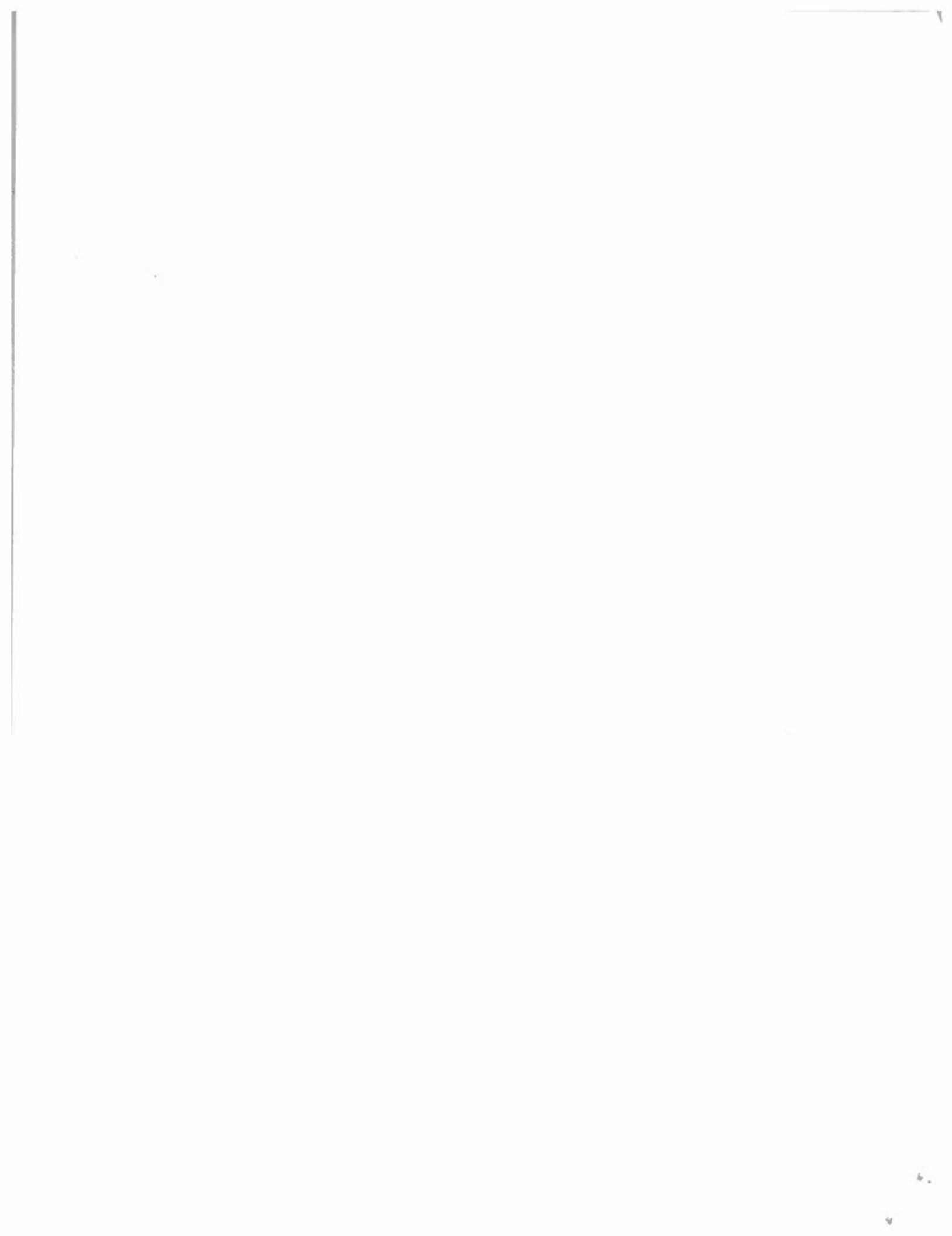


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The DOOR of LIBERATION

ESSENTIAL TEACHINGS OF THE TIBETAN BUDDHIST TRADITION

Translated by

GESHE WANGYAL



WISDOM PUBLICATIONS • BOSTON

[Brief biography of Atiśa and
[Song the pa]

བཅའ་ཤེས་

Atiśa, or Dīpamkara Śrījñāna, was born in the late tenth century in eastern India. He was the second son of Kalyāna Śrī, a rich and powerful king. At a very young age Atiśa entered Nālandā university. He studied there for many years and, by the time he was thirty-one, had mastered the entire *Tripitaka*—*sūtra*, *vinaya*, and *abhidharma*—as well as the teachings of the Mantrayāna. Atiśa then traveled to Suvarṇadvīpa—present-day Sumatra—to study with Acārya Dharmakīrti (Lama Serilingpa), from whom he received the teaching of bodhi-mind. Because of the greatness of this teaching, Atiśa considered Acārya Dharmakīrti the kindest of his many teachers.

While studying in Sumatra, Atiśa became skilled in the two great lineages: that of Maitreya, which is the lineage of compassion descended through Asaṅga; and the lineage of Mañjuśrī, which is the lineage of wisdom descended through Nāgārjuna. He then returned to India and, as he was the foremost teacher of his time, became head of the one hundred and eight temples of the university of Vikramaśīla.

Some years later, a delegation, the first of three, arrived at the university to invite Atiśa to Tibet. Atiśa refused the request of the first delegation. The second delegation, headed by King Yeshe Ōd, was captured en route by a barbarian king who held Yeshe Ōd for ransom. The Buddhist king's son, Prince Jangchub Ōd, collected the necessary gold, but the king refused to be ransomed, saying that he was old and would soon die anyway and would rather that the money be used to bring Atiśa to Tibet. The good king was then executed by his captor. The third delegation reached Vikramaśīla and told Atiśa all of this. Atiśa felt great respect for the determination of

the king and his subjects and agreed to go to Tibet.

Atiśa arrived in Tibet in A.D. 1042. He first stayed in the land of his benefactor, King Jangchub Öd, where, at the king's request, he wrote the famous *Lamp of the Bodhi-Path*.¹² In this treatise is the first formulation of the three levels of beings—lower, middle, and higher—in the three stages of renunciation, bodhi-mind, and the view of reality. This text contains the lineages of profound view and extensive deeds, descended through Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga, respectively. In it are brought together the teachings of the Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna, and Mantrayāna, in stages of practice leading to highest enlightenment. Tsongkhapa praised Atiśa's teaching in a work called *The Concise Meaning of the Stages of the Path*, saying:

Through it one can realize that the teachings are without contradiction

And understand all of the doctrines as precepts;

One can easily find the intention of Buddha,

And avoid the abyss of wrongdoing.

Thus, this precept is relied on by many of good fortune,

The wise of India and Tibet.

What sensible mind would not be captivated

By the path of stages of the three types of beings?

Atiśa later traveled to Lhasa and other parts of Tibet, strengthening and purifying the practice of Buddhism there. During this time he gathered many disciples, the foremost among them being the teacher Dromtönpa, the founder of the Kadampa sect, which carries the lineage of Atiśa's teaching.

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Tsongkhapa (1357–1419) was born in Amdo, a province of eastern Tibet, in Isongkha, "the region of onions." Thus he is known as the "man of the onion region." His religious name is Losang Drakpa.

When he was very young, he entered a monastery of the Kadampa sect. There, he was taught the lineage of compassion and quickly mastered the five treatises of Maitreya, the books Asaṅga brought back from Tūṣita heaven. Tsongkhapa then learned all of the vinaya and abhidharma.

When he began to study Madhyamaka, Tsongkhapa found that the available collection of texts was very confused, for many scholars had attempted to interpret them in their own way. Through his teacher, Lama Umapa, Mañjuśrī told him that the writings of Candrakīrti were in all ways reliable. From then on, Tsongkhapa studied the commentaries of Candrakīrti and soon attained highest realization. By this realization, he was able to converse directly with Mañjuśrī, who gave him many precepts as well as instructions to write *The Great Stages of the Path (Lam-rim Chenmo)* and *The Stages of Mantra (Ngag-rim Chenmo)*.

Tsongkhapa founded Ganden monastery in Lhasa, where he established the Gelug order. It became one of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the other three being the Nyingma, the Kargyu, and the Sakya. Tsongkhapa's third successor, Gendun Drup, was recognized as an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara and became the First Dalai Lama.

The present Dalai Lama, His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, fourteenth incarnation of that unbroken succession, currently lives and teaches in India. His Holiness continues the compassionate deeds of Avalokiteśvara, guiding the Tibetan people in exile, and extending the teachings of Buddha to many, both Eastern and Western.

[A BodhiMind note: The text below comes from a contemporary Tibetan Buddhism site, URL below. These "four thoughts" are often called the Preliminaries since they set the foundation for effective spiritual practice. They entail reflecting on (1) this precious human life of freedom and opportunity; (2) everything in our life is impermanent; (3) the results of all our actions, good and bad, are inescapable; (4) no station or situation in life can ever be fully satisfactory.]

The Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind

LAMA GANGA

<http://www.kagyu.org/kagyulineage/buddhism/dha/dha02.php>

WE ARE VERY FORTUNATE TO BE BORN as human beings and to encounter the Dharma. Achieving a human birth is not easy. It takes positive karma to be reborn and then to practice successfully. If we had not accumulated good karma in past lives, then we might have taken birth in the lower realms.

Even with this precious human body our lives are extremely difficult, and Dharma practice is essential to succeed on any path we follow. Our **first thought** as we begin to practice must be appreciation for our human birth.

Western people especially should understand that their collective karma is ripening now. To be able to practice the Dharma without great difficulties and to meet a teacher without going through hardship are signs of the ripening of karma in the West. If the fruits of this ripening are skillfully used, they will in the future produce greater fruits.

Generally speaking, all living beings--whether human, animal, or insect--desire happiness and comfort, pleasure and success. But because of attachment to the self, the ego, people separate self from others, subject from object. From that separation comes the problems of hatred, jealousy, and anger. It is ignorance that produces these poisons, because we are attached to a self that is actually nonexistent. Ignorance is the basic cause of all of our confusion. We all have Buddhature within us, but in our ignorance we do not recognize it. Dharma practice introduces us to our own nature, and through practice we can eventually fully realize it as Buddhature.

Because in our present state of ignorance and attachment we do not recognize our own nature, we try out of curiosity to obtain possessions, wealth, fame, and so forth. But in fact these things bring us suffering. When at last we do realize Buddhature, we no longer feel attached to any thing, and no one is our enemy; there is nothing that is self or other. Actually, everything and everybody are one, and

realizing the oneness of everything brings eternal happiness. It is known as Buddhahood. The best method to find Buddhahood is self-examination, to observe what is happening within ourselves. This is better than studying others, because when we look at another's errors we do not see our own, and when we criticize others' faults we feel that we have none. We might even feel that we are perfect. Without self-examination we can only remain ignorant and make many mistakes without even knowing it.

The **second thought** in starting to practice the Dharma is understanding that everything is impermanent, even our selves. When we do not examine ourselves we forget this obvious fact, and we act as if we will live forever. We collect as many possessions as possible and try to make hundreds of friends, and we waste our lives. But when we face the inevitability of our death, then we start to wonder what to do about it and how to deal with the uncertainty of life.

As soon as we personally encounter impermanence in this way, Dharma practice becomes easy--our mind falls into practice, so to speak. We become interested in it, and we know why it is important. From the start we must base our practice on this awareness, realizing that at the time of our death the only thing that can help us is the practice that we have done during our

life. Nobody else can help. In this way we meditate on the impermanence of both our selves and others.

Our **third thought** as we practice is to consider karma, or cause and effect. Karma and its result are infallible. They are like a seed and its fruit. If you plant the seed of a sweet fruit such as an orange, it will grow as an orange tree and produce oranges. The result of a sweet fruit is health, if you plant its seed. If you plant a poisonous seed, it will produce poisonous fruit, and its result will be painful or even life threatening. Karma works in the same way, because if we act negatively now, then in our next life we will experience suffering, illness, pain, and frustration. If we practice the precious actions of body, speech, and mind now, then in our next life we will experience greater happiness and success.

The **fourth thought**, and a big obstacle to success on the path of enlightenment, is our attachment to samsara. Because we are all so strongly attached to samsaric life we need to examine with great care whether worldly activities will benefit us eternally or not. For instance, most people desire possessions and also love and acceptance, and many work hard, day and night, to obtain them, going through much discomfort and even suffering. Yet if we evaluate whether possessions or popularity will help us after death or with a better rebirth, we find that neither does us any good. Clinging to samsaric life is fruitless.

To practice the Dharma means to remove our confusion. Right now we are so confused that we are attached to everything. We take the right thing as the wrong thing, and the wrong thing as the right thing. Again we must examine everything that we do. For example, we may feel that friends, relatives, and family truly make us happy. But if we look carefully, we see instead that these, too, bring sufferings.

When you look for a spouse, for example, you first experience the suffering of searching, trying to find a suitable person who has things in common with you. Finally you find someone and you get married. But before too long painful problems arise between the two of you, and you separate. You file for a divorce to free yourself from the same person that not so long ago you worked so hard to find. That is the result of samsara; it is the nature of samsara.

The divorce itself does not happen easily, either. Both partners go through intense emotional pain, and if you have children, they suffer, too. You have to go through the law and the courts, and many people become involved. All of this causes suffering, not only for you and your partner but for many other people. Samsara is nothing but suffering.

The samsaric life distracts us from practicing the Dharma. No matter who we are or what job we are doing--whether president or engineer, doctor or

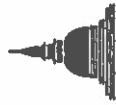
singer, a dancer or even a beggar--each of us wants only to be happy and successful. But that is samsaric life, and it will never help after death. For example, the Shah of Iran was very rich, but when he became gravely ill, even his great wealth could not save his life. Similarly, when death came for the great singer John Lennon, neither money nor friends could help him. Thousands and thousands of his friends cried for him, but they could not return him to life. If Lennon had done Dharma practice, it would surely have helped him far more than thousands of people crying in the street. Everyone needs to practice, for only practice will help. It will help ourselves as well as other people.

We have now examined four thoughts that turn our mind away from its clinging to samsara. We have seen that the first thought is to appreciate that obtaining a precious human birth is not easy. The second is to recognize that because this precious human birth is impermanent we should practice as soon and quickly as possible. Third is karma and its result, knowing that if we act positively through body, speech, and mind we experience happiness, and if we act negatively we experience suffering. Fourth, we understand that the nature of samsara is suffering. These are sometimes called the four thoughts that turn the mind to Dharma, or the four ordinary foundations. They are the basis or foundation of all Dharma practice.

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GESHE WANGYAL



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Kadampa Precepts

THIS CHAPTER IS A COLLECTION of precepts of the Kadampa (Preceptors) lineage, founded in the eleventh century by "Teacher" Dromtönpa, Atiśa's chief disciple. This lineage was introduced in chapter 2. The title of the collection is Kadam Thorbu, or Precepts Collected from Here and There. These precepts, which concern subjects relative to the understanding and practice of Buddhism, begin with dialogues between Atiśa and his closest disciples and are followed by teachings of Drom and his successors. The precepts were assembled and written down by Tsunba Jegom.

The book was written primarily for monks. However, for the most part, the teachings in the book are applicable to lay people as well.

བཅའ་བུ་

When Atiśa arrived in Tibet, his three disciples, Ku, Ngok, and Drom asked him, "For attaining the high states of liberation and omniscience, which is more important, to follow the precept of the lama or to follow the scriptures and commentaries?"

Atiśa replied, "The precept of the lama is more important than scriptures and commentaries."

"Why is that?" they asked.

"Even if you know that the primary characteristic of all phenomena is voidness and can recite the *Tripitaka* as well, you and the teaching will be completely separate if you do not apply the precept of the lama at the time of practice."

Again the disciples asked, "Please define the practice of the precept of the lama. Is it simply striving to do virtuous deeds in body, speech, and mind and acting in accordance with the three vows: the vow of

individual liberation, the bodhisattva vow, and the tantric vow?"

"Both of these are insufficient," Atīśa answered.

"But why?"

"Although you keep the three vows, if you do not renounce the three realms of saṃsāra, your activities will only increase your worldliness. Although you strive to perform virtuous deeds in body, speech, and mind, both day and night, if you do not dedicate this work to the enlightenment of all, you will end up with numerous wrong concepts. Though you meditate and are considered a holy and wise teacher, if you do not abandon your interest in the eight worldly concerns, whatever you do will be only for the purposes of this life, and in the future you will not find the right path."

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At another time Atīśa was asked by Ku, Ngok, and Drom, "What is the highest teaching of the path?"

Atīśa replied, "The highest skill is in the realization of egolessness. The highest nobility is in subduing your own mind. The highest excellence is in having a mind which seeks to help others. The highest precept is continual mindfulness. The highest remedy is in understanding the naturelessness of everything. The highest activity is not to conform with worldly concerns. The highest siddhi is the lessening and transmutation of the passions. The highest giving is found in non-attachment. The highest moral practice is a peaceful mind. The highest patience is humility. The highest effort is to abandon attachment to activities. The highest meditation is the mind without pretension. The highest wisdom is not to grasp anything as it appears."

"And what is the final goal of the teaching?" the three disciples asked.

Atīśa replied, "The final goal of the teaching is possession of the essence of voidness and compassion. Just as in the world there is a panacea for all sickness called the solitary heroic medicine, there is

the realization of voidness, which remedies all the fettering passions." "But many say they have realized voidness. Why do their anger and attachment remain?"

"They are speaking empty words, for when you fully realize the meaning of voidness, your body, speech, and mind react with pleasure, like slipping fresh butter into barley soup. The great sage Āryadeva said:

The nature of existence—

Is it empty or not?

Merely feeling this doubt

Tears saṃsāra asunder.

"Therefore, when you realize the correct meaning of voidness, it is just like the solitary heroic medicine, for all the path is included in that realization."

"How do you include the entire path within the realization of voidness?" the disciples asked.

"All the path is included in the six transcendences (*pāramitā*). When you realize the correct meaning of voidness—and lose your blind lust for all things, material and spiritual—your life becomes one flowing act of transcendent giving. In the absence of attachment, you are no longer defiled by non-virtuous deeds, and you enter the ever-flowing harmony of transcendent moral practice. In this freedom from defilement, you also liberate yourself from the passionate domination of 'I' and 'mine' and attain the ever-flowing transcendent patience. As you take great pleasure in the realization of voidness, your life becomes one ever-flowing transcendent effort. Through this, you lose all attraction to objects and enter the ever-flowing transcendent meditation. And finally, when your mind is freed from the habit of seeing everything through the prism of three aspects,¹³ you will attain the ever-flowing transcendent wisdom."

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"Is it possible for one who realizes the meaning of voidness to attain buddhahood with only the wisdom and meditation of voidness?" a disciple asked.

Atiśa replied, "Whatever you perceive, whatever you proclaim—there is nothing that has not come from your own mind. Understand that this realization of mind is empty. Understanding the non-duality of the realization of mind and of voidness is *wisdom*. *Meditation* is the continuous concentration on this wisdom without any distraction. *Deeds* are the accumulation of merit and wisdom while you realize from the viewpoint of this meditation that everything is like an illusion. Once you are under the influence of these three, their practice will come even in dreams. Once it has come in dreams, it will come at the moment of death. When it comes at the moment of death, it will be present in the *bardo*. Once it is present in the *bardo*, there is certain to be accomplishment of the superior siddhi, and you will become a buddha."

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Once the venerable Atiśa was staying at Nyeythang, southwest of Lhasa. He was asked by the teachers of Shangnaching, Kyur, and Lhangtsang, "What are the teachings of logic (*pramāṇa*)?"

Atiśa replied, "There are many, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, all of which are endless chains of ideation. They are not necessary, and there is no time to be wasted on them. It is time to condense the essential meaning of the teaching."

One of the teachers then asked, "How do you condense the essential meaning of the teaching?"

"Practice love, compassion, and bodhi-mind toward all sentient beings. Make effort to accumulate merit and wisdom on behalf of them all. Dedicate all roots of virtue to attain buddhahood together with all sentient beings, whose number would fill the sky. Understand that all these things are empty of self-nature, like a dream or a magician's illusion."

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When the venerable Atiśa first visited Tibet, he stayed in the western province of Ngari. He gave many precepts to the assembled disciples, who were under the guidance of Lha Jangchub Öd. Then, after two years had passed, Atiśa decided to return to India. Just as he was departing, Lha Jangchub Öd asked, "Even now as you are leaving, could we have one more precept?"

Atiśa answered "What I have already taught you is enough." But Lha Jangchub Öd persisted in his request, so Atiśa gave this precept:

How wonderful! Dear friends, you have clear realization and great knowledge, while I have small worth and am not very intelligent. Yet, since you who are close friends and dear to my heart request me, I give you this advice from my childish knowledge.

Friends, until you have obtained enlightenment, the lama is needed; therefore, depend upon the holy spiritual teacher. Until you fully realize the nature of voidness, you must listen to the teaching; therefore, listen closely to the precept of the lama. Merely understanding the Dharma is not enough to be a buddha; you must practice constantly.

