Contemplation Cards

Lines of reasoning

and objects of meditation

for the 21 practices of the

stages of the path to enlightenment

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1. Our Precious Human Life

"Since it would be a great tragedy to waste this rare opportunity, I must use it in a meaningful way."

—**Geshe Kelsang Gyatso**
Universal Compassion

1. Our Precious Human Life

Contemplation

a) My life is a rare opportunity not to be wasted.
b) Whoever has this rare opportunity must use their life in a meaningful way.
c) Someone who is not using their precious human life in a meaningful way is tragically wasting a rare opportunity.

Meditation

- I must use my life in a meaningful way.

2. Death and Impermanence

"I must practise Dharma purely because at the time
of death and after death only our practice
of Dharma is of benefit to us."

—Geshe Kelsang Gyatso
Joyful Path of Good Fortune

2. Death and Impermanence

Contemplation

a) At the time of death and after death only my practice of Dharma is of benefit to me.
b) If at the time of death and after death only the practice of Dharma is of benefit, then it must be practised purely.
c) If Dharma is practised merely for worldly concerns, then at the time of death and after death it will be of no benefit.

Meditation

- I must practise Dharma purely.

3. The Danger of Lower Rebirth

"The internal poison of negative karma will harm us in all our lives to come. Since this poison is already within us, we have good reason to be afraid."

—**Geshe Kelsang Gyatso**
Universal Compassion

3. The Danger of Lower Rebirth

Contemplation

a) We already have within us the internal poison of negative karma.
b) Someone who has been poisoned has good reason to be afraid of its possible effects.
c) Someone has no good reason to be *un*afraid until this poison has been removed.

Meditation

- We have good reason to be afraid.

4. Refuge Practice

"Since only Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha have the power
to protect living beings from suffering and its causes,
I must rely upon them from the depths of my heart."

—Geshe Kelsang Gyatso
Living Meaningfully, Dying Joyfully

4. Refuge Practice

Contemplation

a) Only Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha have the power to protect me from suffering and its causes.
b) Whatever has the power to protect living beings from suffering and its causes must be relied upon.
c) One must not rely upon that which is powerless to protect living beings from suffering and its causes.

Meditation

- I must rely upon Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha from the depths of my heart.

5. Actions and their Effects

"Since I myself never wish to suffer and always want to be happy, I must abandon and purify my non-virtuous actions and sincerely perform virtuous actions."

—Geshe Kelsang Gyatso
Modern Buddhism

5. Actions and their Effects

Contemplation

a) I never wish to suffer, and I always want to be happy.
b) To never experience suffering, one must abandon and purify non-virtuous actions.
c) To always experience happiness, one must sincerely perform virtuous actions.

Meditation

- I must abandon and purify my non-virtuous actions and sincerely perform virtuous actions.

6. Developing Renunciation for Samsara

"Happiness and suffering are opposites, so if something is a real cause of happiness it cannot give rise to suffering."

—Geshe Kelsang Gyatso
Transform Your Life

6. Developing Renunciation for Samsara

Contemplation

a) Happiness and its causes are opposite in nature to suffering and its causes.
b) Whenever something is in the nature of happiness, it cannot give rise to suffering.
c) Anything that can give rise to suffering is in the nature of suffering.

Meditation

- If something is a real cause of happiness, it cannot give rise to suffering.

7. Developing Equanimity

"When the mind of equanimity is manifest we are very balanced and calm because we are free from the disturbing minds of attachment, anger, and other delusions."

—Geshe Kelsang Gyatso
Living Meaningfully, Dying Joyfully

7. Developing Equanimity

Contemplation

a) When the mind of equanimity is manifest, we are free from the disturbing minds of attachment and anger.
b) Anyone free from delusions such as attachment and anger is very balanced and calm.
c) Someone who is unstable or upset is being controlled by his or her delusions.

Meditation

- When the mind of equanimity is manifest, we are very balanced and calm.

