibet, and returned to China. Beginning from then, the traditions of dharma taught by the great Abbot Shāntarakṣhita and by Kamalashīla have held sway in the snowy land of Tibet.

After that, King Trisong Detsen said the following to Kamalashīla: “You have seen the trouble that arose here. In order that the teachings of the Buddha not be afflicted similarly in the future, please compose newly a good treatise that is easy to understand and of great benefit.” In dependence upon the King’s request, Kamalashīla newly composed the threefold text known as the *Stages of Meditation*, which consists of the *First Treatise on the Stages of Meditation*, the *Intermediate Treatise on the Stages of Meditation*, and the *Final Treatise on the Stages of Meditation*.

Thus, these treatises were composed newly in order to help the people of Tibet when the teachings of the Buddha were initially being established in Tibet. Now, because the teachings of the Buddha are beginning to flourish in America, I thought it would be helpful if I were to present these treatises, which are not like others.

Kamalashīla returned to Tibet two more times. However, there are some who debate this. For instance, in the account of Kamalashīla’s life given in the edition that I am using,<sup>1</sup> it is said that Kamalashīla did not return to Tibet again. Rather, the author of the introduction maintains that Hwa Shang Mahāyāna hired four Chinese men to kill Kamalashīla, and that indeed they succeeded in killing him. However, I think that Hwa Shang Mahāyāna was a great bodhisattva who taught dharma, and that he did not in any way arrange the murder of Kamalashīla.

Some people doubt that Kamalashīla returned to Tibet, and there *is* a basis for their doubt. When Kamalashīla left Tibet, he went to India. On his way to India, he came across the corpse of an Indian man who had succumbed to a terrible illness. Because the illness was contagious, no one dared come near the corpse. Kamalashīla wanted to help the people of the area. His consciousness moved to the corpse, walked the corpse to a distant place, and dumped it there. Then his consciousness came back to the place where he had left his own body. However, in the

meantime, an Indian siddha named Padampa Sangye, who had a very ugly body, came across Kamashīla's body, which was very handsome and completely free from illness. He thought, "This body of mine is not good. That fresh corpse is good and handsome. I would like my consciousness to move to that body." His consciousness then moved into the body of Kamashīla and he walked off, leaving his own body. When Kamashīla's consciousness returned, the only body around was the ugly corpse of the Indian siddha, into which the consciousness of Kamashīla entered. Thus, the mind was Kamashīla's but the body was not.

Kamashīla came to Tibet twice in the body of Padampa Sangye. In that body, he disseminated the methods for practicing "the pacifier," also called "cutting."<sup>2</sup> This practice is included within the tradition of Sūtra rather than within the tradition of Mantra. Kamashīla's *Stages of Meditation on the Middle Way* and the practice of pacification through cutting attachment are, in terms of their meaning, the same. Since the person who taught them is the same, it is not surprising that the meaning of these practices is the same.

The story that I have recounted to you is told in Karma Chakmay's *Mountain Dharma*. It does not accord well with the account given by the author of the Introduction to the edition of Kamashīla's text that I am using. I believe that, in truth, the matter is probably as Karma Chakmay has reported it and, for that reason, I have presented it to you as he does.

Generally speaking, the *First Treatise on the Stages of Meditation* covers three topics: (1) the need for compassion, (2) the need for the mind of awakening, and (3) the need for bringing this into experience through practice. The first thing taught is the importance of compassion. The Buddha himself stressed the importance of compassion. In what sūtras did he express this? In the *Sūtra Compiling the Dharma Correctly*, in the *Sūtra Taught by Akṣhayamati*, and in the *Hill of the Gayā Head Sūtra*. The Buddha said, "Anyone who has one quality can become a buddha. What is that one quality? Compassion."

After that, the manner of cultivating compassion is taught. Knowing that compassion is important, we want to know the method for generating compassion in our continuum and the way to cultivate it. The way to do that is to consider sentient beings who are in pain. If we take many sentient beings to mind and considers their pain, great compassion will arise. For that reason, this treatise explains how to think about the pain that sentient beings experience.

What is the way taught here for considering sentient beings who are in pain? We consider the ways in which wanderers of the six types suffer. I understand that some of you have studied the Buddhadharma for a long time and that some of you have not studied the Buddhadharma very much. Those of you who have not studied the Buddhadharma will be astonished at this notion of six types of wanderers. However, if you study the Buddhadharma stage by stage, you will be able to understand the meaning. Therefore, I will speak about the six types of wanderers in accordance with the way that they are spoken of in the text.

First, sentient beings born in hells suffer greatly from heat, cold, and so forth. Similarly, sentient beings born as hungry ghosts suffer greatly from hunger and thirst. Also, sentient beings born as animals experience many sufferings such as eating one another, becoming angry with one another, harming one another, killing one another, and being used by human beings. If we think about such suffering, compassion for sentient beings who take birth as hell-beings, hungry ghosts, and animals will arise.