Go far away from any place that is harmful to your practice; always stay in a place that is conducive to virtue. Clamor is harmful until you obtain a firm mind; therefore, stay in an isolated place. Abandon friends who increase your fettering passions; depend on friends who cause you to increase virtue. Bear this in mind. There is never an end of things to do, so limit your activities. Dedicate your virtue day and night, and always be mindful.

Once you have obtained the precept of the lama, you should always meditate on it and act in harmony with his speech. When you do this with great humility, the effects will manifest without delay. If you act according to the

Dharma from the depths of your heart, both food and necessities will come naturally.

Friends, there is no satisfaction in the things you desire. It is like drinking sea water to satisfy thirst. Therefore, be content. Annihilate all forms of pretentiousness, pride, and conceit; be subdued and peaceful. Abandon all that some call virtue, but that is really an obstacle to the practice of Dharma. As if they were stones on a narrow slippery path, you should clear away all ideas of gain and respect, for they are the rope of the devil. Like snot in your nose, blow out all thoughts of fame and praise, for they serve only to beguile and delude.

As the happiness, pleasure, and friends you have accumulated are of but a moment's duration, turn your back on them. Future life is longer than this life, so carefully secure your treasure of virtue to provide for the future. You leave everything behind when you die; do not be attached to anything.

Leave off despising and deprecating others and generate a compassionate mind toward those who are your inferiors. Do not have deep attachment to your friends and do not discriminate against your enemies. Without being jealous or envious of others' good qualities, with humility take up those good qualities yourself. Do not bother examining the faults of others, but examine your own faults. Purge yourself of them like bad blood. Nor should you concentrate on your own virtues; instead, concentrate on the virtues of others and respect those others as a servant would. Extend loving-kindness to all beings as though they were your own children.

Always have a smiling face and a loving mind. Speak honestly and without anger. If you go about saying many senseless things, you will make mistakes; thus, speak in

moderation. If you do many senseless things, your virtuous work will cease; give up actions that are not religious. It is useless to make effort in unessential work. Because whatever you do comes as a result of your karma from long ago, results never match your present desires. Therefore, be calm.

Alas, it is far better to die than to cause a holy person shame; thus, ever be straightforward and without deceit. All the misery and happiness of this life arise from the karma of this and previous lives; do not blame others for your circumstances. Remember to repay the kindness of the lama, as all happiness is his blessing.

Until you subdue yourself, you cannot subdue others; therefore, first subdue yourself. As you are unable to ripen others without clairvoyance, make a great effort to achieve clairvoyance.

You will surely die, leaving behind whatever wealth you have accumulated, so be careful not to gather defilements due to wealth. As distracting enjoyments are without substance, adorn yourself with the virtue of giving. Always keep pure moral practice, for it is beautiful in this life and ensures happiness in future lives. In this world age of the *kaliyuga* where hatred is rampant, don the armor of patience, which nullifies anger. We remain in the world by the power of sloth; thus, we must ignite like a great fire the effort of achievement. Moment after moment your life is wasted by the lure of worldly activities; it is time to meditate. Because you are under the influence of wrong views, you do not realize the nature of voidness. Zealously seek the meaning of reality!

Friends, *samsāra* is a vast swamp in which there is no real happiness. Hurry to the place of liberation. Meditate according to the precept of the lama and dry up the river of *samsāric* misery. Always keep this in mind. Listen well to

this advice, which is not mere words but comes straight from my heart. If you follow these precepts you will make not only me happy, but yourselves and all others as well. Though I am ignorant, I urge you to remember these words.

ཅེ་ཅེ་ཅེ་

When the venerable Atiśa was staying on Yerpadrak, near Lhasa, he gave the following precept to Yeshe Barwa of Olgud: "I bow down to the Blessed One and to Ārya Tārā. I bow down to the holy lamas."

"Noble sons, reflect deeply on these words. In the kaliyuga the human lifespan is short, and there is much to be understood. The duration of life is uncertain; you do not know how long you will live. Thus, you must make great effort now to fulfill your right desires.

"Do not proclaim yourself a bhikṣu if you obtain the necessities of life in the manner of a layman. Though you live in a monastery and have given up worldly activities, if you fret about what you have given up, you have no right to proclaim, 'I am a bhikṣu living in a monastery.' If your mind still persists in desire for pretty things and still produces harmful thoughts, do not proclaim, 'I am a bhikṣu living in a monastery.' If you still go about with worldly people and waste time in worldly, senseless talk with those with whom you live, even though you are living in a monastery, do not proclaim, 'I am a bhikṣu living in a monastery.' If you are impatient and go about feeling slighted, if you cannot be even the least bit helpful to others, do not proclaim, 'I am a bodhisattva-bhikṣu.'

"If you speak thus to worldly people, you are a great liar. You may get away with saying such things. However, you cannot deceive those who have the boundless sight of clairvoyance, nor can you deceive those who have the Dharmā-eye of great omniscience. Neither can you deceive yourself, for the effects of karma follow after you.

"Moreover, when generating bodhi-mind, remember the vows you have taken before the lamas and deities. Do not say, 'It is too

difficult to be patient,' when you meet with someone who gives you the opportunity for special patience. Remember that even if it is very difficult, there is always something that can be done. Prior to taking a vow, consider carefully whether it is too difficult for you to keep. For if you do not keep a vow once you have taken it, you will be deceiving the lamas and deities. And again, always remember that even though a thing seems to be difficult, there is always something that can be done.

"To stay in a monastery, it is necessary to give up worldly ways and attachment to friends and relatives. By renouncing these, you are getting rid of all the cooperating causes of attachment and longing. From then on you must seek the precious bodhi-mind. Not even for an instant should you allow your past obsession with worldly concerns to arise. Formerly, you did not properly practice the Dharma, and under the influence of past habits that sapped your strength, you continually produced the concepts of a worldly person. Because such concepts are predominant, unless you make use of strong antidotes to them, it is useless to remain in a monastery. You would be like the birds and wild animals that live there.

"Do not think, 'It is too difficult to apply the antidotes right now.' If the wish-fulfilling jewel should happen to fall from the hands of a blind man, he may never find it again. As you practice, do not count the months and years, but continually examine the strength of your meditation and the extent of your realization. See whether or not your fettering passions are diminishing. Always be mindful. Do not make yourself miserable, nor should you ever even attempt to deceive yourself or the lamas and deities. Do not do anything that would bring disaster to yourself or others.

"When you diminish the activities of this life, you are only doing what is necessary. If there is a heap of filth in front of you, you have to get rid of it quickly. Should someone help you, why not be happy? In the same way you must get rid of all your habitual thoughts, using whatever antidotes are available to you. And, if the lama and your

spiritual friends help you to do this, why not be happy?

"Having promised before the lamas and deities to work for the benefit of living beings, do not differentiate among those to whom you give gifts. Although there are differences in people, there is no differentiation in bodhi-mind.

"Do not be angry with those who would harm you. If you allow yourself to become angry, how can you cultivate patience? When fettering passions arise, you must remember their opposing practice. Otherwise, why bother with religious practice while increasing fettering passions? Constantly guarding your precious bodhi-mind, you should not have the slightest gap in your remembrance. If even a tiny gap should appear, the devil of fettering passions will enter. And when this devil enters, he will obstruct the bodhi-mind, and you will be unable to help others and will even fall into lower states of being. Think it over.

"Even if you have the thought, 'I have done religious practice,' you will go to your death empty-handed. Noble son, when you die, be careful that your lama and spiritual friends do not worry or despair. Do not bring doubt or despair to laymen who are faithful to the Dharma. You must check yourself again and again by comparing the teachings of Buddha with your own mind. If you do not do this, even though you think, 'I have done religious practice,' you will stray from the teaching. Because of this, at the time of death there will be no sign of your having practiced bodhi-mind, and when the sign that you will fall into lower states of being appears, others will feel great worry and despair. Therefore, do not be lazy in your practice of the Dharma or let yourself be deceived by the proud thought, 'I have spent my whole life devoted to religion,' and thus go empty-handed into the instant of death.

"In short, staying in a monastery will not be helpful if you do not reverse your obsession for fine things and do not renounce the activities of this life. For if you do not cut off these inclinations, thinking that you can work for the aims of both this and future

lives, you will perform nothing but incidental religious practice. This type of practice is nothing but hypocritical and pretentious practice done for selfish gain.

"Therefore, you should always seek spiritual friends and shun bad company. Do not become settled in one place or accumulate many things. Whatever you do, do in harmony with the Dharma. Let whatever you do be a remedy for the fettering passions. This is actual religious practice; make great effort to do this. As your knowledge increases, do not be possessed by the demon of pride.

"Staying in an isolated place, subdue yourself. Have few desires and be contented. Neither delight in your own knowledge nor seek out the faults of others. Do not be fearful or anxious. Be of good will and have no prejudice. Concentrate on the Dharma when distracted by wrong things.

"Be humble, and if you are defeated, accept it gracefully. Give up boastfulness; renounce desire. Always generate the compassionate mind. Whatever you do, do in moderation. Be easily pleased and easily sustained. Run like a wild animal from whatever would entrap you.

"If you do not renounce worldly existence, do not say you are holy. If you have not renounced land and agriculture, do not say you have entered the priesthood. If you do not renounce desire, do not say you are a bhikṣu. If you are without love and compassion, do not say you are a bodhisattva. If you do not renounce activity, do not say you are a great meditator. Do not cherish your desires.

"In short, when you stay at a monastery, engage in few activities and just meditate on the Dharma. Do not have cause for repentance at the time of death."

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At another time, Aśiśa stated, "This kaliyuga is not the time to display your ability; it is the time to persevere through hardship. It is not the time to take a high position, but the time to be humble. It is not the time to rely on many attendants, but the time to rely on

isolation. Nor is it the time to subdue disciples; it is the time to subdue yourself. It is not the time of merely listening to words, but the time of contemplation on their meaning. Nor is it the time to go visiting here and there; it is the time to stay alone."

ॐ३३ॐ

Afrer Ariśa passed into parinirvāna, the teacher Drom became his successor. One time his three disciples, the brothers Potowa, Cheningawa, and Puchungwa, asked Geshe Drom, "Please tell us the method of practice that includes the essence of all the paths to omniscient buddhahood."

Geshe Drom answered, "Although there are an inconceivable number of precepts, each of which is an entrance to the path of enlightenment, there is, for one who has the necessary foundation for practice, only one thing to be obtained."

"What is that one thing?" the three brothers asked.

"Possession of the essence of voidness and compassion. Let me explain this. Voidness is the *absolute* bodhi-mind: it is the realization that all phenomena are by nature without truly existent birth. Compassion is the *relative* bodhi-mind: it is great compassion extended to all living beings who have not yet realized this fundamental birthlessness.

"Therefore, those who practice the Mahāyāna path should first make effort in the method of generating these two aspects of bodhi-mind. Once this bodhi-mind has been attained, it should be diligently practiced. By doing this, one is certain to manifest the rūpakāya and the dharmakāya, the final effects of achieving both aspects of bodhi-mind.

"There are many methods of generating the two aspects of bodhi-mind, but condensed into a way of practice, there are no more than three root methods, and sprouting from these, nine principal branch methods. The three root methods are mind-practice, the accumulation of merit and wisdom, and the search for samādhi. Each root method has three principal branch methods.

"The three principal branch methods of mind-practice are the meditation on impermanence, the meditation of love and compassion, and the meditation on the egolessness of all persons and phenomena. Among the various methods of mind-practice, these three are the only important ones; all others are included within them.

"The principal branch methods for the accumulation of merit and wisdom are to honor the lama, to worship the Three Jewels, and to honor the Saigha. All other methods of the accumulation of merit and wisdom are contained in these three; thus, they are the only important ones.

"The principal methods of seeking samādhi are to maintain perfect moral practice, to pray to the lamas of the lineage, and to maintain continual solitude. These three methods are the only important ones in seeking the highest samādhi of abiding tranquility and intense insight; all others are included within them.

"By practicing these nine methods, you will naturally produce the two aspects of bodhi-mind. When you produce the absolute bodhi-mind, you will spontaneously realize that all phenomena, whether inner or outer, are empty of real existence, from the beginning without truly existent birth and totally free from ego-reflection.¹⁴ In this realization, you will find boundless joy. When you produce the relative bodhi-mind, you will generate a deep love and compassion toward all those living beings who have not realized absolute bodhi-mind. Then, whatever you do will be for nothing other than the benefit of these myriad beings, and because you have achieved bodhi-mind, whatever you have done previously will be for their benefit also.

"There are two aspects to the conjoining of absolute and relative bodhi-mind. At the time you generate absolute bodhi-mind, you perceive the voidness of all existence. You must at this same moment of perceiving voidness, generate special compassion toward all living beings, who are not negated by your perception of voidness. At the time of generating relative bodhi-mind, deep compassion toward all living beings, you must also see the non-differentiation of self and others.

"Appearances are like a magician's illusions; actually, they are empty of self-nature. When you have successfully generated this unified realization of the two aspects of bodhi-mind, you have correctly entered the Mahāyāna path. By practicing that realization, you will come to the completion of meditation and will naturally obtain the rūpakāya and the dharmakāya. The dharmakāya arises from voidness, the absolute bodhi-mind; the rūpakāya arises from compassion, the relative bodhi-mind. From inseparable practice of the two aspects of bodhi-mind, you will obtain the inseparable dharmakāya and rūpakāya."

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Again the three brothers questioned the teacher Drom: "In order to work perfectly for oneself and others, which is important, right view (*ita-ba*) or deeds (*spyod-pa*)?"

The teacher Drom replied, "One who has obtained the necessary foundation for practice and has entered the gate of the Mahāyāna must unify pure wisdom (right view) and pure deeds so that he may do perfect work for self and others. Wisdom alone or deeds alone is not enough."

"What, then, is pure wisdom, and what are pure deeds?"

"Pure wisdom, or right view, consists in the realization that all existents are fundamentally free from the two extremes—eternalism, the extreme of existence, and nihilism, the extreme of nonexistence. All phenomena have no *actual* existence; whether appearing inside or outside, their existence is merely relative. They are like dreams, illusions, and apparitions. Furthermore, pure wisdom is the understanding that all things are but a projection of your own mind. Understanding this, you do not seek out or have attachment to anything.

"Pure deeds are understanding the infallible effects of good and bad actions in this relative existence, which is illusory and dreamlike. Further, they are striving with deep compassion, while being careful of the cause and effect of karma, for the benefit of all living beings who do not understand the nature of existence.

"One who produces in himself the two aspects of bodhi-mind will naturally produce pure wisdom and pure deeds."

The disciples then asked, "Is it wrong to have pure wisdom alone or pure deeds alone?"

Geshe Drom replied, "If you have pure wisdom but do not have pure deeds and lose yourself in impetuous behavior, not being careful of the causes and effects of karma, you will be of no benefit to yourself and others, and even your pure wisdom will go wrong. Should you have pure deeds but lack the perception of the fundamental voidness of all things, you will not be able to benefit yourself and others and your pure deeds will begin to go wrong. If you do not unify pure wisdom and pure deeds, you will inevitably fall into mistaken paths. Therefore, you must learn both."

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At another time, the three brothers asked Drom, "Which is more important, to help living beings by means of the teaching, or to practice in an isolated place?"

The teacher answered, "A beginner who has no internal realization cannot help living beings with the teaching. His blessing is like pouring from an empty jar—nothing will come out. His advice is like unfermented beer—it has no essence.

"The person of admirable deeds who has not yet obtained the firmness of warmth¹⁵ does not have the ability to act for the benefit of living beings. His blessing is like pouring from a full vessel—when it has filled another, it itself is empty. His advice is like a butter lamp held in the hand—it may illuminate others, but the holder remains in the shadows.

"However, when a person has entered the stages of the āryas,¹⁶ whatever he does brings benefit to living beings. His blessing is like a magic vessel—though it fills countless vessels, it does not empty itself. His advice is like a butter lamp held by the base—it illuminates others and the one who holds it as well.

"Therefore, this kaliyuga is not the time for an individual to be of help to living beings unless he has cultivated love, compassion, and bodhi-mind in isolation. It is the time to guard against fettering passions. It is not the time to cut down the seedling of the magical medicine tree, but the time to cultivate it."

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A teacher from the district of Kham asked the teacher Drom, "What are the individual meanings of the two types of egolessness?"

Drom replied, "From the crown of your head to the soles of your feet, you cannot find anything which is 'I,' even though you search and make minute inquiry with your mind. This is the egolessness of person. Understand also that the mind of the seeker is without natural existence—that is the egolessness of phenomena."

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Lotsomo, from the Drom family of Penyulbay, once gave forty bushels of barley to the Radreng monastery. As she was in the presence of the teacher Drom, she said, "Geshe-la, I would like to talk with you. These monks are assembled for the purpose of attaining omniscient buddhahood. We lay people are also here for that purpose. As you have been filled with the precept of the venerable Aṅśa as one vessel fills another, I would now like to ask you to give us, with nothing unmentioned, the true precept of obtaining buddhahood."

The teacher Drom told them, "First, meditate on the causes and effects of karma and on the imminence of death. Keep pure all the vows that you have taken. Meditate on love and compassion, and make firm your bodhi-mind. To do these things, use the methods to accumulate merit and wisdom and to purify yourself of sinful deeds. Integrate non-objectification with the three aspects of everything, so that your mind no longer discriminates between the perceiver, the object perceived, and the act of perceiving. Then, dedicate all your roots of virtue to attain perfect enlightenment together with all living beings.

"When you have done this, you will have no cause to regret that you did not meet the venerable Aṅśa, for there is no other teaching than this. Nor, in the future, will anyone need be disheartened that they did not meet old Drom, for there is no higher teaching than this for the accomplishment of buddhahood."

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An upāsaka asked the teacher Drom, "Is it not true that abiding in love, compassion, and bodhi-mind is always the cause, whether by direct or indirect means, of accomplishing the purpose of others?"

Geshe Drom answered, "It is, without a doubt, the cause of accomplishing the perfect purpose of others and, thus, becomes the cause of your own perfected purpose. From the moment of abiding in love, compassion, and bodhi-mind, you can call yourself a 'non-returner,' for there is small possibility of your being born among the three lower states of being. At this point, it is only by the influence of very strong and sudden circumstances or very bad former activities that you can enter the lower states of being. Should this happen, by merely remembering for a fraction of an instant love, compassion, and bodhi-mind, you will immediately free yourself from the lower states of being and will certainly obtain the high state of a human or god.

"Furthermore, as Śāntideva stated in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (*Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*):

All happiness in the world
Comes from wishing others happiness;
All misery in the world
Comes from wishing your own happiness.

What need to say many things?
Children do things for themselves,
Buddha Śākyamuni does things for others—
Look at the difference.

"Therefore, love, compassion, and bodhi-mind are the causes of accomplishing the great purposes of self and others."

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One day an old gentleman was circumambulating the Radreng monastery. Geshe Drom said to him, "Sir, I am happy to see you circumambulating, but wouldn't you rather be practicing the Dharma?"

Thinking this over, the old gentleman felt it might be better to read Mahāyāna sutras. While he was reading in the temple courtyard, Geshe Drom said, "I am happy to see you reciting sutras, but wouldn't you rather be practicing the Dharma?"

At this, the old gentleman thought that perhaps he should meditate. He sat cross-legged on a cushion, with his eyes half-closed. The teacher Drom said again, "I am so happy to see you meditating, but wouldn't it be better to practice the Dharma?"

Now totally confused, the old gentleman asked, "Geshe-la, please tell me what I should do to practice the Dharma."

The teacher Drom replied, "Renounce attraction to this life. Renounce it now. For if you do not renounce attraction to this life, whatever you do will not be the practice of the Dharma, as you have not passed beyond the eight worldly concerns. Once you have renounced this life's habitual thoughts and are no longer distracted by the eight worldly concerns, whatever you do will advance you on the path of liberation."

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"What is the difference between Dharma and non-Dharma?" the teacher Drom was asked by Potowa.

"If something is in opposition to fettering passions, it is Dharma. If it is not, it is not Dharma. If it does not accord with worldly people, it is Dharma. If it does accord, it is not Dharma. If it accords with the teachings of Buddha, it is Dharma. If it does not accord, it is

not Dharma. If good follows, it is Dharma. If bad follows, it is not Dharma."

ॐ३३३

Geshe Gonpapa said, "Omniscience is founded on merit and wisdom. Merit and wisdom are founded on bodhi-mind. Bodhi-mind is founded on love and compassion. The precepts of all these are founded on six transcendences.

"Further, giving is founded on non-attachment. Moral practice is founded on reliance on spiritual friends. Patience is founded on humility. Effort is founded on meditation on death. Meditation is founded on dwelling in isolation. Wisdom is founded on mindfulness. Blessings are founded on your faith and respect for the lama and the Three Jewels. Siddhis are founded on vows and obligations. Excellence is founded on hearing, thinking, and meditating. Being of service to others is founded on desirelessness. The progress of self and others is founded on meditation and devotion."

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Yerbay Shangtsun said, "When we desire liberation from the depths of our hearts, we should, through continuous contemplation of the imminence of death, always abide in the thoughts and deeds of the four qualities of the āryas.