8. Recognizing that all Living Beings are our Mothers

"Since it is so beneficial to regard all living beings
as our mothers, we should adopt this way
of thinking without hesitation."

—Geshe Kelsang Gyatso
Introduction to Buddhism

8. Recognizing that all Living Beings are our Mothers

Contemplation

a) Regarding all living beings as our mothers is so beneficial.
b) Beneficial ways of thinking should be adopted without hesitation.
c) Harmful ways of thinking should be abandoned without hesitation.

Meditation

- We should regard all living beings as our mothers without hesitation.

9. Remembering the Kindness of Living Beings

"Minds such as love and kindness are based on reality and are an expression of our pure nature. Thus when we view others as kind we are seeing beyond their delusions and are relating to their pure nature, their Buddha nature."

—Geshe Kelsang Gyatso
Eight Steps to Happiness

9. Remembering the Kindness of Living Beings

Contemplation

a) We can view others' kindness as an expression of their pure nature.
b) Living beings show kindness to others when they are free from their delusions.
c) It is only when controlled by their delusions that living beings harm others.

Meditation

- When we view others as kind, we are seeing beyond their delusions.

10. Equalizing Self and Others

"There is no reason why I should consider my own happiness or my own suffering to be more important than anyone else's. From now on I will care for others just as much as I care for myself."

—Geshe Kelsang Gyatso
Great Treasury of Merit

10. Equalizing Self and Others

Contemplation

a) I care for those whose happiness I consider to be important.
b) If one person's happiness is not more important than another's, then they should be treated equally.
c) If two people are not being treated equally, then one person's happiness is considered to be more important than the other's.

Meditation

- From now on I will care for others just as much as I care for myself.

11. The Disadvantages of Self-cherishing

"Although it is good to be tolerant of others and to forgive their weaknesses, we should never tolerate our self-cherishing, for the more lenient we are with it the more it will harm us."

—Geshe Kelsang Gyatso
Eight Steps to Happiness

11. The Disadvantages of Self-cherishing

Contemplation

a) As our self-cherishing increases, so does the harm we receive from it.
b) Delusions can only harm us if we tolerate their presence in our minds.
c) If we never tolerate delusions, they can never cause us harm.

Meditation

- We should never tolerate our self-cherishing.

12. The Advantages of Cherishing Others

"Living beings are extremely precious because
without them I cannot gather the inner wealth
of spiritual realizations that will eventually bring me
the ultimate happiness of full enlightenment."

—Geshe Kelsang Gyatso
Transform Your Life

12. The Advantages of Cherishing Others

Contemplation

a) Living beings are the objects of our patience, giving, love, and compassion.
b) Anything that increases our inner wealth of spiritual realizations is extremely precious.
c) Something is utterly worthless if it steals our inner wealth.

Meditation

- Living beings are extremely precious.

13. Exchanging Self with Others

"The reason why we need to train our mind in exchanging self with others is because our self-cherishing interferes with both our intention and our ability to benefit others."

—Geshe Kelsang Gyatso
Eight Steps to Happiness

13. Exchanging Self with Others

Contemplation

a) Our intention to benefit others is impure, and our ability to do so lacks power and remains limited.
b) If one's self-cherishing interferes with benefitting others, then one needs to cherish only others.
c) Only by completing the training in exchanging self with others can someone actually benefit others.

Meditation

- We need to train our mind in exchanging self with others.

14. Great Compassion

"Only a Buddha's compassion possesses the power actually to protect all living beings from suffering. The way to attain enlightenment, therefore, is to cultivate our present mind of compassion and develop it to the full."

—Geshe Kelsang Gyatso
Universal Compassion

14. Great Compassion

Contemplation

a) Attaining enlightenment empowers one to protect all living beings from suffering.
b) One can protect living beings from suffering only by developing the compassion of a Buddha.
c) Without developing a Buddha's compassion, we cannot actually protect any living being from suffering.