Similarly, human beings have many kinds of suffering. Some human beings are put into prisons. Some are destitute. Some are enslaved by others. Thus, they are not actually hell-beings, but their sufferings are like those of hell-beings; they are not actually hungry ghosts, but their sufferings are like those of hungry ghosts; and they are not actually animals, but their sufferings

are like those of animals. We think in that way about the sufferings that human beings experience. Some human beings are wealthy and comfortable. However, that wealth and comfort does not last for a very long time. Not being able to enjoy wealth and comfort for a long time, in the end suffering comes to them too. When we think about the suffering that they experience, compassion arises.

The demigods suffer from continual jealousy of and warfare with the gods of the Desire Realm. As for the gods, though comfortable temporarily, later they fall down into painful situations and, at the time of falling, they suffer greatly. Similarly, even the gods of the Form Realm and the Formless Realm cannot just stay there. They fall down to the states of hell-beings, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, and so forth. When they fall, mentally they suffer greatly. Therefore, sentient beings born in the states of the six wanderers have nothing but suffering. If we think about that, compassion can arise.

In thinking about sentient beings who are suffering, we think, “If I had to undergo that suffering myself, I could not endure it.” In that way, we generate compassion for others by imagining ourselves to be in their position. After that, we think about the suffering of our friends, relatives, and others who love us, and we cultivate compassion for them. When we can meditate well in that way, we think about ordinary people—those who are neither our friends nor our enemies—and cultivate compassion for them. When that goes well, we think about our enemies—those who harm us. Realizing that they too have suffering, we develop compassion for them. In that way, compassion is increased more and more greatly. When we can generate compassion for our enemies to the same degree that we can generate compassion for our friends, we must then cultivate such compassion for all sentient beings in all the ten directions.

Meditating in that way, the main thing is to develop compassion for all, as if they were equal, rather than for some but not for others. For instance, we may have compassion for human beings but not for non-human sentient beings. Or, we may have compassion for human beings included within “us” but not for human beings included within “them.” Such compassion is not the genuine compassion that benefits everyone, both ourselves and others. If we have only partial compassion, then we will help some sentient beings but harm others. Compassion that accords with dharma is not like that. In the perspective of such compassion, all sentient beings are as if equal. If we have compassion for all sentient beings, that is the principal among all types of compassion, and it is superior compassion.

That is the first topic, the way to meditate so as to develop compassion. The second topic is the way to meditate so as to develop the mind of awakening. How do we do that? When we have developed compassion for all sentient beings, we feel that we must be of some use to others. If we help sentient beings with temporary things, generally it is useful and good. However, if we help people only with food, clothing, wealth, medicine, and so forth, it helps them only for the time being. When those things are used up, they suffer again. In light of that, what will really help? Enabling sentient beings to enter into the excellent dharma will really help because by way of the excellent dharma they can achieve the final fruition, the rank of a buddha, so that in the end they will not have to suffer at all. Such an attitude, which is the effect of compassion, thinks, “I must protect all sentient beings from suffering by establishing them in the rank of a buddha.” That mind is the mind of awakening. If compassion arises in a genuine way, the mind of awakening will arise naturally.

There are two methods for cultivating that mind of awakening. What are the two? The first is that a guru, who is our spiritual friend and upon whom we rely, teaches the mind of awakening, speaks of its good qualities, and says, “It would be good if you were to give rise to

the mind that aspires to supreme awakening. In fact, you must give rise to the mind that aspires to supreme awakening.” Having thought about that, we give rise to a mind that aspires to supreme awakening. That is the first way of giving rise to the mind of awakening and it is a good way. The second way is to begin by giving rise to compassion. Then the mind of awakening will arise naturally. The first way is good, but the second way is stable and powerful. Therefore, the best way to give rise to the mind of awakening is in dependence upon great compassion.

That mind of awakening is important and beneficial. The Buddha himself explained this with an example. When a diamond is broken into pieces, it is still much better than ornaments of gold. Similarly, even if we are not actually able to put the mind of awakening into practice, due to having it as our motivation, our virtue will surpass the virtue of hearers and solitary realizers. Therefore, the Buddha said, the mind of awakening is important.

Similarly, in another sūtra, the Buddha said that, although the merit of the mind of awakening has no form, if the merit of the mind of awakening did have form, it would fill all of space and would still exceed even that. The mind of awakening has that measure of benefit.

What minds of awakening are there? The mind of awakening has two aspects. What are the two aspects? There is the mind that aspires to awakening and the mind that enters into the activities that lead to awakening. The mind of aspiring to awakening thinks, “May I be able to accomplish the welfare of sentient beings. May I be able to establish all sentient beings in the rank of buddhahood.” Making effort for the sake of that is the mind that enters into the activities that lead to awakening. Those are the two aspects.

That concludes the second topic. I will stop here this evening. If you have questions that you would like to ask, please ask them.

Q: It has been said by some scholars that Hwa Shang Mahāyāna did not leave Tibet. They say that he remained in Tibet and had something to do with the arising of the Great Completeness teachings. Could you comment on that?