"These four qualities of the āryas are: to be satisfied with simple religious dress, to be satisfied with meager food, to be satisfied with a poor cushion, and to be satisfied with the minimum of medicine.

"Said in another way, these four are: to be desireless, to be content, to be easily sustained, and to be easily satisfied. To be desireless is to be unattached to all possessions and not to desire many or good things to maintain oneself. Contentment is to be happy with simple things. To be easily sustained means to subsist with meager and poor food, a poor cushion, and simple dress. To be easily satisfied means to be content with scant alms and recognition.

"A person who lives in this way is said to be abiding in the four qualities of the āryas, as all his practice of Dharma is directed toward enlightenment. A person who is completely taken up with worldly desires is not abiding in the four qualities of the āryas. Instead, he is said to be abiding in the qualities of the devil, for abiding in non-virtuous activities is the cause of rebirth in saṃsāra's lower states.

"If we do not give up the desires of this life now, we will come under the influence of attachment again in future lifetimes. To give up the desires of this life, the most potent countermeasure is continual meditation on impermanence. If you do not meditate on impermanence in early morning, by midday you will have many desires."

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Again Yerbay Shangtsun said, "If you wish to obtain omniscient buddhahood, you must be free of three entanglements. You must not entangle virtue with prejudice. You must not entangle activities of body and speech with fettering passions. You must not entangle meditation with inclination toward your own liberation. In short, you must practice the path of transcendent realization.

"What is the definition of transcendent realization? Widening what should be widened, it is the widening of wisdom. Constraining what should be constrained, it is constraint in activities. Heroic when heroism is needed, it is heroic opposition to fettering passions. Cautious where caution is needed, it is the caution that provides patience in times of adversity."

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Geshe Potowa was asked by an upāsaka, "To actually practice the Dharma, what is most important?"

"The most important thing is the meditation on impermanence. Meditate on impermanence, the imminence of death; it will cause

you to begin practicing the Dharma. This will create conditions impelling you to do virtuous work, which will then assist you in realizing the equality of all things in their nature of existence.

"Meditation on impermanence will also cause you to decide to renounce the enjoyments of this life, which will create the conditions for ridding yourself of all worldly desire and thus assist you to enter the path of nirvāṇa.

"When you have meditated on impermanence and have gained some understanding, you will seek the Dharma. This will create the conditions for the achievement of Dharma and thus assist in its final accomplishment.

"Meditating on impermanence and finding some understanding of it will also cause you to commence armor-like effort, which will, in turn, create the conditions for commencing the effort of religious practice. This will assist you in commencing effort on the stage of non-returning."

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Kyang Chadtsul petitioned Geshe Potowa for a precept.

Geshe Potowa answered, "When you frequently contemplate impermanence and become conscious of the certainty of death, you will have no difficulty in abandoning sinful activities and doing virtuous work.

"In addition to that, when you frequently meditate on love and compassion and produce them in yourself, you will have no difficulty in working for the benefit of living beings.

"Finally, when you frequently meditate on voidness and produce some realization of it, you will have no difficulty in liquidating delusion."

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[The Eight Wordly Concerns by the American Buddhist nun and author Thubten Chodron (from <http://thubtenchodron.org/2007/12/hopes-fears-samsara/>)]

Back in the 1970s, Lama Zopa Rinpoche compassionately taught us again and again the evils of the eight worldly concerns. Here's what they are, listed in four pairs with each revolving around a certain kind of object.

1. Taking delight in having money and material possessions, and the other one in the pair is being disappointed, upset, angry when we lose them or don't get them.
2. Feeling delighted when people praise us and approve of us and tell us how wonderful we are, and the converse is feeling very upset and dejected when they criticize us and disapprove of us—even if they are telling us the truth!
3. Feeling delighted when we have a good reputation and a good image, and the converse is being dejected and upset when we have a bad reputation.
4. Feeling delighted when we experience sense pleasures—fantastic sights, sounds, odors, tastes and tactile sensations—and feeling dejected and upset when we have unpleasant sensations.

These eight worldly concerns keep us pretty busy in our life. Most of our life is spent trying to obtain four of them and trying to avoid the other four.

Lama Yeshe [her teacher] used to talk about how we have a yo-yo mind. "I get a present! I feel so happy!" "I lost that wonderful gift. I'm so unhappy." Somebody says "You're wonderful," and we feel up; somebody says, "You made a mistake," then our mood goes down. This constant yo-yo mind is dependent on external objects and people and leaves us oblivious to how our mind is the actual source of our happiness and misery. We have bought into the appearances of this life, thinking that money and material things, praise and approval, a good reputation and marvelous sense experiences are the epitome of happiness. In our confusion, we think these things will bring us lasting and perfect well-being. This is what our consumer culture tells us and we unthinkingly believe it. Then—at least in wealthy countries—we wind up disappointed and frustrated because we thought all of these things are the cause of genuine happiness and they aren't. They bring their own set of problems—such as fear of losing them, jealousy when others have more, and empty feeling inside our hearts.

Thus the eight are concern for:

- (1) possessions and (2) their absence
- (3) praise vs. (4) blame
- (5) reputation, fame and (6) the lack thereof
- (7) pleasure and comfort vs. (8) the lack thereof

From Here to Enlightenment

AN INTRODUCTION TO TSONG-KHA-PA'S CLASSIC TEXT
The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Translated, edited, and annotated by

Guy Newland



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Truly Practicing

Gung-tang Rinpoche's songs include these lines:¹⁶

Having attained this precious human life of leisure and opportunity, there is a danger that I may lose it without giving it meaning. So now is the time for me to reach for liberation.

He goes on to admonish himself:

Now, therefore, I must be seized—as though by an iron hook—by awareness of impermanence.

We all have to recognize the tremendous opportunity that we have. As humans we have this rare intelligence, but there is a real danger that we will waste it. Death is certain, but when we will die is totally unpredictable. We could lose our precious human existence at any moment. With such reflections, we must motivate ourselves to do something meaningful *right now*. The best way to make your human existence meaningful is to really engage in the practice of Dharma. During formal sitting meditation and in between sessions, in different ways, be mindful and introspectively vigilant. Keep constant watch on your mind.

Remember that such practices are common to all traditions. It is entirely up to individuals—whether they accept religion or not—to decide whether to do these practices. You do not have to be a religious person in order to be a good, sensitive human being; among nonbelievers, there are many wonderful people. But if you do accept religion, then you should be serious and sincere. Make the teachings of your tradition a real part of your life. Every day, from the moment you wake, use one corner of your mind to watch your mind and your behavior.

One time in Jerusalem, I was in a meeting with some Jews and Palestinians together. An Israeli Jewish teacher told us how he teaches his students to deal with situations where they cannot avoid people they do not like. For example, he said that his Palestinian students feel a sense

of agitation at Israeli checkpoints. He advised his students that, when meeting someone whose presence agitates their minds, they should practice considering that person as someone made in God's image. His students told him that this was extremely helpful. When they remembered his advice, their minds were much calmer and it was easier to meet the guards at checkpoints without being overwhelmed with irritation. This is what practice means. We actually have to do these things. The whole point of religious teaching is its practical implementation, which can be so wonderful.

In order to carry out a practice—such as constantly watching the mind—you should form a determination, make a pledge, right when you wake up: "Now, for the rest of this day, I will put into practice what I believe just as much as I can." It is very important that, at the start of the day, we should set out to shape what will happen later. Then, at the end of every day, check what happened. Review the day. And if you carried through for that whole day your morning's determination, then rejoice. Reinforce further your motivation to continue in the same line. However, when you do your reviewing, you may discover that you did things during the day that are contrary to your religious values and beliefs. You should then acknowledge this and cultivate a deep sense of remorse. Strengthen your resolve not to indulge in these actions in the future.

If you keep practicing in this way, then it is certain that over time there will be real change, genuine transformation, within your mind. This is the way to improve. It is impossible to really change through one session of prayer. But improvement definitely can come by constantly watching our minds and carrying out the practices we believe in day-by-day, year-by-year, decade-by-decade. This understanding is common to believers of all religious traditions.

CHAPTER TWO

The Great Value of This Teaching

Transmission

THIS BOOK, the *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, was of course written by Atisha Dipamkara, an eleventh-century Bengali who came to Tibet.¹⁷ Shantarakshita had come in the eighth century, so by the eleventh century the Nalanda tradition was well established in Tibet. Atisha composed a short text, *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, with the aim of providing a way to integrate the various Buddhist teachings intended for practitioners at different levels of mental capacity.¹⁸ Atisha's Lamp became the root of all stages of the path (*lam rim*) literature. In that sense, one can treat Tsong-kha-pa's *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* as an extensive commentary on, or exposition of, that short text by Atisha.

I received the transmission of these teachings on the *Great Treatise* from Trijang Rinpoche and from Ling Rinpoche, my two tutors. Trijang Rinpoche had received these teachings from his teacher, Pabongka Rinpoche. Ling Rinpoche also had Pabongka in his lineage, but in addition—when he was quite young—he also received these teachings from the Thirteenth Dalai Lama.

The Buddha

The *Great Treatise* (I: 33) opens with a salutation to Manjushri¹⁹ in the Sanskrit language. This is partly to indicate that the source of the Tibetan tradition is the Sanskrit tradition. Sanskrit became the domi-

nant medium through which the Buddha's teaching was presented in the Nalanda tradition. The custom evolved to acknowledge that the teaching derives from Indian sources by often placing a salutation in Sanskrit at the beginning of Tibetan texts.

Then, in Tibetan, the text opens with a salutation to the Buddha. Here Tsong-kha-pa pays homage to the Buddha by reflecting upon the qualities of the Buddha's body, speech, and mind. In the first line he reflects upon the qualities of the Buddha's body, pointing out that the Buddha's physical body came into being as a result of its causes. This is an important idea, right here. The Buddha's embodiment in form results from specific causes and Tsong-kha-pa identifies those causes as good qualities—by which he means virtuous acts. Even the attainment of buddhahood is the result of something; it arises from causes and conditions. Buddhahood does not come out of nowhere, nor is it an eternal permanent state that is uncaused. In a sense, Tsong-kha-pa is echoing the point Dignaga makes in the opening stanza of his *Compendium of Valid Cognition* where, in identifying Buddha as a reliable person, he says that the Buddha has *become* such a person.²⁰ Commenting on that, Dharmakīrti says that in order to negate the idea that the Buddha was uncaused, Dignaga intentionally uses the term "become."²¹ The Buddha, through some processes, *came to be* a reliable person.

Tsong-kha-pa speaks about the Buddha's body as arising from a vast array of causes. These causes are listed in various texts, particularly in studies of the Perfection of Wisdom tradition, but they are also explicitly mentioned in Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland*.²² Tsong-kha-pa emphasizes that even the Buddha whom we revere, the Blessed Buddha, was previously an ordinary being on the path to becoming a buddha. There was a time when the Buddha was just like us. By gathering all of the relevant conditions, he evolved into a fully enlightened being.

To understand fully the significance of this first line—that the Buddha's body is born of a vast array of excellent causes—you have to understand the relationships among the four noble truths.²³ And in order to understand completely the presentation of the four noble truths, you have to develop an understanding of the teaching of the two

truths, the conventional and the ultimate.²⁴ In particular, it is important for you to understand how the two truths have the same nature but distinct identities. We will explain more when we discuss the practices pertaining to the person of medium capacity.²⁵ Implicit in this line on how the Buddha's qualities are born from a vast array of excellent causes is the important principle of dependent origination in terms of cause and effect.

Tsong-kha-pa writes that the Buddha's *speech* fulfills the hopes and aspirations of countless sentient beings, limitless living beings. The "hopes" of countless beings means their welfare. The welfare of living beings includes their immediate and temporary welfare as well as their long-term, ultimate welfare. To be able to fulfill their welfare in either sense, the Buddha needs a deep understanding of what these needs are and how most effectively to meet them. The primary way that the Buddha acts for the welfare of others is speech. Thus, the enlightened quality of the Buddha's speech is its capacity to fulfill the aspirations of living beings.

In some texts we find reference to the Buddha's qualities in terms of their supernormal nature; there are marvelous qualities associated with the Buddha's body, speech, and mind. Various texts identify marvelous qualities of the Buddha's physical *body*; the marvelous quality of the Buddha's *mind* is that it can realize all facts. The Buddha's speech is marvelous in providing instructions that help all beings. Of these three, the qualities of the Buddha's speech are always considered the most important.

In his *Praise to the Buddha for Teaching Dependent Origination* Tsong-kha-pa writes—addressing the Buddha—that among all of your enlightened activities the most important is your speech and that, within that, speech teaching dependent origination is the very most important.²⁶ Also, in Nagarjuna's texts, his opening salutations to the Buddha often involve particularly recognizing the Buddha's having taught dependent origination.²⁷

We notice that Tsong-kha-pa identifies the qualities of the Buddha's body primarily from the point of view of its *causes*. Then, when identify-

ing the qualities of the Buddha's speech, he does this mainly in terms of its *results*, how it brings about the welfare of others. And when identifying the qualities of the Buddha's mind, he identifies the enlightened quality of the Buddha's mind as its capacity to be fully immersed in realization of ultimate truth while in the same instant perceiving the world of diversity as well. This enlightened mind of the Buddha is the actual identity of buddhahood. So he praises the Buddha's mind from the perspective of its being the *nature* of buddhahood.

After paying homage to the Buddha as the great sage of the Shakya clan, in subsequent stanzas Tsong-kha-pa makes salutations to Manjushri and Maitreya²⁹ and then to Nagarjuna and Asanga, the two main pioneers of the Mahayana tradition. He then also makes salutations to Anisha Dipamkara, who is, in a sense, the founder of this lineage of teachings on the stages of the path, and also to the great masters who are upholders of this lineage.

Integrated Practice

Tsong-kha-pa (1: 33) then explains his primary motivation for composing the *Great Treatise*. This is quite important. He says that he sees many people who are deeply dedicated to meditation, but are lacking in learning. Because of this deficiency, they focus on just one or two aspects of a particular practice. With only minimal understanding of the overall Buddhist path, they cannot take an approach that integrates into practice all the key elements of the essential teachings.

Those who are learned can sometimes be very skilled at integrating the teachings into their personal practice. But in other cases those who are highly learned in Buddhist text-traditions do not seem to have much actual experience. They may get very little benefit from all of their Dharma learning. Today, we see cases where learning seems to serve as a further reinforcement for the scholar's ego, creating conceit, jealousy, and other problems. Even when these negative qualities are not pronounced, some teachers somehow seem lost when it comes to applying what they know in practice. Faced with the vast dimensions of

the teachings, their approach is scattered. Such scholars are somehow unable to bring the teachings together in an integrated format that is useful for actual practice.

Furthermore, Tsong-kha-pa says that many individuals show partiality in their study and in their practice. For example, in Tibet, when someone happens to be keen in the practice of the Sutra path, then they tend to ignore the Vajrayana teachings.³⁰ If someone happens to be a practitioner of Vajrayana, then they tend to ignore the Sutra teachings. If someone is enthusiastic about epistemological studies, then they may specialize in just that. For others, it may be Abhidharma or monastic discipline.

So there are meditation practitioners with no learning, scholars of great learning who cannot apply their learning to practice, and also many others who are in various ways one-sided in their approach to study and practice. Tsong-kha-pa says that all three of these are cases of being unable to practice the Dharma in a way that would truly please those who have wisdom. He means that none of these persons can practice on the basis of an integrated approach encompassing all essential elements of the Buddhist path.

What Atisha gave us in his *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* was just such a way to integrate all of the key elements of the Dharma for an individual practitioner, one person sitting on one cushion. So Tsong-kha-pa says that his heart takes great delight in writing an extensive exposition of Anisha's *Lamp* because it offers a way to practice that *will* please those who have great wisdom. It brings all of the key elements of the teaching into a framework within which one person can practice them all *in stages*.

This integration is very similar to what Aryadeva presents in his *Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way*, there we also have a series of stages. On the first level, you must avoid nonvirtuous actions; in the middle stage, you must stop grasping at self; and finally, you must stop grasping at all views. The one who fully understands this approach is truly wise.³⁰

from:

From Here to Enlightenment

by The Dalai Lama

CHAPTER FIVE

Four Noble Truths

Instructions for Liberation

TSONG-KHA-PA (I: 34 and 69) refers to the question of how to lead students with "actual instructions." This term refers to the *instructions of the Buddha*. As I have explained, what makes instructions distinctly Buddhist is their relevance to *liberation*. When Tsong-kha-pa presents practices for the person of medium capacity, he (I: 267) explains liberation:

Liberation means freedom from bondage, and what binds you to cyclic existence is karma and the afflictions. . . . Since this is the nature of bondage, freedom from rebirth impelled by karma and the afflictions is liberation, and the desire to obtain that freedom is the mind intent on liberation.

The notion of liberation is common in the classical traditions of India. In the Buddhist context, liberation is generally defined as a mental state—or else a quality of mind—that involves freedom from some contamination or stain. Of course, for Buddhists the notion of liberation is tied intimately to the view of selflessness. Nagarjuna gives a precise explanation in his *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, where he says that one gains freedom by stopping karma and afflictions, karma and afflictions arise from false conceptualizations, and these conceptualizations can be calmed by emptiness.⁷⁰ On this reading, Nagarjuna explains emptiness as a *means* for stopping afflictions and karma.

An alternative reading of the Sanskrit text says that false conceptualizations are calmed not by emptiness but *within* emptiness. Cyclic existence (*samsara*) arises on the basis of our distorted understanding of the fundamental nature of mind. So insight into the nature of mind brings about the calming and dissolution of all stains and distortions within the nature of the mind itself. Nagarjuna takes liberation to be the very nature of a mind at the point when all false conceptualizations have been dissolved.

Tsong-kha-pa identifies karma and the afflictions as what bind us; he identifies cyclic existence as the condition in which we are bound. Cyclic existence means conditioned existence with mental and physical aggregates that one has appropriated, taken up under the influence of afflictions and karma. So cyclic existence does not mean having just any kind of mind and body; there *can* be existence with uncontaminated aggregates, liberated existence. Cyclic existence means being born with *karmically conditioned* aggregates. It is cyclic because we continue to exist in this way, going from one set of aggregates to another. Karma and the afflictions trap us here, so there is an element of constraint, a lack of freedom on our part. Dharmakirti's *Commentary on the Compendium of Valid Cognition* identifies the karmically conditioned aggregates themselves as the cyclic existence within which we suffer.⁷

The Order of the Four Noble Truths

In discussing the Buddha's teaching of true suffering as the first noble truth, Tsong-kha-pa (I: 269) first raises a qualm: "True origins are the causes and true sufferings are their effects. Why then did the Blessed One reverse that order?" In fact, the origin of suffering must precede suffering. Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realization* explains suffering and its origin in this actual sequence, with origins first and then sufferings that arise as a result, etc.⁷ However, Tsong-kha-pa (I: 269) explains that, when the Buddha first gave the sermon on the four noble truths, "the Teacher reversed the sequence of cause and effect" for a

specific purpose. It is only when one comes to understand the nature of suffering that true aspiration to seek freedom from that suffering really arises. Therefore, the Buddha teaches the truth of suffering first. The Buddha insists that we must first recognize suffering *as* suffering.

Of course, when we talk about suffering in the context of the four noble truths, we are not talking about suffering in the usual sense. Ordinarily, we take pleasurable experiences and mundane successes as desirable; we do not see them as being in the nature of suffering. When we speak of happiness, we usually mean something that is wonderful or successful in a worldly way. Examining our own attitudes toward people who are successful in worldly terms, we find that we feel admiration and sometimes even envy. Actually, what they have is what we wish to have. So instead of recognizing worldly success to be in the nature of suffering, we take it to be happiness. We need to cultivate a deeper understanding of true sufferings.

The Panchen Lama Losang Chogyen⁷ sums it up quite beautifully. He says that there are many ways in which one can contemplate the nature of suffering. At the first level, evident suffering is something even animals recognize as undesirable and try to escape. At the second level, the suffering of change is something toward which non-Buddhist practitioners cultivate a sense of disenchantment as they seek to attain the pleasures of elevated meditative states of concentration and formless absorption.⁷ But when the Buddha talks about cultivating a true recognition of the meaning of suffering, he means that we need to understand the third level of suffering, the suffering of conditioning. Our very existence is driven and conditioned by karma and afflictions. Tsong-kha-pa and the Panchen Lama point out that our aggregates serve both as conditions for the arising of future suffering and as containers within which we are presently bound in suffering as our past karma ripens. If you can recognize suffering in this sense, then you will be able to generate a genuine aspiration to get out of this sort of conditioned existence. This is renunciation.

Tsong-kha-pa (1: 269) writes:

Once you recognize suffering, you see yourself as submerged in an ocean of suffering, and you realize that, if you want to be liberated from suffering, you must counteract it. Moreover, you recognize that you cannot stop suffering unless you counteract its cause. By investigating the cause of suffering, you come to understand its true origin. Consequently, the Buddha spoke next about the truth of origin.