Meditation

- The way to attain enlightenment is to cultivate our present mind of compassion and develop it to the full.

15. Taking

"May all the suffering, fears, and obstacles of every living being ripen upon me, and may they thereby be freed from all problems."

—Geshe Kelsang Gyatso
The New Meditation Handbook

15. Taking

Contemplation

a) Living beings can be freed from their suffering.
b) If the effects of others' negative actions ripen upon me instead of them, they will be free.
c) Others will not be free for so long as their karma does not ripen upon me.

Meditation

- May all the suffering, fears, and obstacles of every living being ripen upon me.

16. Wishing Love

"The nature of samsara is suffering, so for as long as living beings are reborn in samsara they can never experience true happiness."

—Geshe Kelsang Gyatso
Eight Steps to Happiness

16. Wishing Love

Contemplation

a) Living beings experience only suffering—manifest, changing, and pervasive.
b) Tormented by the three types of suffering, no one ever experiences true happiness.
c) One can only ever experience true happiness by becoming liberated from the three types of suffering.

Meditation

- For as long as living beings are reborn in samsara, they can never experience true happiness.

17. Giving

"So that they may experience pure happiness,
I will transform my roots of virtue, my happiness,
and my good fortune into whatever each sentient
being requires and give it to them."

—Geshe Kelsang Gyatso
Great Treasury of Merit

17. Giving

Contemplation

a) Living beings can experience pure happiness.
b) If my roots of virtue ripen upon others instead of me, they will experience pure happiness.
c) Others will not experience pure happiness for so long as my roots of virtue ripen upon me and not them.

Meditation

- I will give each sentient whatever they require.

18. Bodhichitta

"From this time forth until I become a Buddha, I shall keep
even at the cost of my life a mind wishing to attain
complete enlightenment to free all living beings
from the fears of samsara and solitary peace."

—Geshe Kelsang Gyatso
The Bodhisattva Vow

18. Bodhichitta

Contemplation

a) My attaining enlightenment is the means to free all living beings from the fears of samsara and solitary peace.
b) Freeing all living beings is more valuable to a Bodhisattva than his very life.
c) If this goal is not more valuable to a Bodhisattva than his own life, then living beings will never be free.

Meditation

- I shall keep even at the cost of my life a mind wishing to attain complete enlightenment.

19. Tranquil Abiding

"Happiness and suffering are states of mind and so their main causes are not to be found outside the mind."

—Geshe Kelsang Gyatso
How to Solve Our Human Problems

19. Tranquil Abiding

Contemplation

a) The main cause of happiness or suffering—what actually *transforms* into happiness or suffering—is a state of mind.
b) No state of mind can be found outside the mind.
c) Whatever is found outside the mind cannot be or become a state of mind.

Meditation

- The main causes of happiness and suffering are not to be found outside the mind.

20. Superior Seeing

"Through searching with wisdom for my self in this way, I realize that my self is unfindable. This is a valid reason to prove that my self that I normally see does not exist at all."

—Geshe Kelsang Gyatso
Modern Buddhism

20. Superior Seeing

Contemplation

a) My self that I normally see—a self that appears to exist from its own side—is unfindable when searched for with wisdom.
b) If something does not exist in the way that it appears, then what is appearing does not exist at all.
c) If something exists, then it would exist in the way that it appears.

Meditation

- My self that I normally see does not exist at all.

21. Relying on a Spiritual Guide

"Since benefiting others continuously is the very meaning of full enlightenment, it is impossible for Buddhas to cease helping us."

—Geshe Kelsang Gyatso
Joyful Path of Good Fortune

21. Relying on a Spiritual Guide

Contemplation

a) As fully enlightened beings, Buddhas benefit others continuously.
b) A person whose very purpose is to benefit others continuously will never cease helping them.
c) Someone who would abandon any living being even for a moment has not yet realized the meaning of full enlightenment.

Meditation

- It is impossible for Buddhas to cease helping us.