A: Some people do say that; but to say that is to criticize the system of the Great Completeness, because it is to say that the system of the Great Completeness is like the system of Hwa Shang Mahāyāna. Those are words that refute the Great Completeness. Some say that Hwa Shang Mahāyāna lost one of his boots when he left Tibet and that, through that condition, a little bit of his view is present in the Great Completeness teachings of the Nyingma. Actually, that is not so, and to say that it is so is to criticize the Great Completeness.

Q: You said that incomplete or partial compassion can harm other people. How is that?

A: Suppose that I have compassion for one group and do not have compassion for another group. If the two groups fall into disharmony, then I will take the side of the group for which I do have compassion and I will feel hatred for the group for which I do not have compassion. For instance, if I have compassion for my friend, and if there is someone who is harming my friend, I will feel hatred for that person. In dependence upon that hatred, I will initiate action that harms him or her. After I have harmed that person, he or she will harm me in return. Partial compassion is the cause in dependence upon which this arises.

Q: Are the six types of wanderers merely psychological states? You mentioned that in the human realm there are psychological states comparable to the hell-realm, hungry ghost realm, animal realm, and so forth. If they are not psychological states, where are the hell-realms and god-realms, and what are the beings there like?

A: The six types of wanderers are not just mind. Generally speaking, they have form. In Vasubandhu’s *Treasury of Higher Knowledge (abhidharmakosha)*, it is said that hell-beings and hungry ghosts are mostly *under* the ground of Jambudvīpa, which is to say, *in* the ground. The

gods of the Desire Realm, the Form Realm, and the Formless Realm are in the sky. Therefore, it is probably like that. For instance, scientists say that within the earth there is fire. Some say that there are sentient beings there.

Q: Why is Hwa Shang Mahāyāna's doctrine false? Both black clouds and white clouds cover the sun. If we go to the bad migrations, they are painful. If we take birth in the upper realms, they provide only temporary happiness. Therefore, we must abandon all three realms of cyclic existence and achieve liberation. How does that differ from Hwa Shang Mahāyāna's tradition?

A: Generally, Hwa Shang Mahāyāna's thought is not some terrible thing. However, if we refute the value of virtue suited to the occasion, then people will not be able to practice virtue. If people are not able to practice virtue, meditation will not be able to increase to a higher level. In dependence upon that, saying that it is not good to refute the value of appropriate virtue, Kamalashīla refuted Hwa Shang Mahāyāna. Refuting the value of appropriate virtue does not lead to much good. It is in dependence upon our accumulation of virtue that our meditation increases to a higher level. In dependence upon our meditation increasing to a higher level, we achieve the rank of a buddha. Kamalashīla said that although the happiness of humans and gods is generally not very stable, to achieve liberation gradually it is important to have the body of a god or a human as our support. To achieve the lifetime of a god or a human, we need to practice virtue.

In Hwa Shang Mahāyāna's system, compassion is only a temporary virtue and must be destroyed. Kamalashīla held that we must cultivate both compassion and the mind of awakening. Hwa Shang Mahāyāna held that we must destroy both compassion and the mind of awakening. In his view, we must destroy everything. That was the point that they debated.

Q: I have heard that as human beings we have the unique ability to experience all of cyclic existence. Is there a connection between that and our ability to hear and practice the dharma? If not, what is it that makes birth as a human being an unusually opportune situation?

A: Kamalashīla's text explains that humans experience situations that are similar to those of bad migrations but are not identical to them. For instance, human beings who have been put into prison are not hell-beings but experience something similar to a hell. Also, human beings who are poor are not hungry ghosts but experience something like the poverty of hungry ghosts. However, it does not say that human beings experience the actual suffering that hell-beings or hungry ghosts experience. Thus, human beings experience something like the suffering of hell-beings but, compared to the suffering of actual hell-beings, human beings have little pain. Similarly human beings experience something like the suffering of hungry ghosts but, compared to the suffering of actual hungry ghosts, human beings have little pain. As human beings we have achieved the opportunity to practice dharma. Hell-beings and hungry ghosts have not achieved the opportunity to practice dharma. That is the difference between our situation and theirs.

Q: What about the sentient beings in the higher realms? What prevents them from hearing and practicing dharma?

A: They are extremely comfortable and are not able to feel discouragement with cyclic existence. Because they never feel discouraged with cyclic existence, they cannot generate the wish to enter into the dharma. In dependence upon that reason, they have no opportunity to practice the dharma.

- 1 Kamalashīla, *Bhāvanākramah of Ācārya Kamalaśīla: Tibetan Version, Sanskrit Restoration, and Hindi Translation*, ed. & trans. Ācārya Gyaltzen Namdol (Sarnath, Varanasi: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 1985).
- 2 Thrangu Rinpoche is referring to the practice of *jö* (*gcod*). *jö* means “cut” and, in this context, “cut” means cut attachment. “The pacifier” (*zhi byed*) is another name for this practice. For a discussion of it, see Khetsun Sangpo Rinbochay, *Tantric Practice in Nyingma*, trans. Jeffrey Hopkins, ed. Jeffrey Hopkins and Anne Klein (Ithaca, New York: Gabriel/Snow Lion, 1982), 161-166.