And he continues:

Next you develop an understanding of the truth of the origin, an understanding that contaminated karma produces the suffering of cyclic existence, that afflictions produce karma, and that the conception of self is the root of the afflictions. When you see that you can eliminate the conception of self, you will vow to realize its cessation, which is also the cessation of suffering.

Later Tsong-kha-pa explains this conception of self more specifically, relating it to the teachings on emptiness. But here he is presenting the general consensus among all the Buddhist schools that grasping at self is the root of cyclic existence. Suffering arises from its origin, its origin is constituted principally by karma and the afflictions, and the root of all the afflictions is the grasping at self.

Changing Our Minds

In cyclic existence, we all have a sense of grasping at self. It is an innate mental state, not something acquired intellectually through philosophical training. It is a very natural state of mind. But is it *correct*? Does it accord with the reality? Just because a perception or a mental state is natural does not mean that it accords with how things are. We must ask

this question and probe into this. And when we do, we come to recognize that grasping at self is really a form of ignorance. It is a distortion.

Things appear to us in one way, but they actually exist in a different way. When we react to events with afflictive emotion, we just react and operate on the level of ordinary appearances. Things appear to us as possessing some kind of independent reality of their own and we tend to affirm that perception immediately, accepting as real that apparent separateness and solidity. We react on the basis of our acceptance of that perception. We then grasp very strongly at the apparent solidity of the objects we perceive. Thus, we are not reacting to things as they actually are.

We have to investigate the disparity between reality and our perceptions. We can learn to differentiate our accustomed perception of reality from reality itself. To do this, we have to have some way of understanding the true mode of being, the actual way that things exist. In Buddhist texts all of the reasoning about emptiness comes down to just this: the importance of establishing proper understanding of the actual nature of reality. When we understand emptiness, then we see that our naive perception of things as having self-existence is distorted. And because this perception is distorted, all of the afflictions based upon it are unstable. They can be rooted out and cleared from our mental states.

We also need to recognize that the essential nature of the mind is not polluted. A person may be temperamentally inclined to hatefulness, but even so he will not *always* be full of hate. He may experience moments of loving-kindness, moments of compassion. Loving-kindness and hatred are diametrically opposed mental states; they cannot coexist in a single individual in a single moment. That even the hateful person is not openly hateful all the time and has occasional moments of compassion shows that the essential nature of the mind is not inseparable from afflictions such as hatred. The essential nature of the mind is such as to allow the arising of afflictions as well as mental states that oppose these afflictions.

Likewise, our grasping at the self-existence of things may seem well established, normal and natural, but that does not mean that it is

proof that they lack ultimate existence.⁷⁷ Emptiness is thus established by taking the fact of causal origination as the premise. Generally speaking, we are naturally aware of causal relationships. To some extent, at a very gross level, even animals are capable of making causal connections. They know that if they eat, they won't be hungry; if they're feeling too hot, they will look for shade. In considering our own future welfare, humans are more capable than animals. We try to save for the future. We try to better educate ourselves so that we will qualify for jobs with bigger paychecks, perhaps with a better-known company. We make causal connections between what we want in the future and the conditions that are necessary to get there. We organize our efforts on the basis of our understanding of such connections.

Nagarjuna helps us to reflect more deeply upon the implications of these cause-and-effect relationships. How is it that effects depend on causes? It is by way of the interdependent nature of reality. Cause-and-effect relationships operate because cause and effect are not separate, enclosed realities. There is an openness in things that allows for relationships to occur. Because relationships are possible, events can relate to each other as cause and effect.

Nagarjuna shows us that by reflecting deeply upon cause and effect we can come to recognize the interrelatedness of things. When you recognize things as having a relational, dependent nature, then you come to see that all phenomena are devoid of their own self-enclosed, intrinsic reality. You then can understand how things exist in terms of designation and convention. Therefore, when the Buddha taught dependent origination in terms of causes and effects in the twelve links, he did not explicitly teach emptiness, but he provided the foundation that allows us to understand emptiness.⁷⁸

We can consider the Buddha's teaching on dependent origination both (1) at the level of cause and effect and (2) in terms of emptiness. The first pertains to developing the conditions for attainment of favorable rebirth in higher realms of existence. The second pertains to the cultivation of the causes and conditions for the attainment of liberation. So dependent origination is vital both to our immediate aim (favorable

integral to the mind's nature. By cultivating the wisdom of selflessness we can gradually undermine this grasping. Eventually we can recognize the utter absence of self-existence. This illustrates that no matter how strong a particular affliction may be, it is not an integral, inseparable element of the mind.

These two points are very important: (1) The afflictions—particularly ignorance that is their root—are distorted and thus unstable; and (2) the afflictions can be separated from the essential nature of the mind. These points allow you to know that our innate sense of grasping at self-existence is a removable mental state. Then, when you hear about the cessation of suffering, you will have a sincere feeling with a distinctive flavor. You will aspire to that freedom and set out to attain it. Tsong-kha-pa (1: 270) says, "In this way, when you do think, 'I shall realize the cessation that is liberation,' you become interested in the truth of the path."⁷⁹

Understanding Dependent Arising

Your notion of what constitutes the fundamental ignorance at the root of cyclic existence depends upon your view of reality. In the case of Nagarjuna, his final position appears in the *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness*, where he writes that while phenomena arise from causes and conditions, ignorance grasps at phenomena as possessing final existence.⁷⁵ Ignorance is a mental state that conceives of dependently originated phenomena as having a final reality of their own. To make this clearer, Aryadeva's *Four Hundred* teaches that just as the sense of touch pervades the body, including the other sense faculties, delusion (ignorance) permeates all of the afflictions. Aryadeva then explains ignorance or delusion by way of its antidote, stating that ignorance will no longer arise in the person who sees dependent origination.⁷⁶ Therefore, we should really delve into and get to the bottom of the teachings on dependent origination.

Nagarjuna's *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness* cites the fact that phenomena come into being in dependence upon causes and conditions as the

rebirth) and our long-term aim (liberation). I think that this is why Tsong-kha-pa says that dependent arising is the most precious jewel in the treasury of the Buddha's teachings.⁷⁹

When we set out to realize these two aims, favorable rebirth has to come first; only on that basis can we realize the second aim, liberation. This is because the practice of the path leading to liberation requires the maximum use of our faculty of intelligence. Human existence has the most advanced form of intelligence. This is why Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland* first presents all the practices aimed at obtaining fortunate rebirth and then goes on to other teachings. Similarly, Aryadeva's *Four Hundred* presents a three-stage sequence of practices: first, you must stop nonvirtuous activity; then, you must cease grasping at self; and finally, you must cease grasping at all false views.⁸⁰ Again, in the stages of the path literature, you begin with preoccupations totally confined to this life, progress to concerns with one's next life, and then eventually develop a motivation to attain liberation.

Tsong-kha-pa (i: 270) writes:

[T]he four truths are taught repeatedly throughout the Mahayana and the lesser vehicle teachings. Since the Sugata^a has included in the four truths the vital points concerning the process of cyclic existence and its cessation, this teaching is crucial for achieving freedom. Since this synoptic outline of the practice is important, it must be taught to students in just this order.

Tsong-kha-pa makes a very important point: one must guide students on the basis of the sequence of the four noble truths, these being the actual instructions of the Buddha.

True Sufferings

Tsong-kha-pa's *Songs of Spiritual Experience* says that if you do not work at contemplating the faults of true sufferings, then you will not

develop an authentic aspiration to liberation.⁸¹ If you believe that existence in cyclic existence is not such a big problem—or that it is actually quite joyful—then you simply will have no real wish for freedom from it.

At the same time, if you do not contemplate the conditions that drive cyclic existence—the origins of suffering—then you will not know how to sever the roots of misery. Even if you recognize the suffering nature of cyclic existence, simply making a wish or prayer to be free from it is not going to help you escape. You have to think about what conditions lead to that suffering. So Tsong-kha-pa teaches that we need to cultivate both disenchantment about cyclic existence and recognition of the factors that bind us within it.

In the *Great Treatise Tsong-kha-pa* (i: 265-295) presents contemplation of the nature of suffering in three broad sections: (1) contemplation of the eight types of suffering; (2) contemplation of the six types of suffering; and (3) further meditations on suffering. About the eighth of the eight types of suffering, Tsong-kha-pa (i: 279) says:

The Buddha said, "In brief, the five appropriated aggregates are suffering." Reflection on the meaning of this teaching again takes in five points. It is the nature of the five aggregates appropriated by karma and the afflictions to be:

- (1) vessels for future suffering;
- (2) vessels for suffering based on what presently exists;
- (3) vessels for the suffering of pain;
- (4) vessels for the suffering of change; and
- (5) vessels for the suffering of conditionality.

Reflect on these again and again.

Here, with regard to the first point, you induce suffering in future lives by taking up these appropriated aggregates.

Our mental and physical aggregates arise through the conditioning of karma and afflictions, so they have a character and nature that is very close to that of karma and afflictions. They have a quality of being

vulnerable to further aggravation by karma and afflictions, so they are receptive to suffering. In this sense, they are “vessels for future suffering.”

During the time of the Twelfth Dalai Lama, there was a very learned Mongolian scholar who happened to be involved in something that led to his being reprimanded. He was slightly disgraced and was feeling really sorry for himself. He then touched his own body and said, “Well, all of this pain and all of this misery becomes possible because I happened to have this karmically conditioned, appropriated body.” The Buddhist point of view is that all problems in the world, both societal and individual, happen because our existence is conditioned by karma and by afflictions. They are what give us the kind of mind and body that is the basis for all these sufferings to arise.

Tsong-kha-pa (1: 279) writes:

As for the second point, the appropriated aggregates form the basis for states, such as illness and old age, that are grounded in the already existing aggregates. The third and the fourth points both come about because the appropriated aggregates are linked with dysfunctional tendencies toward these two types of suffering.

“These two types of suffering” refers to evident suffering and the suffering of change. Tsong-kha-pa (1: 279) continues:

As regards the fifth point, the very existence of the appropriated aggregates constitutes the nature of the suffering of conditionality because all of the compositional factors which depend on previous karma and afflictions are the suffering of conditionality.

Passing over Tsong-kha-pa’s (1: 281-287) discussion of the six types of suffering, we come to the three types of suffering. Of the second of these, the suffering of change, Tsong-kha-pa (1: 289) writes:

Pleasant feelings experienced by beings in cyclic existence are like the pleasure felt when cool water is applied to an inflamed boil or carbuncle: as the temporary feeling fades, the pain reasserts itself.

This is one reason why even what we conventionally identify as pleasurable experiences are recognized to be ultimately in the nature of suffering. Dharmakīrti’s *Commentary on the Compendium of Valid Cognition* points out that impermanence must lead us to recognize the suffering nature of our existence.¹³ The very same causes and conditions that give rise to things simultaneously equip them with a transient nature, a quality of being not only subject to change, but actually changing instant by instant.

One Buddhist school, the Vaibhāṣika, presents impermanence in terms of an end to the continued existence of a thing. They speak of what is known as the four characteristics of conditioned phenomena: arising, enduring, decay, and then cessation. But all other Buddhist schools understand impermanence in terms of moment by moment existence, the momentary quality of things. The fact that a phenomenon is momentary is not contingent upon its contact with some new condition. Rather, the very cause that creates a phenomenon brings it into being as something with a transitory nature.

The natures of transient phenomena are governed by their causes and conditions. So in the particular case of our current situation, what are the causes and conditions governing us? They are karma and the afflictions. In terms of the teaching on the twelve links of dependent origination, the first in the chain is fundamental ignorance. Even the term ignorance (*ma rig pa*) suggests something negative.¹⁴ With such a negative cause, the result is bound to be negative as well. Reflecting on this carefully, we find that there is really no basis for any sense of satisfaction in cyclic existence.

Carrying on the same metaphor that he used earlier, Tsong-kha-pa (1: 290) explains the suffering of conditionality:

Contaminated neutral feelings are like an inflamed boil which is in contact with neither soothing nor irritating substances.

Because these feelings coexist with dysfunctional tendencies, they constitute *the suffering of conditionality*, which, as explained above, does not refer to the feelings alone.

Tsong-kha-pa earlier explained that it is not only our feelings, but all of the mental states and mental factors concomitant with them, that belong to the category of suffering. He (1: 289) writes:

This is called *the suffering of change* and includes not only the feeling itself, but also the main mind and other mental processes that are similar to it, as well as the contaminated objects which, when perceived, give rise to that feeling.

Pleasurable, painful, and neutral feelings are suffering, all are unsatisfactory. All of the mental states associated with those feelings are sufferings; the sensory faculties and their objects, which give rise to those feelings, are suffering. They all engender suffering, so they are classified together.

The Four Seals of the Dharma

Among the four seals of the Buddha's teaching,⁸⁵ the first is that *all conditioned phenomena are impermanent or transient*; the second is that *all contaminated phenomena are in the nature of suffering*. This is Tsong-kha-pa's point. Yet after explaining that all conditioned phenomena are impermanent and that all contaminated phenomena are in the nature of suffering, the Buddha does not stop. Perhaps saying *only* this would cause further depression and a sense of discouragement. Is this suffering endless? Or is there a way to stop it?

This is why the third seal is very important. The Buddha teaches that *all phenomena are empty and devoid of self*. Of course there are different ways to explain the teaching of selflessness in different schools of Buddhist philosophy. Still, in general, all Buddhist schools accept that

it is grasping at self-existence that lies at the root of our suffering. This is the root of all other afflictions. In fact, this grasping at self-existence can be demonstrated to be a distorted way to perceive and experience the world. It is not consonant with reality. Hence, there is a powerful antidote to it and we can cultivate that antidote. This powerful antidote, when applied, can eliminate and eradicate grasping at self. Therefore, the Buddha teaches the fourth seal: *nirvana is true peace*. By applying a powerful antidote against the root of suffering, which is grasping at self, we can develop insight into the nature of reality. This will lead to the attainment of nirvana, true peace. It is beautiful to connect the four seals with the four noble truths, taking them to heart in an integrated way.

Tsong-kha-pa (1: 290) says:

Insofar as the suffering of conditionality is affected by previous karma, as well as the afflictions, and coexists with seeds that will produce future suffering and affliction, it coexists with persistent dysfunctional tendencies.

He then explains why the suffering of conditionality is so pervasive, citing (1: 291) the *Descent into the Womb Sutra*:

Nanda, the physical activities of walking, sitting, standing, or lying down must each be understood as suffering. If meditators analyze the nature of these physical activities, they will see that if they spend the day walking and do not rest, sit down, or lie down, they will experience walking exclusively as suffering and will experience intense, sharp, unbearable and unpleasant feelings. The notion that walking is pleasant will not arise.

Nanda was the Buddha's brother. Tsong-kha-pa (1: 291) further cites that same sutra:

Nanda, when this contaminated feeling of pleasure arises, it is only suffering that is arising; when it ends, it is only this nature of suffering that ends. When it arises yet again, it is only a conditioned phenomenon that arises; when it ends, it is only a conditioned phenomenon that ends.

This point is that the suffering of conditioning pervades every aspect of our existence. If we want to follow the Buddha's advice that we must recognize the truth of suffering, then we have to contemplate these explanations.

Where Does Suffering Come From?

We also must abandon the origin of suffering. In explaining the nature of the afflictions, Tsong-kha-pa (I: 298) cites Asanga's *Compendium of Knowledge*:

An affliction is defined as a phenomenon that, when it arises, is disturbing in character and that, through arising, disturbs the mind-stream.⁶⁵

The mind has a natural state of equilibrium. Certain mental states, thoughts, or emotions tend to disturb that equilibrium. Afflictions have this quality. This effect can range from very gross to very subtle.

Among Buddhist schools of thought, there are those that accept the notion of inherent existence and there is the Prasangka Madhyamaka school which totally rejects inherent existence. The first group of Buddhist schools has a broad consensus on the nature of afflictions. However, the Prasangka Madhyamaka has a much subtler way of understanding what constitutes grasping at true existence. The idea of a very subtle form of grasping at true existence changes the way they understand afflictions such as attachment, aversion, delusion, and so on.

Asanga's definition of affliction can perhaps be accepted if we read it in a very broad sense. What does he mean by "disturbance" or "dis-

equilibrium"? We could make a number of guesses; I will suggest one idea. Note that Tsong-kha-pa (I: 300) concludes his explanation of how afflictions arise with these words:

I have explained these ten afflictions in accordance with Asanga's *Compendium of Knowledge* and *Levels of Logic Deals* and with Vasubandhu's *Explanation of the Five Aggregates*.⁶⁷

We may read this as implying that Tsong-kha-pa thinks there is a different and subtler way to understand the afflictions. Perhaps we need to add a qualification: causing this disturbance *without any control on our part*. When a practitioner cultivates compassion, the experience becomes quite strong as you feel someone else's pain; there really is an element of disturbance. Yet that kind of disturbance does not arise without any control on one's part. There is a voluntary dimension to this because you are choosing to share in others' suffering, intentionally cultivating that compassion. Disturbing emotions that seem to arise spontaneously tend to be negative. Emotions arising from intentional training in which we reflect and reason—these are usually positive.

THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS
of
TSONGKHAPA



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First (on an initial level) we should make ourselves continually mindful of our (forthcoming) death and not staying long in this world. We should also familiarise ourselves a great deal with the two ways in which we can go to our next life (either up to a fortunate rebirth or down to an unfortunate one), together with their causes (our virtuous or non-virtuous acts). In this way we should turn our mind from working with keen interest for this life (alone) and thereby develop as much as possible the attitude to work with keen interest for the happiness of future lives beyond.

Then (on an intermediate level) we should exert much effort in thinking about the faults of all the various (rebirth states) of cyclic existence and the advantages of the peaceful (attainment of Liberation). In this way we should turn our mind from working with keen interest for the (so-called) good things of cyclic existence and thereby develop the strong and continuing attitude to work with keen interest for Liberation.

Then (progressing to an advanced level motivation) we should see that just as we ourselves are benefitted from being happy and harmed by suffering, so too are all sentient beings. Thereby we should thoroughly familiarise ourselves with love, compassion and an Enlightened Motive of Bodhichitta. If we do this, we will turn our motivating intentions completely away from eagerly endeavouring for only our own aims, not caring at all about bringing happiness to sentient beings and eliminating their suffering. Thereby we will see the aims of others as actually the (only) aims we strongly wish (to work for). By doing this and also by being certain that the supreme method for accomplishing these (aims) is in fact only if we become a Buddha ourselves and that alone, we will then develop the very firm motivating intention of wishing to attain (the state of) a Buddha because of these reasons. (These then are the actual stages for working ourselves up to having such an Enlightened Motive of Bodhichitta for our Dharma practice.)

But suppose we were to take as the foundation (for our practice) the self-deception of having only a partial, merely intellectual understanding of the verbal formulations of these (stages for building

From Tsong Khapa's
"A Letter of Advice on
Sutra and Tantra"

[On three capacities or levels,
and the need for practice]

Therefore first of all (before any Dharma practice) it is extremely important for our motivating thought to be one which we have (properly) worked ourselves up to and not one that has (simply) come from mere words. Although the stages for working ourselves up (to a proper motivation) have been explained in many (different ways), the most commonly helpful scheme for minds of superior, middling and all (scopes of capacity is as follows).

(such as our selfishness) and bring about conducive conditions (such as a kind heart) for (developing) these motivating thoughts (like compassion).

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up our motivation) and then were to engage ourselves in hearing, thinking and meditating (on a certain Dharma practice). We might then say with many sweet-sounding words that "I am doing these for the sake of my future lives" or "I am doing these for liberation" or "I am doing these for the benefit of sentient beings". But despite (such noble claims), I think the way our mind probably has been working will have in fact been nothing other than one in which it has been aiming for the sake of either (benefits in) this lifetime, or for certain pleasurable fruits of cyclic existence to which we have given the name "Liberation", or for a partial (ultimate) aim for ourselves (and not Enlightenment at all). Therefore to develop these motivating thoughts non-artificially, it is not sufficient to have merely an intellectual understanding (of them). We must meditate (in order to build them up as a natural, instinctive habit).

As for how to meditate, we need to actualise and achieve (these motivations) by acquainting ourselves over and again with the examination meditation with which we meditate by examining, in many aspects, (the situations that are) the causes pertinent for (developing) each of these kinds (of motivations) like this. (For instance, by examining many aspects of others' suffering, we can develop compassion.)

