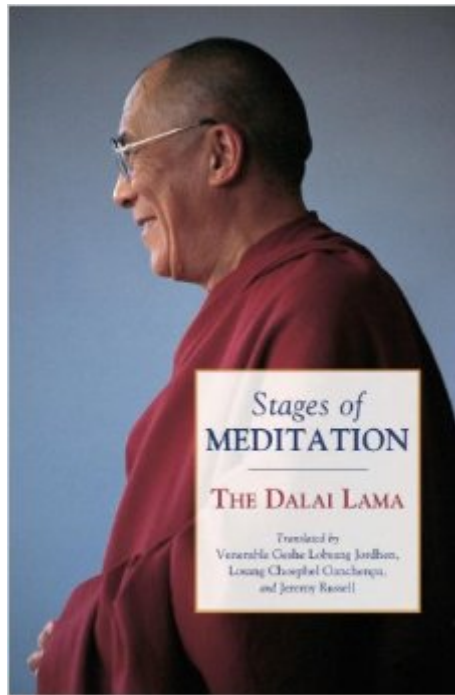


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Stages Of Meditation



Synopsis

The Dalai Lama explains the principles of meditation in a practice-oriented format especially suited to Westerners. Based upon the middle section of the Bhavanakrama by Kamalashila, a translation of which is included, this is the most extensive commentary given by the Dalai Lama on this concise but important meditation handbook. It is a favorite text of the Dalai Lama, and he often takes the opportunity to give teachings on it to audiences throughout the world. In his words, "This text can be like a key that opens the door to all other major Buddhist scriptures." Topics include the nature of mind, how to develop compassion and loving-kindness, calm abiding wisdom, and how to establish a union of calm abiding and special insight.

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Customer Reviews

I'm a WASP born and raised in the United States and a very long term meditator who has mostly practiced inside Hindu and Theravadin traditions. I've seen the Dalai Lama speak twice, read some of his books, and watched a few of his videos, so I'm not entirely unfamiliar with his work, but still I'm not a follower of his branch of Buddhism. I downloaded this book from Audible several years ago, and listened to it through in bits and pieces several times while commuting. There were passages I wanted to linger over, so I bought the hardback. It sat on my shelf unread for quite some time, until I finally picked it up about a week ago and read it through in a short series of evening sessions. I find this book to be extremely useful. In it, the Dalai Lama talks about two different types of meditation: 1) Calm Abiding 2) Special Insight. Calm abiding meditation usually involves some form of single pointed

concentration, and in my experience can lead to the pleasant or - on rare occasions - the blissful experiences that dominate popular perceptions of meditation. The second type of meditation I think of as Insight meditation. It is often associated with the goal of attaining wisdom. The Diamond Sutra, and many branches of Buddhism, emphasize that wisdom involves compassion, selflessness, and learning to treat this "fleeting world" as "a star at dawn, a bubble in a stream, a flash of lightning in a summer cloud, a flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream." Finding the right words to help westerners understand Buddhist wisdom is one of the book's strengths. Many schools of meditation present you with the option of choosing either special insight or calm abiding. In this book, and in others of his that I have read, the Dalai Lama insists that both techniques are essential for those who want to make spiritual progress. In this book the Dalai Lama gets quite specific about what is involved in each form of meditation, and provides numerous techniques that practitioners of meditation can use to enhance their practice. For instance, I found his discussion of the antidotes to torpor or over-excitement to be particularly useful. I'll echo what others have said about this book not being a good text for beginners. It is not particularly difficult to understand, but it is unlikely that most practitioners will have the practical background in meditation necessary to understand the significance of some of the points made by the Dalai Lama in this text. I disagree, however, with those who find the book dry. The Dalai Lama was trained from early childhood in the arcana of Buddhist thought, and his discussions of this topic are often detailed and highly technical. In this text, however, he is less rigid, and delves immediately and continuously into the most telling and important points in Buddhist thought. If this book finds the right audience, as it did with me, it becomes something of a page turner. I found myself thinking about this book often during the day, and looking forward to immersing myself in its beauty when I finally had free time in the evening. It is a little disappointing to know that I have finished reading it.

This book is aimed at those who already have the basic knowledge of Buddhism. Those who wish to know the basic of Buddhism should pick up *What Buddhists Believe* by K. Sri Dhammananda. *Stages of Meditation* is about the practice of the Madhyamika school of Buddhism. Though a follower of the Theravada school, I greatly enjoy the teaching expounded in this text. The language is precise and to the point. Hence it could be a little dry and challenging to novice readers. Each school of Buddhism explains the core Buddhist concepts a little differently. Because of this students of the Dharma can pick up different insights from reading texts outside of their school. This is hugely benefiting for the development of wisdom and compassion.

Essentially a study of Mahayan Buddhism, this book is also an excellent choice for those interested in refining their mindfulness meditation practice. There are full chapters describing calm abiding and actualizing special insight. Both are discussed in great detail with vivid examples. I would consider it to be a must-have for anyone interested in the practice of mindfulness meditation.

This book captures the Dalai Lama in his classical role, explaining an ancient Buddhist text to monks in Northern India. The exposition is simply translated from Tibetan, and it shows us the subtlety of an advanced class for committed practitioners. Where our sound-bite world commonly simplifies religion to some "main point", the Dalai Lama's careful reflections always maintain a balancing act. The terse root text by Kamalashila is expanded on, the way a seasoned mountain guide explains a map through highly variable terrain. The path to unwavering attention and compassion looks hard, but possible. The teacher evokes a desire to make it.

The Book consists of the text and its interpretation / comments in ten chapters, a glossary, a list of recommended readings, and a print of the text in Tibetan. The text is written by Kamalashila, translated into English and commented by H.H. Dalai Lama. The title as well as the book cover have some misleading notions that lured me into the decision to buy the book and deceived me:- the original text "Stages of Meditation" consists of three parts. The book covers the intermediate part - the second of three.- the text is a theoretical treatise. Whoever thinks that "Practise-oriented Westerners will find this favorite text of the Dalai Lama especially useful" (so the cover states) either hasn't read it or has a totally wrong idea about a practise-oriented westerner's need.- the Glossary misses many expressions I'd need clear interpretation of. Other interpretations I have read five times and still don't get them. I guess that too clearly shows me I am not on intermediate level. Just to give you some little taste of it, let me randomly pick two sentences of p. 110: "Through the process of meditation, the practitioner initially actualizes mental pliancy. This is preceded by a kind of heaviness of the brain that is in fact a sign of relinquishing the defects of the mind." I am missing here either a language, or a wisdom, or a sanity interface between the sender (Kalamashila) and the recipient (myself). No matter how much I'd like to get that, I simply don't.

The other reviews of this book have done an admirable job of describing the different aspects of this work, but I would like to add a couple of thoughts. First, this is a wonderful book for those with a background in meditative practice, but a beginner could get lost in some unfamiliar territory. Second, although the book is 210 pages, the last 40 are comprised of the original Tibetan text, which will be

of limited use to those of us who are not Tibetan scholars. Otherwise, this is a great book with solid, practical advice (which is to be expected of the Dalai Lama).

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