In regard to this, even though cultivating (repeatedly meditating with the proper) aspects and focal objects for these (motivations) is the main cause (for actually developing them, such as focussing on others' suffering with the wish that they be parted from it as the way to develop compassion), just (to do) this much is not enough. In between sessions we should make (our understanding of how to develop them) firm and certain by looking at the stainless expositions (of Buddha), the (Indian) treatises and also the guideline instructions that have been composed around (the themes of) these (motivations). Thus we should read, for example, the accounts of how Buddha developed renunciation, compassion and Bodhicitta in his previous lives. In addition we must reach the heart (of our problems preventing us from developing them) by doing a great deal of collecting (of merit) and cleansing (of obstacles) in order to eliminate the contrary factors

**THE GREAT TREATISE
ON THE STAGES OF THE PATH
TO ENLIGHTENMENT**

by
Tsong-kha-pa

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DEDICATION

*We dedicate this translation to
His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama
and the people of Tibet.*

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From The Great Treatise

Vol. I

8

THE THREE TYPES OF PERSONS

2. How to take full advantage of a life of leisure and opportunity
 - a. How to develop certain knowledge of a general presentation of the path
 - 1) How all the scriptures are included within the paths of the three types of persons
 - 2) Why students are led in stages using the trainings of the three types of persons
 - a) The purpose of leading students by means of the paths of the three types of persons
 - b) Why one guides students through such stages
 - i) The actual reason
 - ii) The purpose

— 58 —

2. How to take full advantage of a life of leisure and opportunity
How to take full advantage of a life of leisure and opportunity is presented in two parts:
 1. How to develop certain knowledge of a general presentation of the path (Chapter 8)
 2. The actual way to take full advantage of a life of leisure and opportunity (Chapters 9 and on)
- a. How to develop certain knowledge of a general presentation of the path
The way to develop certain knowledge of a general presentation of the path itself has two parts:

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1. How all the scriptures are included within the paths of the three types of persons
2. Why students are led in stages using the trainings of the three types of persons

1) How all the scriptures are included within the paths of the three types of persons

In the beginning a person who is to become a buddha develops the spirit of enlightenment; in the middle, this person accumulates the collections of merit and sublime wisdom; and in the end, this person actualizes perfect buddhahood. All these actions are solely for the welfare of living beings. Therefore, all the teachings given by a buddha simply accomplish the welfare of living beings. This being the case, the welfare of living beings is what you should accomplish as well. [87] This welfare is twofold: the provisional goal of high status as a human or deity, and the final goal of the certain goodness of liberation or omniscience. Between these two, many of the Buddha's statements pertain to the attainment of the temporary goal of high status. All of these statements are included in the teachings for a person of genuine small capacity or the teachings shared with such a person, because persons of special small capacity do not work very much on behalf of this lifetime, but they diligently strive for the excellent high states of human or divine rebirth in future lifetimes by engaging in the cultivation of their causes. The *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*.²¹⁶

Know to be "least" those persons
Who diligently strive to attain
Solely the joys of cyclic existence
By any means for their welfare alone.

There are two kinds of certain goodness: the liberation that is mere freedom from cyclic existence and the sublime state of omniscience. Many of the Buddha's statements pertain to the vehicle of the *pratyekabuddha* and the *śrāvaka*. All of these statements are included in the teachings for a person of actual medium capacity or the teachings shared with such a person, because persons of medium capacity develop disenchantment with all of cyclic existence, and then make their goal their own liberation from cyclic existence. They then enter the path of the three trainings, the method for attaining liberation. The *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*.²¹⁷

Those persons are called "medium"
Who stop sinful actions,

Turn their backs on the joys of cyclic existence,
And diligently strive just for their own peace.

The Elder's [Atisha's] *Lamp for the Collection of Deeds (Caryā-saṅgraha-pradīpa)* states:²¹⁸

Since the guru, the Buddha, said,
"Depend on the perfection and mantra vehicles
And attain enlightenment,"
Here I will write about the meaning of this.

According to this, the method of attaining omniscience is twofold: the Mahāyāna of the perfections and the Mahāyāna of mantra. These two are included in the teachings of a person of great capacity because persons of great capacity, under the influence of great compassion, make buddhahood their goal in order to extinguish all the sufferings of all living beings. They then train in the six perfections, the two stages, and the like. [88] The *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*.²¹⁹

Those persons are called "superior"
Who sincerely want to extinguish
All the sufferings of others
By understanding their own suffering.

Below, I will explain how the method for these persons to attain enlightenment involves both the perfection and mantra vehicles.

With respect to the terms for the three types of persons, these statements in the *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* are similar in meaning to the statement in the *Compendium of Determinations (Vinīścaya-saṅgrahaṇi)* of the *Levels of Yogic Deeds (Yoga-caryā-bhūmi)*.²²⁰

Furthermore, there are the three types of persons as follows. There are those who have correctly assumed the vow of ethical discipline of giving up the ten nonvirtues, which is not considered a vow and yet is similar to a vow. There are those who have correctly assumed the *śrāvaka's* vow of ethical discipline. There are those who have correctly assumed the bodhisattva's vow of ethical discipline. Among these, the first are the least; the second, medium; and the third, superior.

Furthermore, the scriptures mention many ways of positing a least, a medium, and a superior person. Like Atisha's *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, Vasubandhu's *Abhidharma-kośa Auto-commentary (Abhidharma-kośa-bhāṣya)* defines²²¹ the three types of persons. Among the persons of small capacity, there are indeed two types—

those who are intent on this lifetime and those who are intent on future lifetimes. However, here I am speaking of the latter, whom I will identify as those who engage in the unmistakable method for attaining high status.

2) Why students are led in stages using the trainings of the three types of persons

This explanation has two parts:

1. The purpose of leading students by means of the paths of the three types of persons
 2. Why one guides students through such stages
- a) The purpose of leading students by means of the paths of the three types of persons

I have given an explanation of the three types of persons. However, the stages of the path for the person of great capacity also include the paths for the other two types of persons in their entirety. Thus, these two paths are parts, or branches, of the Mahāyāna path. [89] As the master Aśvaghōṣa states in his *Cultivation of the Conventional Spirit of Enlightenment (Samṃvṛti-bodhicitta-bhāvaṇā)*:²²

Being harmless, truthful,
And chaste; not stealing,
And giving away all your possessions:
These are deeds that give rise to happy rebirths.
Once you have seen the suffering of cyclic existence,
You cultivate the true path to abandon it,
And you eliminate the two misdeeds;
These are the deeds that give rise to peace.

A person of great capacity should practice all these; They are the branches of the path of the supreme determination to be free.

The knowledge that all phenomena are emptiness
Creates the stream of compassion for all beings.

Limitless deeds of skill-in-means
Are the activity of the supreme determination to be free.

Therefore, in this instance teachers lead you neither to the path for persons of small capacity, who make their goal the mere happiness of cyclic existence, nor to the path for persons of medium capacity, who make their goal the mere liberation from cyclic existence for their own sake. Rather, they take some of the paths that are common to

these two types of persons and make them prerequisites for leading you to the path for persons of great capacity. Thus they make them components of the training in the path for persons of great capacity.

Therefore, once you have developed the desire to take full advantage of this human life of leisure and opportunity as explained before, you must know how to take full advantage of it. With respect to that, Bhāvaviveka's *Heart of the Middle Way* states:²³

These bodies are insubstantial,
Like banana trees and bubbles.
Who would not give them a substance that is like Mount Meru
By making them conditions for helping others?

These bodies are a basis for sickness, old age, and death.
Those who have good character and compassion
Make them in each moment
A basis for promoting happiness in others.

This life of leisure is free of the eight conditions of nonleisure.
With the lamp of the sublime teaching
Make good use of this leisure
Through the deeds of a person of great capacity.

Thus, enter the Mahāyāna with the thought, "Day and night I will conduct myself as a person of great capacity, making good use of this body of mine, which is a home for illness, a basis for the sufferings of old age and the like, and which lacks an essence like a banana tree or a water bubble."

Question: From the outset one should guide students through the practices of a person of great capacity. [90] What is the use of training in paths which are shared with the persons of small and medium capacities?

Reply: Training in the paths that are shared with these two is a prerequisite for the development of the path of a person of great capacity. I will explain how this is so.

b) Why one guides students through such stages

Why one guides students through such stages is explained in terms of the actual reason and the purpose.

i) The actual reason

The entrance to the Mahāyāna is solely the spirit of supreme enlightenment. Once this is produced in your mind-stream, it is as Śāntideva states in his *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*:²⁴

those who are intent on this lifetime and those who are intent on future lifetimes. However, here I am speaking of the latter, whom I will identify as those who engage in the unmistakable method for attaining high status.

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Reply: Training in the paths that are shared with these two is a prerequisite for the development of the path of a person of great capacity. I will explain how this is so.

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Why one guides students through such stages is explained in terms of the actual reason and the purpose.

i) The actual reason

The entrance to the Mahāyāna is solely the spirit of supreme enlightenment. Once this is produced in your mind-stream, it is as Śāntideva states in his *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*:²⁴

The moment helpless beings, bound in the prison of cyclic existence, develop this spirit of enlightenment they are called "children of the *sugatās*" ...

Thus, these beings enter the Mahāyāna upon being named "converters' children" or "bodhisattvas." If they ruin their spirit of enlightenment, they expel themselves from the company of Mahāyāna practitioners.

Therefore, those who wish to enter the Mahāyāna must develop this spirit of enlightenment by making many forms of effort. The supreme texts that teach the stages of the bodhisattva path, Śāntideva's *Compendium of Trainings* and *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*, speak of how to develop it. They state that you first need to meditate on its benefits. Then you intensify your delight in these benefits from the depths of your heart. This must be accompanied with practicing the seven branches of worship along with the practice of refuge.

If you condense the benefits spoken of in this way, they are twofold: temporary and final. The first is again twofold: not falling into miserable realms and being reborn in happy realms. That is, once you have developed this spirit of enlightenment, you clear away many previously accumulated causes for miserable rebirths, and you end the continuous accumulation of them in the future. You also vastly increase your previously accumulated causes of happy rebirths since they are imbued with this spirit. Furthermore, because you are motivated by this spirit, the causes that you create anew will be inexhaustible. [91] Relying upon this spirit of enlightenment, you will easily achieve the final aims, liberation and omniscience.

From the outset you must have an uncontrived aspiration that seeks to attain these final and temporary benefits. If you do not have this, you might say, "I will strive to develop this spirit" on account of those benefits that arise from developing the spirit of enlightenment, but it will be mere words. The hollowness of this claim is very clear once you examine your mind.

Therefore, first you must train in the thought that is common to persons of small and medium capacities in order to develop a wish to attain the two benefits, high status [as a human or deity] and certain goodness [liberation or omniscience]. After you have developed such a wish, you engage in cultivating the spirit of enlightenment, the attitude that produces these benefits. As you do this, you must develop the great compassion and love that are the foundation of this attitude. In other words, when you contemplate how

you wander through cyclic existence, bereft of happiness and tormented by suffering, your body hairs should stand on end. Without this experience, it would be impossible for you to become unable to tolerate other beings' torment while they suffer and are bereft of happiness as they wander through cyclic existence.
Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds:25

These beings have yet to dream
Of such an attitude
Toward even their own welfare;
How then could they produce it for other's welfare?

Consequently, in the context of the person of small capacity you reflect on how you are harmed by the suffering of the miserable realms. In the context of the person of medium capacity you contemplate on how, even in high status, there is suffering and there is no peaceful bliss. Then you foster the development of love and compassion by cultivating a sense of empathy for living beings, whom you hold as close to you. From this you develop the spirit of enlightenment. Therefore, training in the thought common to persons of small and medium capacities is the method for producing an uncontrived spirit of enlightenment; it is not some separate path along which your teacher leads you.

Accordingly, you work at many ways of purifying yourself of nonvirtue and accumulating virtue using the practices for developing both the attitude that is shared with persons of small capacity and the attitude that is shared with persons of medium capacity. These are practices such as going for refuge and thinking about karma and its effects. [92] Understand that these too help you to develop the spirit of enlightenment, because they correspond to either the seven branches of worship or the practice of refuge, which are methods of training that are prerequisites for the spirit of enlightenment in the context of the practices for the person of great capacity.

At this point the guru thoroughly expounds the ways in which the trainings of the persons of small and medium capacities serve as components for the development of the spirit of unsurpassed enlightenment. Moreover, you, the student, reach certain knowledge of this. Then, whenever you sustain a meditation, it is extremely important for you to keep this understanding in mind and train in these teachings as components for your development of the spirit of enlightenment. Otherwise, the path of the person of great capacity and the paths of the persons of small and medium capacities

would be separate and unrelated. And since you do not attain any certain knowledge of the spirit of enlightenment until you reach the actual path of the person of great capacity, your lack of training in these topics as components of your development of the spirit of enlightenment would either prevent you from developing that spirit, or, while you lack this training, cause you to deviate from your great purpose of developing that spirit. Therefore, pay close attention to this point.

In this way, train in the paths of persons of small and medium capacities and train well in what is explained in the context of the person of great capacity. Then, to the best of your ability, develop an uncontrived spirit of enlightenment in your mind-stream. Next, in order to stabilize this spirit, make a special practice of refuge and then perform the rite of the aspirational spirit of enlightenment. After you have adopted this aspirational spirit through the rite, you must strive to learn its precepts. Then, develop a great yearning to learn the bodhisattva deeds, such as the six perfections and the four ways of gathering disciples. Once this yearning arises from the depths of your heart, decisively take up the pure vow of the engaged spirit of enlightenment. Then, at the risk of your life, avoid being polluted by the root infractions. Strive not to be soiled by even small and medium contaminations or by the creation of faults. Even if you are soiled, thoroughly purify yourself by repairing the infractions just as is taught in scripture.

Next, train broadly in the six perfections. In particular, train well in meditative stabilization—the heart of meditative serenity—in order to make your mind capable of being set on a virtuous object of meditation, according to your wish. [93] The Elder's *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* says²²⁶ that you should develop meditative serenity for the sake of producing the superknowledges. He is simply giving an example. In other contexts he says that you should develop serenity for the sake of producing insight. Therefore, achieve serenity mainly for the purpose of insight. Then, in order to cut the bonds of the conception of the two selves, make a philosophical determination of the meaning of emptiness, which is selflessness. After sustaining an unmistakable method of meditation, achieve insight, the heart of wisdom.

Accordingly, Atisha's *Commentary on the Difficult Points of the Lamp for the Path* (*Bodhi-mārga-pradīpa-parīṭīkā*)²²⁷ states that, except for the practices of serenity and insight, all the practices up to and including the training in the precepts of the vow of the engaged

spirit of enlightenment constitute the training in ethical discipline. Serenity is the training in concentration or mind. Insight is the training in wisdom. Furthermore, all the practices up to and including meditative serenity constitute the factor of enlightenment called either method, the collection of merit, the paths that depend on conventional truths, or the stages of the vast path. The development of the three kinds of special wisdom constitutes the factor of enlightenment called wisdom, the collection of wisdom, that which depends on ultimate truths, or the stages of the profound path. Therefore, be very certain about their order, the fact that they are a comprehensive list, and the fact that you do not achieve enlightenment by either method or wisdom alone.

This is how the royal geese, the conquerors' children, who are on their way to the great ocean of a buddha's good qualities, spread their two wings and fly. One wing is conventional truths—all of the factors of method, the vast path. The other wing, which depends on ultimate truths, is knowing well both reality and selflessness. However, they do not take up only a single part of the path, or fly like a bird with a broken wing. As Candrakīrti's *Commentary on the "Middle Way"* states:²²⁸

Spreading the broad, white wings of reality and conventionality,
The royal geese, escorted by the flock of living beings,
Fly on the winds of virtue to supremacy
On the far shore of a buddha's ocean-like qualities. [94]

After you have trained your mind by means of the ordinary path, you must certainly enter the mantra path because, when you do, you will quickly complete the two collections. If you cannot practice more than just the ordinary path, or do not want to do it because your inclination inherited from former lives is too weak, then just improve on these very stages of the path.

It is taught in all the vehicles in general and in the mantra vehicle in particular that reliance on the teacher is very crucial. Consequently, once you enter the mantra path, you should follow the mantra explanations, and practice a method of relying on the teacher that is even more specialized than what I have explained before. Then, ripen your mind with initiations that come from pure tantric sources, and observe properly, at the risk of your life, all of the vows and pledges that you have received during your initiations. You can take the vow or pledge again if you are affected by a root infraction, but your mind will have been spoiled, and it will be very difficult to give rise to good qualities. Therefore, specifically

strive never to be tainted by root infractions and not to be soiled by secondary infractions. Even if you are tainted by these, purify yourself of them with confession and restraint, since vows and pledges are the foundation of the path.

Then train in good instructions on either the yoga with signs (in the context of the lower tantras), or the yoga of the generation stage (in the context of highest yoga tantra). After this training has been made firm, train well in either the yoga without signs (in the context of the lower tantras), or the yoga of the completion stage (in the context of highest yoga tantra).

The *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* presents the body of such a path; these stages of the path also instruct you in this way. The Great Elder taught this in other texts, as well. His *Concise Method of Achieving the Mahāyāna Path (Mahāyāna-patha-sādhana-saṃgraha)* states:²²⁹

If you wish to attain unsurpassed enlightenment,
Which has inconceivable greatness,
Be intent on practice and achieve its heart,
For enlightenment depends upon practice. [95]
As this body of perfect leisure and opportunity
Was very difficult to obtain, and once obtained
Will be very difficult to possess again,
Make it meaningful by striving at practice.

And his *Concisely Written Method of Achieving the Mahāyāna Path (Mahāyāna-patha-sādhana-varṇa-saṃgraha)* says:²³⁰

Just as, when a chance arises
For prisoners to flee from prison,
They flee from that place,
As their goals are not the same as others',
So too if an opportunity arises
To cross over this great ocean of cyclic existence,
You emerge from this household of existence,
As your goals are not the same as others'.

Also:²³¹

Taking up the bodhisattva vow through abiding
In the practice of refuge, higher ethical discipline,
And the basis of the aspirational spirit of enlightenment,
Practice properly, in stages, with what ability you have,
All the deeds of the bodhisattvas—
The six perfections and the like.

Also:²³²

Cultivate the heart of wisdom and method—
Insight, meditative serenity, and their unification.

Moreover, Bodhibhadra's *Chapter on the Collections of Concentration (Samādhi-sambhāra-pārtivarta)* states:²³³

First, make firm your spirit of perfect enlightenment,
Which has arisen from the strength of compassion.
Do not be attached to enjoying the resources of cyclic existence,
And turn your back on grasping.
Endowed with perfect jewels such as faith,
Respect your guru, who is equal to the Buddha.
With the pledges that this guru taught,
Joyously persevere in your meditations.
Receive through your guru's kindness
The bestowal of initiations, both vase and secret.
Purifying body, speech, and mind,
Such practitioners are fit for attainments.
By completing the collections
That arise from the branch of concentration,
They will quickly achieve the supreme attainment.
This is the way of mantra.

ii) The purpose

Question: If the teachings for the persons of small and medium capacities are prerequisites for the person of great capacity, they may as well be considered stages for the path of the person of great capacity. [96] Why use the expression, "stages of the path shared with the persons of small and medium capacities"?

Reply: There are two great purposes for differentiating three types of persons and guiding students accordingly: (1) it destroys the presumption of asserting that you are a person of great capacity despite not having developed the states of mind common to persons of small and medium capacities, and (2) it is of great benefit for those whose minds have the greatest, medium, and least capacity. How does it benefit them? Even the two persons of higher capacities must seek high status and liberation, so it is not wrong to teach students of medium and great capacities the practices that develop the attitudes of persons of small capacity and persons of medium capacity. They will develop good qualities.

Those persons of least capacity may train in higher practices, but this will lead to their giving up their lower perspective without

rising to a higher perspective, and thus they would be left with nothing. Furthermore, there could be persons who have the fortune to have already produced the higher paths in past lives. If they are taught the paths shared with persons of lower capacity and they then train in them, they will quickly give rise either to those good qualities developed previously or to those not developed before. Consequently, as they have already developed lower paths, they can be led to successively higher paths, and thus their own path from practice in earlier lives will not be delayed.

The *Questions of the Royal Lord of Formulae (Dhāraṇīśvara-rāja-pariprcchā)*²³⁴ uses the example of a skillful jeweler gradually refining a jewel in order to illustrate the need to guide the student's mind in stages. Wary of being verbose, I have not cited it in full here. The protector Nāgārjuna also said to guide students in stages through the paths of high status and certain goodness:²³⁵

Initially there are the teachings on high status;
Then come the teachings on certain goodness.
For, having obtained high status,
You gradually reach certain goodness.

Also, the noble being Asaṅga states:²³⁶

Further, bodhisattvas cause their disciples to accomplish the virtuous factor of enlightenment correctly and in stages. In order to do this, they initially give easy teachings to beings of childlike wisdom, having them practice easy instructions and explications. When they recognize that these beings have become endowed with average wisdom, they have them practice average teachings and instructions, and average explications. [97] When they recognize that these beings have become endowed with extensive wisdom, they have them practice profound teachings and instructions, and subtle explications. This is the graduated flow of activity for the welfare of these living beings.

Also, Āryadeva's *Lamp Which Is a Compendium of Deeds (Caryā-melāpaka-pradīpa)* describes how you first train in the thought of the perfection vehicle and then enter the mantra vehicle. It establishes that you must do so in stages. It then summarizes this point as follows:²³⁷

The method by which beings who are beginners
Engage in the ultimate purpose
Was said by the perfect Buddha
To be like the steps of a staircase.

Also, the *Four Hundred Stanzas*²³⁸ states that the order of the path is definite:

Initially, you stop the nonmeritorious.
In the middle, you stop the misconception of self.
Finally, you put an end to all bad views;
One who knows this is an adept.

Also, the learned master Mātrceṭa said:²³⁹

It is like dyeing cloth that is free of stains:
First they develop goodness in the students' minds
Through discussions on generosity and the like,
And then they have them meditate on the teaching.

Citing this passage, the great master Candrakīrti also held that the path has a definite order. Since the order we use in guiding others along the path clearly is very crucial for their practice, reach firm certainty about this method.

From The Great Treatises

Vol. I

22

THE ATTITUDE OF A PERSON OF MEDIUM CAPACITY

- b) The measure of the determination to be free
- c) Dispelling misconceptions

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b) The measure of the determination to be free

You must understand in detail the characteristics of cyclic existence, both by way of suffering and its origin and by way of the twelve factors of dependent-arising. [258] Once you understand these characteristics, you will develop a desire to abandon and to quell suffering and its origin. At this point, although you may have a simple determination to be free, you should not be satisfied merely with this. Hence, Candrakīrti's *Commentary on the "Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning"* (*Yukti-ṣaṣṭikā-vṛtti*) says:

Once we are certain that living in the three levels of cyclic existence—impermanence's blazing fire—is like entering a burning house, we want to escape it.

And, as cited previously:⁵⁴⁸

Just as, when a chance arises
For prisoners to flee from prison...

Develop an attitude about cyclic existence like those who feel aversion for their confinement in a blazing house or a prison, and want

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to escape. Then progressively increase this feeling of aversion and desire to escape.

Sha-ra-wa described a superficial determination to be free as being like when you pour powder into inferior beer; the powder forms just a thin layer on the surface. If your ability to see the undesirability of true origins—the causes of cyclic existence—is superficial like this, then your search for liberation, the cessation of suffering and its origin, will be the same. Likewise, your desire to attain the path to liberation will be mere words. Thus, you will not be able to develop either the compassion that cannot bear to see the sufferings of living beings in cyclic existence or the uncontrived spirit of unsurpassed enlightenment that instills you with strength. Hence, your understanding of the Mahāyāna will also be merely intellectual. Therefore, you must practice these teachings for the person of medium capacity and regard them as crucial instructions.

c) Dispelling misconceptions

Qualm: Although it is appropriate in the Hinayāna to cultivate disenchantment with cyclic existence, it is inappropriate for bodhisattvas, for, if bodhisattvas were to cultivate intense disgust and disenchantment with cyclic existence, they would be like the *śrāvakas* and fall into an extreme of peace, having become displeased with their involvement in cyclic existence. [259] As the *Sūtra of Showing the Tathāgata's Inconceivable Secret* states:⁵⁴⁹

Bodhisattvas, thinking of the maturation of living beings, view cyclic existence as beneficial. Accordingly, they do not view great nirvāna [liberation] as beneficial to the maturation of beings.

And further:

Were bodhisattvas to fear involvement in cyclic existence, they would fall to a destitute place.

And also:

Bhagavan, whereas the *śrāvakas* fear involvement in cyclic existence, bodhisattvas voluntarily take innumerable rebirths in cyclic existence.

Response: This is a great error that misconstrues the sūtra's meaning. For, the sūtra passage that says, "Thus, bodhisattvas should not become disenchanted with cyclic existence," does not teach bodhisattvas not to be disgusted with the sufferings of birth, aging, illness, death, and so on—the result of our wandering through

cyclic existence under the influence of our karma and afflictions. Rather, this sūtra teaches joyous perseverance. In order to train in the bodhisattvas' activities for the sake of others until the end of cyclic existence, bodhisattvas must put on armor [courage]. Once they do this, even if all the sufferings of all beings were collected and the bodhisattvas constantly experienced them mentally and physically, they would still persevere joyously, delighting in the magnificent deeds that help others, without becoming disenchanted with or frightened by sufferings. Thus, the Buddha said that bodhisattvas must not be disenchanted with cyclic existence.

The master Candrakīrti says:

Bodhisattvas, who take on the sufferings of all beings moment by moment until the end of cyclic existence, do not fear harm to their bodies or minds. Bodhisattvas, who take on the sufferings of all beings simultaneously until the end of cyclic existence, delight in this activity. Each instant of such joyous perseverance acts as the cause whose effect produces boundless collections of wealth, bringing omniscience to all beings. Once bodhisattvas understand this, it is appropriate for them to take hundreds of rebirths.

In order to emphasize this point, Candrakīrti then cites the aforementioned sūtra passages from the *Sūtra of Showing the Tathāgata's Inconceivable Secret*. [260]

This same sūtra states that cyclic existence should be viewed as beneficial because bodhisattvas gain happiness proportionate to the effort they make when they strive for the welfare of living beings. Hence, the Buddha says that not being disenchanted with cyclic existence means not being disenchanted with accomplishing the good of living beings in cyclic existence, as well as enjoying this activity.

When you wander through cyclic existence by the power of karma and afflictions, you are tormented by many sufferings. If you are unable to accomplish even your own aims, what need is there to mention that you cannot accomplish those of others? Since such wandering is the door to all problems, bodhisattvas must be even more disenchanted with cyclic existence than Hinayāna practitioners and must stop their own wandering caused by karma and the afflictions. Nevertheless, bodhisattvas must enjoy being reborn in cyclic existence through their aspirational prayers and compassion. These two ways of being reborn are not the same.

Failing to make this distinction leads to qualms like that above. The *Bodhisattva Levels* says that if the proponents of such a position have taken the vows of a bodhisattva then they have committed a

misdeed permeated with afflictions. However, fearing too many words, I will not quote the passage in full.

Hence, it is amazing that bodhisattvas see the defects of cyclic existence and are thoroughly disgusted, yet do not give up their vow because they are motivated by great compassion. If those who see the wonders of cyclic existence as like a celestial mansion—without reducing their craving even in the slightest—claim to be serving others, how could their unwillingness to abandon cyclic existence please the wise? As Bhāvaviveka's *Heart of the Middle Way* says:⁵⁵⁰

Since bodhisattvas see the faults of cyclic existence, they do not remain here.

Because they care for others, they do not remain in nirvāna.

In order to fulfill the needs of others, they resolve

To remain in cyclic existence.

Once you see the limitless sufferings of all living beings—such as the one hundred and ten sufferings explained in the *Bodhisattva Levels*—you allow this to be the cause for great compassion. At this time, when you cultivate a heart that has a forceful and enduring inability to withstand the sight of others' sufferings, it would be contradictory to be not even slightly disenchanted with cyclic existence. [261]

The theme of Āryadeva's *Four Hundred Stanzas* is the stages of the path upon which bodhisattvas develop great revulsion for cyclic existence and then, seeing living beings as their close relatives, enter the ocean of cyclic existence for their sake. In his commentary on that work, the great master Candrakīrti clarified this:⁵⁵¹

Due to the Buddha's explanation of the faults of cyclic existence, his disciples learned to fear it and desire freedom from it. The Bhagavan said the following so that they would develop a strong connection to the Mahāyāna: "O monks, among all who have passed through cyclic existence for a long time, there is not one being among all the various types of living beings who has not been like a father, mother, son, daughter, relative, or step-relation to you."

And further:

By understanding the words of the Bhagavan, bodhisattvas are able to leap into the ocean of cyclic existence. They do this so that all beings who have been their close relatives—like father and mother—throughout beginningless time and who are now bereft and without a protector may be freed by the boat of the Mahāyāna.

The unsurpassed mantra vehicle also requires this method. For, as Āryadeva says in his *Lamp Which Is a Compendium of Deeds*:⁵⁵²

Through these stages, you should engage in these activities wholly free of elaborations. The stages for doing this are as follows: in the very beginning, you should recall the beginningless sufferings of cyclic existence, and then desire the bliss of nirvāna. Therefore, you should completely give up all agitation, and even cultivate the idea that the rulers of kingdoms suffer.

From The Great Treatise

Vol. III

1

THE STAGES OF THE PATH FOR PERSONS OF GREAT CAPACITY¹

- 3) Training the mind in the stages of the path for persons of great capacity
- a) Showing that developing the spirit of enlightenment is the only entrance to the Mahāyāna
 - b) How to develop the spirit of enlightenment
 - i) How the spirit of enlightenment depends on certain causes to arise
 - a' The development of the spirit through the four conditions
 - b' The development of the spirit through the four causes
 - c' The development of the spirit through the four strengths

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Respectfully I bow down at the feet of those excellent and revered persons who have great compassion. [281]

After such extended meditation on the faults of cyclic existence from various perspectives, you will see all of cyclic existence as a pit of blazing fire. Then you will be completely consumed with the desire to attain liberation, the elimination of suffering and the afflictions. If you learn the path of the three precious trainings, you will attain liberation, which is free of cyclic existence and is indeed irreversible, unlike the glory of high status within cyclic existence. However, your elimination of faults and attainment of good qualities will be incomplete. Thus, you will not have accomplished your own aims and can only accomplish the purposes of others in a limited way. Eventually, a buddha will exhort you, and you will have to enter the Mahāyāna. Because of this, intelligent persons should

enter the Mahāyāna from the beginning. As Āryaśūra's *Compendium of the Perfections (Pāramitā-samāsa)* says:²

Once you have abandoned forever the two lower vehicles,
Which possess no power to provide the welfare of the world,
Enter the vehicle which the Conqueror Śākyamuni compassionately taught—
This consists only of helping others. [282]

And also:

When people see that joy and unhappiness are like a dream
And that beings degenerate due to the faults of delusion,
Why would they strive for their own welfare,
Forsaking delight in the excellent deeds of altruism?

When you see that beings have fallen, just as you have, into the ocean of existence and are stumbling, unable to walk in a safe direction, because the eye of wisdom—which distinguishes what to adopt and what to discard—for them is closed, is it not better to care for others and to strive for their welfare, you who are in the Conqueror's lineage? That same text says:³

Why wouldn't anyone who is in the Conqueror's lineage and
Who works for the welfare of the world
Have compassion for those stumbling with their eyes of
wisdom closed
And joyously persevere so as to clear away such confusion?

Here, you should use a great person's joy, charisma, and strength to shoulder the responsibility of others' welfare, for focusing only on your own welfare is a trait shared even with animals. Consequently, the fundamental orientation of a great person is to focus solely on achieving the happiness and benefit of others. Candragomin's *Letter to a Student (Śiṣya-lekha)* says:⁴

Domestic animals eat a mouthful of easily found grass,
And when tormented by great thirst, they happily drink water they find.
Here, those who make an effort at working for the welfare of others
Do so out of charisma, joy, and surpassing strength.
The sun's great rays shine everywhere, traveling like a horse-drawn chariot.
The ground supports the world without calculating the burden—

Such is the nature of persons of great capacity, who lack any self-interest,
They are consumed with whatever brings happiness and benefit to the world.

One who sees beings tormented by the above-mentioned suffering and who hastens to act for their welfare is called a "person of great capacity" and an "adept." [283] The same text says:⁵

Those who see beings disturbed by the smoke cloud of ignorance that enshrouds the world,
Helplessly fallen into the blazing fire of suffering,
And hastily make effort as if their own heads were on fire
Are here called "great persons" and "adepts."

Therefore, the Mahāyāna is the origin of all the good of self and others; the medicine that alleviates all troubles; the great path traveled by all knowledgeable persons; nourishment for all beings who see, hear, remember, and come into contact with it; and that which has the great skill-in-means that engages you in others' welfare and thereby indirectly achieves your own welfare in its entirety. One who enters it thinks, "Wonderful! I have found what I am looking for." Enter this supreme vehicle with all of the "strength of an excellent person" that you have. The *Compendium of the Perfections* states:⁶

This supreme vehicle is realized by genuine wisdom.
From it the omniscience of the Great Sage arises.
He is like the eye of the world,
His radiance like the rays of the rising sun.

Thus, enter the Mahāyāna after you have developed great respect for it induced by seeing its good qualities from various perspectives.

3) Training the mind in the stages of the path for persons of great capacity
Training the mind in the stages of the path for persons of great capacity is presented in three sections:

1. Showing that developing the spirit of enlightenment is the only entrance to the Mahāyāna
2. How to develop the spirit of enlightenment (Chapters 1-6)
3. How to learn the bodhisattva deeds after developing the spirit of enlightenment (Chapters 7 and on)

a) Showing that developing the spirit of enlightenment is the only entrance to the Mahāyāna

Question: Given that you should enter the Mahāyāna in the above-mentioned manner, what is the entrance?

Reply: The Conqueror taught that there are no Mahāyāna vehicles other than the perfection vehicle and the tantra vehicle. Whichever of these two you enter, the only entrance is the spirit of enlightenment. Once you have generated this spirit in your mind, you are recognized as a Mahāyāna practitioner even though you may not have generated any other good quality. [284] When you separate from this spirit, no matter what other good qualities you may have—such as the knowledge of emptiness, etc.—you lapse from the Mahāyāna, falling to the level of a *śrāvaka* and the like. This point is taught in many Mahāyāna scriptures and is also proved by reason.

The initial entrance into the Mahāyāna is determined by the development of this spirit alone. A subsequent departure from the Mahāyāna is determined by its loss alone. Hence, being a Mahāyāna practitioner or not is contingent upon the existence or nonexistence of this spirit. You become a conqueror's child immediately after generating this spirit. As Śāntideva's *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* (*Bodhisattva-caryāvatāra*) says:⁷

The moment helpless beings, bound in the prison of cyclic existence,

Develop this spirit of enlightenment

They are called "children of the *sugatas*" ...

And also:

Today I have been born in the buddhas' family;
I have become a child of the buddhas.

Thus it says that once you have generated this spirit, you are called "a bodhisattva." Moreover, the *Life of Maitreya* (*Arya-maitreya-vimokṣa*) speaks of persons being bodhisattvas if they have this spirit even though they have not trained in the bodhisattva deeds:⁸

O child of good lineage, although a precious diamond breaks, it still outshines all special ornaments of gold. It does not lose its name "precious diamond," and it still removes all poverty. O child of good lineage, similarly, those who have developed the precious diamond which is the spirit of enlightenment and the aspiration to omniscience, although they lack its application, still outshine all the golden ornaments which are the good qualities

of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha*. They do not lose the name "bodhisattva," and they still remove all the poverty of cyclic existence.

Also the protector Nāgārjuna in his *Precious Garland* (*Ratnāvalī*) says:⁹

If you and the world
Wish to obtain unexcelled enlightenment,
Its root is the spirit of enlightenment,
Firm as the king of mountains.

Further, the *Tantra Bestowing the Initiation of Vajrapāṇi* (*Vajrapāṇy-abhiṣeka-mahā-tantra*) says:¹⁰

"O great bodhisattva, Mañjuśrī, this tantric maṇḍala is exceedingly secret, unfathomable, very profound, and vast. It is unable to teach it to sinful beings." [285]

"Vajrapāṇi, you say this maṇḍala is very rare. Since I have not heard about it, to whom should it be explained?"

Vajrapāṇi replied, "O Mañjuśrī, once those who have entered meditation on the spirit of enlightenment have attained it, Mañjuśrī, these bodhisattvas who practice the bodhisattva deeds—the door to tantra—should enter into the tantric maṇḍala of the great sublime wisdom initiation. However, those who have not fully attained the spirit of enlightenment should not enter it. They should not even enter and see the maṇḍala. Moreover, do not teach them the gestures and mantras."

Therefore it is not sufficient that the teaching be a Mahāyāna teaching; it is crucial that the person be a Mahāyāna practitioner. Furthermore, functioning as a Mahāyāna practitioner depends solely on realizing the spirit of enlightenment. Hence, if you have only an intellectual understanding of this spirit, then you likewise have only an intellectual understanding of what it means to be a Mahāyāna practitioner. If the spirit is completely perfect, then the Mahāyāna practitioner is genuine, so strive for this.

In regard to this the *Array of Stalks Sūtra* (*Gaṇḍa-vyūha-sūtra*) says:¹¹

O child of good lineage, the spirit of enlightenment is like the seed of all the buddha qualities.

Because you must fully comprehend this statement, I will explain it. When water, manure, warmth, earth, etc., combine with a rice seed, they act as the causes of the rice sprout. If they combine with the seeds of wheat, peas, etc., they act as the causes of these types

of sprouts. Therefore these factors are the general causes of the sprouts. But it is impossible for a barley seed, though it combines with those conditions, to be the cause of a sprout of rice, and so on. [286] Thus a barley seed is the specific cause of a barley sprout, and the water, manure, and so forth, that are linked with that seed become the general causes of the barley sprout. Likewise, the spirit of unsurpassed enlightenment is like the seed, the specific cause among the general causes of the sprout of buddhahood. The wisdom that knows emptiness is the general cause of the three types of enlightenment [the *śrāvaka*, *pratyekabuddha*, and *bodhisattva*], just as water, manure, etc. are the general causes of the sprouts. Hence Maitreya's *Sublime Continuum (Uttara-tantra)* also states that:¹²

Aspiration to the supreme vehicle is the seed;

Wisdom is the mother for generating the buddha qualities.

Thus the spirit of enlightenment is like the seed of the father, and the wisdom which knows selflessness is like the mother. For example, since a Tibetan father cannot have a boy who is Indian, Mongolian, and so forth, he is the specific cause of the child's lineage, whereas a Tibetan mother can give birth to a variety of boys and is therefore the general cause of her child. And the *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* also depend on wisdom, for the protector Nāgārjuna, in the *Praise of the Perfection of Wisdom (Prajñā-pāramitā-stotra)* says:¹³

The path of liberation upon which the buddhas,
Pratyekabuddhas, and *śrāvakas* definitely rely
Is just this:

It is certain that there are no others.

The perfection of wisdom is the mother of both Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna disciples, for it is also spoken of as "mother." Consequently, do not distinguish Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna by the wisdom that knows emptiness but by the spirit of enlightenment and the greatly effective bodhisattva deeds. Nāgārjuna's *Precious Garland* says:¹⁴

Since the aspirational prayers, deeds,
And complete dedications of the bodhisattva
Are not explained in the *śrāvaka* vehicle,
How then could you become a bodhisattva through it?

Thus he says that you differentiate these vehicles not by philosophical view but by deeds. If, in this way, even the wisdom that knows

emptiness is not a specifically Mahāyāna path, it goes without saying that there are other shared paths as well. [287] Hence it is a clear indication that you have very little familiarity with the teachings when, after you have taken the spirit of enlightenment to be the crucial instruction, you do not practice it, but, after recalling it at the beginning of a session only in words, you intently make great effort at some single, small portion of the path.

In general, just as both father and mother are needed to have a child, you need the entire complement of method and wisdom to have a complete path. In particular, you need the main method—the spirit of enlightenment—and the main wisdom—the knowledge of emptiness. If you only meditate on one of them and diligently seek merely to be liberated from cyclic existence, then you have to meditate on the meaning of emptiness—selflessness—without mistaking meditative serenity for insight. Nonetheless, if you claim to be a Mahāyāna practitioner, then you must be practicing the spirit of enlightenment as well. Why? You need wisdom to prevent falling into the extreme of cyclic existence, and you need compassion to prevent falling into the extreme of peace [nirvāṇa], so wisdom does not prevent you from falling into the extreme of peace. As the venerable Maitreya says in his *Ornament for Clear Knowledge (Abhisamayālaṅkāra)*:¹⁵

Through knowledge you do not abide in cyclic existence.

Through compassion you do not abide in peace.

If you are a Mahāyāna practitioner, you must practice the spirit of enlightenment because even in the Hīnayāna you do not fall into the extreme of cyclic existence and the main thing to be prevented on the bodhisattva path is falling into the extreme of peace.

When the conquerors' children, who validly interpret the commentaries on the Conqueror's intended meaning, generate just this precious spirit in their minds, they are amazed and think, "Such a marvelous path has arisen." However, they do not have this same feeling when they attain a slight good quality pleasing to ordinary persons. *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:¹⁶

This altruistic spirit which is not born

In others even for their own sake,

Is a special jewel of the mind,

Bringing an unprecedented wonder.

And also:

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Is there any virtue equal to this?
 Is there any such friend?
 Is there any such merit?

And also:

I bow down to the body of anyone
 Who has generated this sacred jewel of the mind. [288]

And:

It is the quintessential butter
 Churned from the milk of the sublime teaching.

Thus the spirit of enlightenment is the supreme instruction, extracting the quintessence of the scriptures.

Therefore, although the glorious Atisha held the Madhyamaka view and his teacher Ser-ling-ba (gSer-gling-pa) held the Satyākāravādin view,¹⁷ Atisha attained the spirit of enlightenment by depending on him and therefore took him to be the kindest of his gurus. If those who know the core of the scriptures look at this part of Atisha's biography, they will gain a great understanding of a key point of the path.

If you generate this spirit in an uncontrived manner after making much effort, you will be imbued with the spirit of enlightenment and then even giving a tiny morsel of food to a crow will be considered a bodhisattva deed. However, if you lack this spirit, even offering a universe of three billion world systems filled with jewels will not be considered a bodhisattva deed. Likewise, actions such as the perfections from ethical discipline through wisdom, as well as meditation on yourself as a deity and meditation on the channels, winds, drops, etc., will also not be considered bodhisattva deeds.

If your precious spirit has not actualized the key point of the practice, no matter how long you try to cultivate virtue, you will not accomplish much. It is like cutting grass with a very dull sickle. If your spirit of enlightenment has actualized the key point of the practice, however, it is like cutting the grass and sharpening the sickle—even when you are not cutting the grass, you will be sharpening the sickle, and when you set to cutting, you cut a large amount even in a short time. Likewise, with this fully actualized spirit of enlightenment, in each instant you are able to easily clear away

obscurations and accumulate the collections of merit and sublime wisdom. Even small virtues become extensive, and those that would otherwise be lost after a certain period of time do not end. *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:¹⁸

The force of sin is great and extremely intense;
 Besides the spirit of perfect enlightenment,
 What virtue can overcome it?

And also:

Like the fire at the end of an eon,
 It will instantly consume grave sins. [289]

And also:

If even those who think, "I'll clear away
 Just the headaches of living beings,"
 Have such a beneficial intention
 That they receive immeasurable merit,

Then what is there to say

Of one who aspires to clear away

The immeasurable unhappiness of each being
 And to endow each with immeasurable good qualities?

And also:

All other virtues are like the plantain tree—
 After bearing fruit they perish.
 But this spirit of enlightenment, like a wish-granting tree,
 Always bears fruit and never dies, but flourishes.

b) How to develop the spirit of enlightenment

How to develop the spirit of enlightenment is explained in four parts:

1. How the spirit of enlightenment depends on certain causes to arise
2. The stages of training in the spirit of enlightenment (Chapters 2-4)
3. The measure of producing the spirit of enlightenment (Chapter 4)
4. How to adopt the spirit of enlightenment through its ritual (Chapters 5-6)

i) How the spirit of enlightenment depends on certain causes to arise

How the spirit of enlightenment depends on certain causes to arise is explained in three parts:

1. The development of the spirit through the four conditions
2. The development of the spirit through the four causes
3. The development of the spirit through the four strengths

a' The development of the spirit through the four conditions

1. You develop the spirit of enlightenment either by seeing for yourself the inconceivable power of buddhas or bodhisattvas, or by hearing about them from a reliable person, and then thinking, "This enlightenment in which they abide or which they pursue is very powerful."

2. Although you may not have seen or heard of such power in this way, you can develop the spirit by listening to the scriptural collections which take unsurpassed enlightenment as a point of departure, and then aspiring to the sublime wisdom of a buddha.

3. Although you may not have heard the teachings, you can develop the spirit by understanding that the excellent teaching of the bodhisattvas is about to disappear, and then thinking, "I will definitely develop the spirit of enlightenment so that the bodhisattva teaching will remain for a long time, because the existence of such teaching removes suffering from innumerable living beings."

4. Although you have not seen the decline of the teaching, you think, "It is difficult to generate the spirit of enlightenment of even a *śrāvaka* or *pratyekabuddha* in these terrible times in which there is a preponderance of ignorance, shamelessness, lack of embarrassment, jealousy, stingingness, and the like. Then what need is there to mention developing the spirit of highest enlightenment? If I were, at some point, to develop the spirit of enlightenment, others would surely follow." Thus, you generate the spirit of enlightenment through seeing the difficulty required to develop it. [290]

Concerning *how* the spirit of enlightenment arises from these four conditions, it is said that they inspire you to attain great enlightenment, so a desire to attain enlightenment arises. The ways in which this happens are as follows:

1. After you see or hear about supernatural powers, you are awed, thinking, "I will attain such an enlightenment," and then generate the spirit of enlightenment.

2. Through hearing about the good qualities of a buddha from an instructor, you first develop faith and then there arises a desire to attain these qualities.

3. On finding the thought of the decline of the Mahāyāna teaching unbearable, you develop the desire to attain a buddha's sublime wisdom.

In regard to this last point, you see that if the teaching does not disappear, the suffering of living beings can be stopped. So even though your objective is indeed to remove suffering, nevertheless, the principal condition for the spirit of enlightenment arising is your inability to bear the fact that the teaching might disappear. Otherwise, this way of developing the spirit would repeat the explanation (presented later on in this text) of how the spirit arises in dependence on compassion.

4. After you see how rare this most purposeful spirit is, you develop a desire to attain buddhahood, spurred on principally by this awareness.

With regard to the two components of the spirit of enlightenment—the desire to attain enlightenment and the aim of the welfare of all beings—this fourth development of the spirit of enlightenment is established in terms of producing a desire to attain enlightenment, and is not established in terms of the aim.

Without the desire to attain buddhahood that comes from cultivating faith in a buddha's good qualities, you cannot overcome the sense of contentment that thinks peace [nirvāṇa] alone is sufficient to fulfill your own aims. The desire to attain buddhahood on account of training in love and compassion and seeing the fulfillment of others' aims as a necessity can eradicate the sense of contentment that thinks your peace alone is sufficient to fulfill *others'* aims, but cannot stop the sense of contentment that thinks peace is enough for *your own* aims. Besides this desire to attain buddhahood that comes from cultivating faith in a buddha's good qualities, there is no other way to stop the sense of contentment that thinks your peace alone is sufficient to fulfill your own aims. Indeed, you do need to overcome the sense of contentment that peace alone is enough to accomplish your own welfare because (1) Hinayāna practitioners, who are merely liberated from cyclic existence, have only a partial elimination of faults and a partial knowledge, and thus lack the perfect fulfillment of their own aims; (2) these practitioners are liberated from the problems of cyclic existence but not from

the problems of peace; and (3) the perfect fulfillment of one's own aims, it is said, is a buddha's embodiment of truth. [291] Therefore, once you cultivate faith in the good qualities of a buddha, you will see that you must attain buddhahood to accomplish even your own aims, let alone the aims of others. Understanding this is important for causing you not to turn back toward the Hinayāna.

Among the four developments of the spirit of enlightenment explained above, the first two are not induced by compassion and love. In other scriptures and treatises as well there are many explanations of the development of the spirit of enlightenment as the desire to attain buddhahood induced by just seeing the good qualities of a buddha's embodiment of truth and embodiment of form. The determination to establish all beings in buddhahood is also said to be the development of this spirit. So you must consider each of these two to be counted as simply "developments of the spirit of enlightenment." With regard to developing a completely perfect spirit of enlightenment, however, it is not sufficient merely to have the desire to attain buddhahood upon seeing the necessity of fulfilling others' aims. You must have the desire to attain buddhahood that sees that it is indispensable even for your own aims. Furthermore, this intention must not neglect others' welfare but be for others' sake as well, because the *Ornament for Clear Knowledge* talks about both the intention to attain enlightenment and the intention to accomplish others' welfare.¹⁹

The development of the spirit of enlightenment

Is the desire for perfect enlightenment for others' welfare.

b' The development of the spirit through the four causes

You develop the spirit of enlightenment through relying on:

- 1) a perfect lineage;
- 2) being sustained by a teacher;
- 3) compassion toward living beings;
- 4) not being disheartened by the difficulties of cyclic existence.

c' The development of the spirit through the four strengths

You develop the spirit through relying on the four strengths:

- 1) the strength of yourself—the desire to attain perfect enlightenment through your own power;
- 2) the strength of others—the desire to attain perfect enlightenment through others' power; [292]

- 3) the strength of the cause—developing the spirit by having been familiar with the Mahāyāna and now merely hearing praise of buddhas and bodhisattvas;
- 4) the strength of application—in this life, being accustomed for a long time to such virtuous activities as relying upon an excellent being and reflecting on the teachings you have heard.

Furthermore, Asaṅga's *Bodhisattva Levels (Bodhisattva-bhūmi)* says²⁰ that after you depend on the four causes and four conditions (whether individually or collectively), you generate a firm spirit of enlightenment if you develop it from your own strength or from the strength of the cause. It is not firm if you develop it from others' strength or from the strength of application.

Once you have understood well that the teaching in general and the Mahāyāna teaching in particular are about to disappear, and that this time is particularly degenerate, you realize that a spirit of enlightenment developed from the depths of the heart is extremely rare. Rely on an excellent teacher and make an effort to practice—studying and reflecting, etc. upon the Mahāyāna scriptural collection—and plant the root for the development of the spirit from the depths of your heart, not forced by others, nor mindlessly following others, nor through the habit of custom, but through your own strength. All the bodhisattva deeds are necessarily based on it.

From The Great Treatise

Vol. III

27

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

b' How to train specifically in the Vajrayāna

—

Now I will give a brief summation of the general meaning of the path. At the outset, the root of the path derives from your reliance upon a teacher, so consider this seriously. Then, once you have developed an uncontrived desire to take advantage of your leisure, this desire will spur you to practice continually. Therefore, in order to develop this, meditate on the topics connected with leisure and opportunity. Unless you then stop the various sentiments which seek the aims of this life, you will not diligently seek the aims of future lives. So work at meditating on how the body you have is impermanent in the sense that it will not last for long, and on how after death you will wander in the miserable realms. At that time, by creating a genuine awareness which is mindful of the frights of the miserable realms, build certainty from the depths of your heart about the qualities of the three refuges. Be constant in the common vow of going for refuge and train in its precepts. Then, from a range of perspectives develop faith, in the sense of conviction, in karma and its effects—this being the great foundation of all positive qualities. Make this faith firm. Strive to cultivate the ten virtues and to turn away from the ten nonvirtues, and always stay within the path of the four powers.⁷³

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When you have thus trained well in the teachings associated with a person of small capacity and have made this practice firm, you should contemplate often the general and specific faults of cyclic existence, and in general turn your mind away from cyclic existence as much as you can. Then, having identified the nature of karma and the afflictions—the causes from which cyclic existence arises—create an authentic desire to eliminate them. Develop broad certainty about the path that liberates you from cyclic existence, i.e., the three trainings, and particularly make effort at whichever of the vows of individual liberation you have taken. [806]

When you have thus trained well in the teachings associated with a person of medium capacity and have made this practice firm,⁷³⁴ consider the fact that just as you yourself have fallen into the ocean of cyclic existence, so have all beings, your mothers. Train in the spirit of enlightenment which is rooted in love and compassion, and strive to develop this as much as you can. Without it, the practices of the six perfections and the two stages⁷³⁵ are like stories built on a house with no foundation. When you develop a little experience of this spirit of enlightenment, confirm it with the rite. By making effort in this training, make the aspiration as solid as you can. Then study the great waves of the bodhisattva deeds, learning the boundaries of what to discard and what to adopt, and make a strong wish to train in those bodhisattva deeds. After you have developed these attitudes, take the vow of the engaged spirit of enlightenment through its rite. Train in the six perfections that mature your own mind and the four ways of gathering disciples which mature the minds of others. In particular, risk your life in making a great effort to avoid the root infractions. Strive not to be tainted by the small and intermediate contaminants and faults, and even if you are tainted, work to repair it.⁷³⁶ Then, because you must train specifically in the final two perfections, become knowledgeable in the way to sustain meditative stabilization and then achieve concentration. As much as you can, develop the view of the two selflessnesses, a purity free from permanence and annihilation. After you have found the view and stabilized your mind upon it, understand the proper way to sustain the view in meditation, and then do so. Such stabilization and wisdom are called serenity and insight, but they are not something separate from the last two perfections.⁷³⁷ Therefore, after you have taken the bodhisattva vows, they come about in the context of the training in its precepts.

You have reached a critical point when, while meditating on the lower levels, you increasingly wish to attain the higher levels, and

when studying the higher levels, you wish to practice the lower levels becomes stronger and stronger. [807] Some say to expend your energy only to stabilize your mind and to understand the view ignoring all earlier topics, but this makes it very difficult to get the vital points. Therefore, you must develop certainty about the whole course of the path. When you meditate on these topics, train your understanding and then go back to balance your mind. So if it seems that your faith in the teacher who instructs you on the path is decreasing, since this will cut the root of everything good that has come together, work on the methods for relying on the teacher. Similarly, if your joy in your practice loses strength, make meditation on the topics connected with leisure and opportunity your primary focus; if your attachment to this life increases, make meditation on impermanence and the faults of the miserable realms your primary focus. If you seem to be lazy about the proscriptives you have accepted, consider that your certainty about karmic cause and effect is meager and make meditation on karma and its effects your primary focus. If your sense of disenchantment with all of cyclic existence decreases, your desire to seek liberation will become just words. Therefore, contemplate the faults of cyclic existence. If your intention to benefit living beings in whatever you do is not strong, then you will sever the root of the Mahāyāna. Therefore, frequently cultivate the aspirational spirit of enlightenment together with its causes. Once you have taken the vows of a conqueror's child and are training in the practices, if the bondage of the reifying conception of signs seems strong, use reasoning consciousnesses to destroy all objects which are apprehended by the mind which conceives of signs, and train your mind in the space-like and illusion-like emptiness. If your mind is enslaved to distraction and does not remain on a virtuous object, you should primarily sustain one-pointed stability, as former teachers have said. From these illustrations, you should understand the cases I have not explained. In brief, without being partial, you have to be able to use the whole spectrum of virtues.

Among the stages of the path of a person of great capacity, I have explained how one who trains in the bodhisattva path practices insight, which is wisdom. [808]

From The Door of Liberation

6

The Three Principles of the Path

by Tsongkhapa

THE SECOND WORK OF TSONGKHAPA translated here is a short root text, The Three Principles of the Path. These three principles are renunciation, bodhi-mind, and right view. The root text, presented first in its entirety, is followed by a commentary containing instructions for meditation written in the early nineteenth century by the Fourth Panchen Lama, Tenpe Nyima.

This use of root text and commentary is integral to the Tibetan system of transmission of the teaching. Root texts are usually relatively short poems, difficult to understand but easily memorized. Although the author of a root text will sometimes write a commentary on his own text, most commentaries have been written by later scholars. They usually follow the root text line for line or verse for verse, explaining and clarifying the meaning.

This commentary gives comprehensive instructions for meditation, from the six preparatory practices to the final dedication. Following each relevant section, the author has quoted the verses of the root text.

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THE THREE PRINCIPLES OF THE PATH

I bow down to the venerable lamas.

I will explain as well as I am able

The essence of all the teachings of the Conqueror,

The path praised by the Conqueror's offspring,

The entrance for the fortunate ones who desire liberation.

SB

Listen with clear minds, you fortunate ones
 Who direct your minds to the path pleasing to Buddha,
 Who strive to make good use of leisure and opportunity
 And are not attached to the joys of saṃsāra.

Those with bodies are bound by the craving for existence.
 Without pure renunciation, there is no way to still
 Attraction to the pleasures of saṃsāra.
 Thus, from the outset seek renunciation.

Leisure and opportunity are difficult to find.
 There is no time to waste: reverse attraction to this life.
 Reverse attraction to future lives: think repeatedly
 Of the infallible effects of karma and the misery of this
 world.

Contemplating this, when you do not for an instant
 Wish the pleasures of saṃsāra,
 And day and night remain intent on liberation,
 You have then produced renunciation.

Renunciation without pure bodhi-mind
 Does not bring forth the perfect bliss
 Of unsurpassed enlightenment;
 Therefore, bodhisattvas generate excellent bodhi-mind.

Swept by the current of the four powerful rivers,
 Tied by strong bonds of karma, so hard to undo,
 Caught in the iron net of self-grasping,
 Completely enveloped by the darkness of ignorance,

Born and reborn in boundless saṃsāra,
 Ceaselessly tormented by the three miseries—

All beings, your mothers, are in this condition.
 Think of them and generate bodhi-mind.

Though you practice renunciation and bodhi-mind,
 Without wisdom, the realization of voidness,
 You cannot cut the root of saṃsāra.
 Therefore, strive to understand dependent origination.

One who sees the infallible cause and effect
 Of all phenomena in saṃsāra and nirvāṇa
 And destroys all false perceptions
 Has entered the path that pleases the Buddha.

Appearances are infallible dependent origination;
 Voidness is free of assertions.³¹
 As long as these two understandings are seen as separate,
 One has not yet realized the intent of the Buddha.

When these two realizations are simultaneous and concurrent,
 From a mere sight of infallible dependent origination
 Comes certain knowledge that completely destroys all
 modes of mental grasping.

At that time the analysis of the profound view is complete.

Appearances clear away the extreme of existence;
 Voidness clears away the extreme of non-existence.
 When you understand the arising of cause and effect from
 the viewpoint of voidness,
 You are not captivated by either extreme view.

Son, when you realize the keys
 Of the three principles of the path,
 Depend on solitude and strong effort,
 And quickly reach the final goal!

From The Life and

Teachings of
Tsung-khan

[On Ultimate Reality
or Right View
i.e., Wisdom]

False Mode of Arising as Illusory

When one has not properly identified the measure of the negates as explained above, when one's analysis of the object cools down, one first begins to imagine that the object does not exist, then one comes to experience the analyzer also as likewise (non-existent), then even the ascertainer of the non-existence ceases to have existence, and one comes into a state wherein there is no ground of ascertaining anything at all as "this is it" or "this is not it." There then arises perception of a fuzzy, foggy appearance, occurring from the failure to distinguish between intrinsically real existence/non-existence and mere existence/non-existence. Such an emptiness is the kind of emptiness that destroys relativity, and therefore the arising of such a fuzzy, foggy appearance derived from such a realization is definitely not the meaning of illusoriness.

Therefore, when one analyzes rationally and one comes to consider that such a person is not present even in the slightest upon its intrinsically established object, depending on which (consideration) these appearances arise in a fuzzy, foggy manner—just this is not very difficult. Such experiences occur for all those who admire the Middle Way theories and have a casual learning of the teachings that demonstrate intrinsic reality/lessness. But the real difficulty is to completely negate any objectively established intrinsic reality and yet develop a deep certainty about the representation of how that intrinsically unreal person himself is the accumulator of evolutionary actions and the experienter of evolutionary effects etc. When the combination of those two facts (reality/lessness and) the ability to represent those things, is carried to the extreme limit of existence, that is the view of the middle way, so extremely difficult to discover.

From Life and Teaching
of Tsongkhapa

Song of the Tricosmic Master

dPal Idan sa gsum ma



by Khaydrub Choeje Gelek Pal Zangpo (1385-1438)

O Je Tsongkhapa, master of the three worlds,
Who surpasses all others in compassion,
The eye through whom all beings
Can receive ultimate vision,
Peerless Refuge of liberation seekers,
To you, a supreme and incomparable Lama,
I offer my spiritual aspirations.

In the very presence of the Victorious One
You entered the ways of enlightenment;
Here in this Land of Snow Mountains
You were renowned as Losang Drakpa;
Now in Tushita Pure Land you abide,
Famed as Wisdom Essence;
To you, mightiest of Bodhisattvas,
I offer my spiritual aspirations.

By the force of ripening merits
You read the teachings and, without study,
Understood texts even in the language of mystics.
To you of naturally perfect excellence
I offer my spiritual aspirations.

From the time your sun-like body
Slipped radiantly from your mother's cloud,
You ever shunned the dancing lights
Of the world and its vain fortunes;
To you I offer my spiritual aspirations.

From very youth you held no distaste
Toward the austerities of Buddhacharma
But secured yourself in perfect discipline.
To you who for countless lifetimes knew
The power of familiarity with meditation,
I offer my spiritual aspirations.

Having unrelentingly examined in depth
The words and meanings of Buddha's teachings,
Constantly and with spontaneity you practised
The guidelines discovered therein.
To you, a treasury of vast knowledge,
I offer my spiritual aspirations.

Not satisfied with strings of empty words,
With subtle reason you fathomed that point
Not perceived by the millions of scholars;
To you who beheld reality itself
I offer my spiritual aspirations.

Were all logicians to analyse
Your teachings a hundred times,
Not even a fraction's fraction
Of your words would prove wrong.
To you of flawless mind
I offer my spiritual aspirations.

Who but you has seen as they are
All the concepts contained
In the texts of the ancient masters?
To you in whom all teachings
Arose as practical advice
I offer my spiritual aspirations.

When the dust clothing the earth
Is inscribed by your lotus feet
Which always rests on the crowns of sages,
That dust becomes an object
Well worthy of worship by men; to you
I offer my spiritual aspirations.

Although a fully omniscient one
Were to challenge your ethical temper,
Not a hint of a flaw
Could ever be discovered:
To you, a perfect renunciate,
I offer my spiritual aspirations.

Like an ocean of wish-fulfilling gems
Is the immeasurable depth of your love,
Beyond even the bounds of clairvoyance.
To you, a mine of benevolence,
I offer my spiritual aspirations.

What load of benefit to beings
Is not carried by your mind so mighty,
For did you not reach the zenith
Of deeds sending endless waves?
To you of miraculous compassion
I offer my spiritual aspirations.

If each breath you release
Acts only as medicine to beings,
Why try to describe the effect
Of your stores of merit and wisdom?
To you, friend of the three worlds,
I offer my spiritual aspirations.

Manjushri, the Bodhisatva of Wisdom,
Daily appeared directly to you
And rained ambrosial streams of teachings,
The synthesis of the minds of Buddhas
Past, present and future;
To you I offer my spiritual aspirations.

"In the lotus garden of the Muni's teachings
 You are likened to a sun amongst Buddhas;
 With these very words Maitreya Buddha
 Praised you when in a vision he appeared;
 To you I offer my spiritual aspirations.

Beholding the sublime forms of countless Buddhas,
 You directly received the transforming powers
 Of Saraha, Luipa and the other mahasiddhas;
 To you, a supreme and perfected being,
 I offer my spiritual aspirations.

Having in a dream been given the blessings of
 Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Buddhapalita and Chandrakirti,
 Experience of the Very Dharma, profound emptiness,
 Arose within you; to you, who has abandoned
 Even the imprints of confusion,
 I offer my spiritual aspirations.

With subtle meditation in samadhi centred
 Upon reality itself, clear like the sky,
 You moved not for a moment
 Even in post meditation
 From viewing mind as illusory;
 To you I offer my spiritual aspirations.

Having mastered the oceans of tantras,
 Pinnacle of all Buddhas teachings,
 You indeed are a perfect Lama
 Inseparable from All-pervading Vajradhara;
 To you I offer my spiritual aspirations.

Master who practised exactly as taught
 The essential profundities of tantra's two stages,²
 The ultimate paths, as never before
 Shown by another in this land,
 And then accomplished their purpose,
 I offer you my spiritual aspirations.

By perfecting the coarse and subtle deity yogas,
 You eliminated the habitual thought patterns
 That conceive existence as profane.
 To you whose mind never stirs
 From the blissful flow of mystic mandalas,
 I offer my spiritual aspirations.

Coasting in the central nadi on a current of air,
 You perceived the quintessence of emptiness,
 The clear light itself, mahamudra,
 Experiencing the summit of great bliss;
 To you, the one of vajra mind,
 I offer my spiritual aspirations.

Due to the force of your infinite prayers,
 Countless disciples spontaneously were drawn
 To the path that pleases all Buddhas;
 To you, Refuge of all the world,
 I offer my spiritual aspirations.

In an era when nothing but the empty name
 of "Doctrine" was upheld by teachers and trainees,
 You brought into light the three higher trainings³
 To you, the Great Reviver,
 I offer my spiritual aspirations.

When you determined consciously to pass away,
 Hosts of Dakas and Dakinis beyond imagination
 Making offerings filled the skies.
 To you I offer my spiritual aspirations.

Mind focussed on the clear light of Dharmakaya,
 Your body transformed into a luminous sphere and,
 In the bardo, illusory body yoga fulfilled Sambhogakaya.
 To you who gained supreme siddhi
 I offer my spiritual aspirations.

From this moment onward in all future lives,
 May I sit before your lotus feet

And, hearing your teachings,
Practise only as delights you.

May I be blessed to abandon both
Viewing this life as something to crave
And yearning for happiness for myself alone.
And may I never abandon the bodhimind,
The wish to attain Buddhahood for all⁴.

With clear wisdom focussing on the subtle,
May I fathom the perfect words of Buddha
And ascend the path of knowledge.
Thus may I arise to dispel the darkness
Of the ignorance pervading beings' minds.

May I have power to discover
The import of the many tantras
And to practise single-pointedly
The profound significance of their two stages,
Unhindered by inner or outer obstacles,

In brief, may I receive grace to understand
All the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni,
Especially those of the peerless Vajrayana,
Just as do the Awakened Ones.
Thus may I bring light to the world.

By the virtue of this aspiration,
May I in all future lives never be
Parted from you, a perfect Lama,
And may I dwell with the taste of the teachings
That arose from the depths of your experience.

Because of whatever goodness
I have done or will do,
May you gaze upon me with pleasure,
And may I always unwaveringly practise
Precisely in accord with your advice.

By the power of the mighty deeds
Of Lama Je Tsongkhapa, the tantric Guru,
Until enlightenment may I never fall
From the good path praised by all Buddhas.

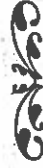
*The colophon: Written by Khogydrub Choje Gelek Pal Zangpo, who learned
a great deal by sitting for many years at the lotus feet of Je Rinpoche.*



mNyam med Tsong kha pa'i bstod pa

In Praise of the Incomparable Tsongkhapa

mNyam med Tsong kha pa'i bstod pa



by Gyalwa Milkyo Dorje, The Eighth Karmapa
(1507-1554)

At a time when nearly all in this Northern Land
Were living in utter contradiction to Dharma,
Without illusion, O Tsongkhapa, you polished the
teachings.

Hence I sing this praise to you of Ganden Mountain⁹.

When the teachings of the Sakya, Kargu, Kadam
And Nyingma sects in Tibet were declining,
You, O Tsongkhapa, revived Buddha's Doctrine,
Hence I sing this praise to you of Ganden Mountain.

Mañjushri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, gave to you
Special instructions on the thought of Nagarjuna.
O Tsongkhapa, upholder of the Middle Way,
I sing this praise to you of Ganden Mountain.

"Mind and form are not empty of their own natures
But are empty of truly existent mind and form,"¹⁰
You, O Tsongkhapa, are Tibet's chief exponent of voidness,
Hence I sing this praise to you of Ganden Mountain.

In merely a few years you filled
 The land from China to India
 With peerless holders of the saffron robes.
 Hence I sing this praise to you of Ganden Mountain.

Those who become your followers
 And look to you and your teachings
 Are never again disappointed or forsaken.
 Hence I sing this praise to you of Ganden Mountain.

The trainees who walk in your footsteps
 Breathe the fresh air of the Great Way.
 They would die for the good of the world.
 Hence I sing this praise to you of Ganden Mountain.

Anyone who disparages your doctrine must face
 The terrible wrath of the Dharma protectors.
 O Tsongkhapa, who abides in truth's power,
 I sing this praise to you of Ganden Mountain.

In person and in dreams you come to those
 Who but once recollect your image.
 O Tsongkhapa, who watches with compassionate eyes,
 I sing this praise to you of Ganden Mountain.

In order to civilize men and spirits you spread
 Your teachings through Kham, Mongolia and Turkestan:
 O Tsongkhapa, subduer of savages,
 I sing this praise to you of Ganden Mountain.

For men coarse and far from the Way, you dispel
 Mental clouds, evils and bad karma.
 O Tsongkhapa, who bestows quick progress,
 I sing this praise to you of Ganden Mountain.

Those who take heartfelt Refuge in you,
 Even those with no hope for now or hereafter,
 O Tsongkhapa, have their every wish fulfilled.
 Hence I sing this praise to you of Ganden Mountain.

Having exposed false teachings transgressing
 The excellent ways well shown by Buddha,
 You firmly established your Bold Doctrine.
 Hence I sing this praise to you of Ganden Mountain.

Manifesting sublime austerity and discipline,
 The form and fragrance of your life was incomparable.
 O Tsongkhapa, controlled one pleasing to the Buddhas,
 I sing this praise to you of Ganden Mountain.

By the strength of the sons of your lineage
 And by my having faithfully offered this praise,
 May the enlightened activity of Buddha Shakyamuni
 Pervade the earth for ages to come.

The colophon: Once when Gyalwa Misky Dorje was travelling through the Charida Pass, thoughts of the incomparable Tsongkhapa welled up within him. Overcome by profound faith, he was moved to compose the above poem.



Essence of Superfine Gold

A Guide on the Stages of the Path
to Enlightenment

The Third Dalai Lama

Translated from Tibetan and annotated by
Dr. Chok Tenzin Monlam Peltsok

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included next

ROOT TEXT

A SONG OF EXPERIENCE

CONDENSED POINTS OF THE STAGES OF THE PATH

Lama Tsongkhapa

I bow down my head to the chief of the Shakyas
Whose body was formed through millions of perfect virtues
Whose speech fulfills the hopes of limitless beings
And whose mind sees all objects of knowledge precisely as they are.

I prostrate to Ajita and Manjughosha
The excellent sons of the peerless Teacher
Who, emanating in the countless realms
Carry out all the tasks of the buddhas.

I bow at the feet of Nagarjuna and Asanga, the Ornaments
of the World

Who are renowned throughout the three realms
And correctly interpreted the Mother of the Victors
Which is so difficult to fathom.

I bow to Dipamkara, the holder of the treasury of instructions
The distilled essence, unmistaken and complete
On the paths of the profound view and vast deeds
Which were well transmitted from the two great trailblazers.

I respectfully pay homage to the spiritual masters
Who, with skillful deeds moved by compassion
Open the eyes of the fortunate ones to see all the vast scriptures
And the brilliant gateway leading to liberation.

The stages of the path to enlightenment
Have been transmitted in succession through Nagarjuna and Asanga
The crowning jewels of the learned ones of the world
Whose banner of renown rises high amongst all beings.
As it fulfills every aspiration of sentient beings
It is the king of wish-fulfilling gems of instruction
As it combines the thousand streams of noble teachings
It is also an ocean of glorious, excellent explanations.

It makes one realize that the entire teaching is consistent
It makes one see the entire teaching as spiritual instruction
It makes one discover the intent of the Buddha with ease
And it also saves one from the abyss of grave misdeeds.
Hence, which intelligent being would not be enthralled
By the Stages of the Path of the Three Beings
The excellent instruction relied upon by the many fortunate beings
The learned ones of India and Tibet?

(Atishy)

4 *Essence of Superfine Gold*

As the essence of the entire scripture is herein condensed
 Even listening to or explaining this teaching once
 Certainly accumulates a great virtue of teaching or listening
 To the holy Dharma; hence, contemplate on this meaning.

To fulfill all ideal conditions for the good of this and future lives
 The root lies in our spiritual masters, the guides on our path.
 Seeing this, follow them properly in thought and deed
 Forsaking them not even at the cost of your life
 And please them with the offering of practice—
 heeding their words.

I, a yogi, practiced in this way.
 You, who seek liberation, should do likewise.

This opportune life surpasses a wish-fulfilling gem
 Such is found only once this time
 So hard to obtain, yet so easy to lose, like a flash of lightning!
 Seeing this nature, discard all worldly activities
 Just like winnowing the chaff
 And, day and night, make it meaningful.
 I, a yogi, practiced in this way.
 You, who seek liberation, should do likewise.

You are unsure about your birth in the unfortunate realms
 after death.

And certain that the Three Jewels are the protectors from this terror.
 So, make your practice of refuge firm

And let not the precepts of your refuge weaken.
 This depends on the correct practice of actions to be adopted
 or discarded

By considering well the causality of white and black karmas.
 I, a yogi, practiced in this way.
 You, who seek liberation, should do likewise.

Until you obtain a fully qualified rebirth
 No breakthrough in the practice of the extraordinary path will occur.
 Hence, cultivate its complete cause, missing nothing.
 Especially, it is essential to purify the karmic obscurations
 Of non-virtues and infractions that pollute the three doors.
 Hence, cherish the cultivation of the four opponent powers
 constantly.

I, a yogi, practiced in this way.
 You, who seek liberation, should do likewise.

If you make no effort to ponder the faults of true suffering
 A genuine wish for liberation will not arise.
 If you do not contemplate how the origin of suffering leads
 to samsara

You will not know how to eliminate the root of samsara;
 Hence, it is essential to cultivate renunciation of samsara
 And recognize what binds you in samsara.
 I, a yogi, practiced in this way.
 You, who seek liberation, should do likewise.

Bodhicitta is the central pillar of the Supreme Vehicle's path
 The foundation and basis of the great practices.

It is like an elixir for the Two Accumulations
 It is a treasury of merit containing countless virtues.
 Knowing this, the courageous Children of the Victors
 Hold this precious, supreme aspiration as their core practice.
 I, a yogi, practiced in this way.
 You, who seek liberation, should do likewise.

Generosity is the wish-fulfilling gem that satisfies the hopes
 of wanderers

The superior weapon that cuts the knot of miserliness
 The *bodhisattva* deed that generates unflinching courage
 And the foundation of glory that roars in the ten directions.
 Knowing this, the learned ones cultivate the noble path
 Of giving one's body, possessions and virtues.
 I, a yogi, practiced in this way.
 You, who seek liberation, should do likewise.

Ethics are the water that cleanses the stains of misdeeds
 The moonlight that soothes the tormenting heat of delusions.
 One stands majestically like Meru amidst sentient beings
 Without intimidation, all beings bow down to you.
 Knowing this, the worthy ones guard
 Their well-adopted ethics like their eyes.
 I, a yogi, practiced in this way.
 You, who seek liberation, should do likewise.

6 *Essence of Superfine Gold*

Patience is the finest ornament of the Powerful Ones
 The best ascetic practice for the tormenting afflictions
 The *garuda*, the enemy of the snake of hatred
 The sturdy armor against the weapons of harsh speech.
 Knowing this, by various means
 They cultivate the excellent armor of patience.
 I, a yogi, practiced in this way.
 You, who seek liberation, should do likewise.

If one dons the armor of unwavering joyous effort
 The virtues of scriptural knowledge and insight will grow
 like the waxing moon
 All activities will become meaningful
 Every work begun will be accomplished as desired.
 Knowing this, the *bodhisattvas* practice great joyous effort
 Which dispels all laziness.
 I, a yogi, practiced in this way.
 You, who seek liberation, should do likewise.

Meditative concentration is the king that rules the mind
 When remaining focused it is immovable like the King
 of Mountains
 When directed it engages with all objects of the virtuous mind
 And induces serviceable bliss for body and mind.
 Knowing this, the great *yogis* always rely upon *samadhi*
 The destroyer of the enemy of mental distraction.
 I, a yogi, practiced in this way.
 You, who seek liberation, should do likewise.

Wisdom is the eye through which to see profound reality
 The path that eliminates the root of *samsara*
 The treasury of virtues praised in all the scriptures
 Renowned as the excellent lamp that dispels the darkness
 of ignorance.
 Knowing this, the learned ones who seek liberation
 Dedicate every effort to generate the path.
 I, a yogi, practiced in this way.
 You, who seek liberation, should do likewise.

Single-pointed concentration alone
 Is seen as powerless to eliminate the root of *samsara*.
 Insight devoid of the path of calm abiding

Cannot overcome the afflictions, however much it analyzes.
 Hence, the insight that resolves the mode of being of things
 Should mount the horse of unwavering calm abiding
 And, through the sharp weapon of *Madhyamika* reasoning,
 free from extremes

All extreme graspings are destroyed.
 With the vast insight that correctly analyzes thus
 The intelligence that realizes the reality is expanded.
 I, a yogi, practiced in this way.
 You, who seek liberation, should do likewise.

Single-pointed familiarization evidently brings meditative
 concentration

Yet the correct analysis of the mode of being of things
 By individual investigation
 Also generates meditative concentration which remains firm
 and unwavering.

Seeing this, how marvelous are those who strive to accomplish
 Such a union of calm abiding and special insight!
 I, a yogi, practiced in this way.
 You, who seek liberation, should do likewise.

Meditating on the space-like emptiness of meditative equipoise
 And the illusion-like emptiness of the post-meditation state
 And engaging in the practices of *bodhisattvas*—
 Through the union of method and wisdom—is praiseworthy.
 Understanding this, not being satisfied with the partial path
 Is the tradition of the Fortunate Ones.
 I, a yogi, practiced in this way.
 You, who seek liberation, should do likewise.

Thus, generating the common path, which is essential for both
 The Causal and Resultant Vehicles of Mahayana
 And then, with a proficient captain's guidance
 Entering into the ocean of Tantras
 And receiving the complete quintessential instruction
 Is the way to make human rebirth meaningful.
 I, a yogi, practiced in this way.
 You, who seek liberation, should do likewise.

In order to make familiar in my own mind
 And also to benefit other fortunate beings

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I have hereit explained in an easy manner
The complete path that pleases the Victors.
I pray and dedicate any merit thus created
To all sentient beings, that they not be separated from the pure
and noble path.
I, a yogi, prayed in this way.
You, who seek liberation, should do likewise.

The colophon: This short presentation of the practice of the Stages on the Path to Enlightenment is written by Bhikshu Lobzang Dakpa, a hermit who has undertaken extensive studies on Dharma in order to remind himself of the practices, at the Victorious Monastery of Geden, on Drok Mountain.

The Foundation of All Excellence

THE FINAL SELECTION is The Foundation of All Excellence, which presents the stages of the path from the viewpoint of reliance on a spiritual teacher and the mind-practice of the three levels of beings. Tsongkhapa's poem, presented first in its entirety, serves as the root text for the commentary that follows, written by Kishri Kabchu Sudhi.

In this case the commentator has made a line-for-line commentary on the root text, quoting sutras as scriptural authority at the end of each section. In order to make this process clear, we have inserted the lines of the root text in italics. Also, many of the sutra citations have been omitted to limit the length of this selection.

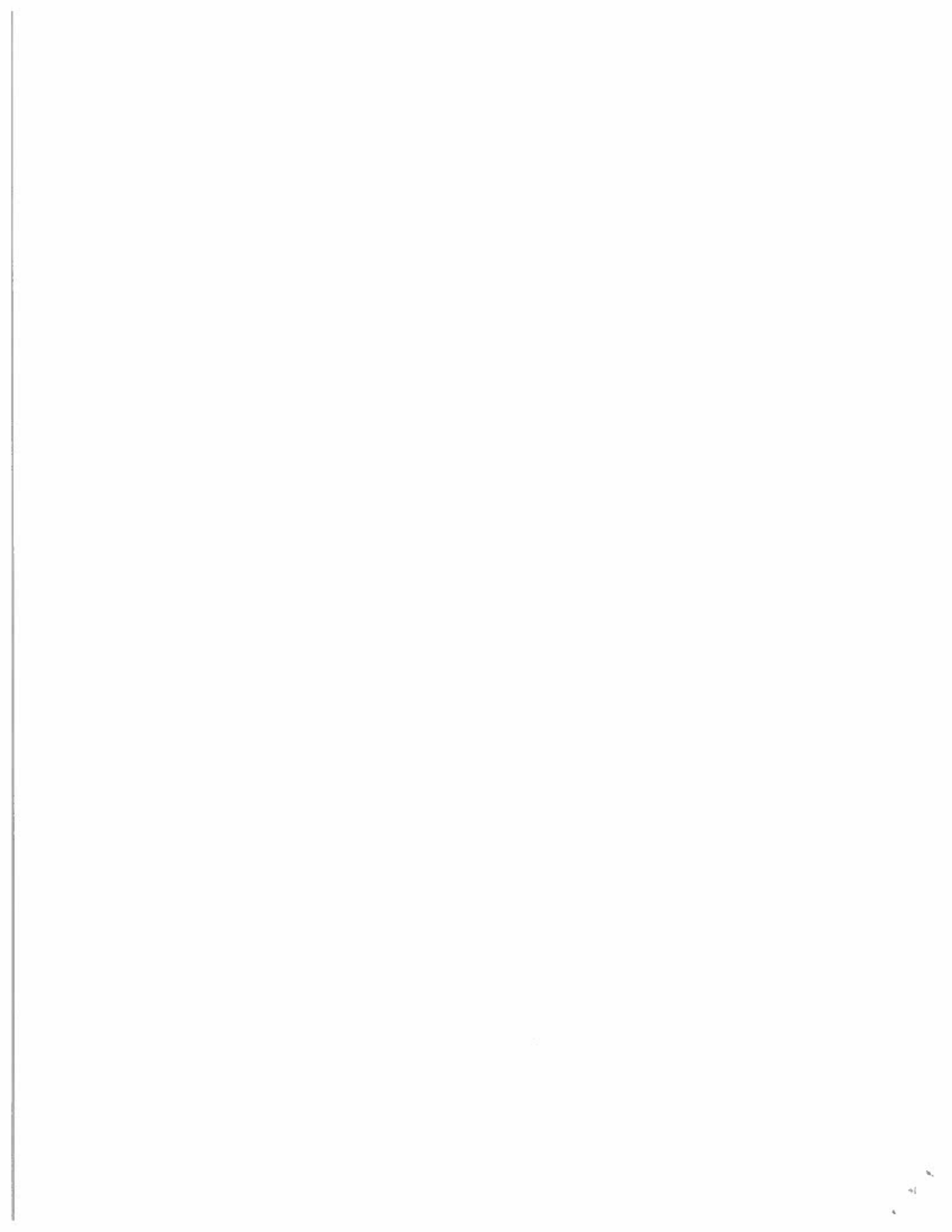
The Foundation of All Excellence is usually recited last during the chanting of prayers, as it is a prayer to achieve the object of one's meditation or prayer. When the text is recited in this way, the last line of each verse is repeated.

o3o3o

THE FOUNDATION OF ALL EXCELLENCE

The kind reverend lama is the foundation of all excellence.
 Seeing that dependence on him is the root of the path,
 May I rely on him
 With great respect and continuous effort.

A human life with leisure is obtained this once.
 Understanding that it is very important and hard to find,
 May I produce unceasingly
 The mind that takes up its essence day and night.



The fluctuation of life is like a bubble of water;
 Remember death, for we perish so quickly.
 After death, the effects of black and white karma
 Pursue us as the shadow follows the body.

Finding certainty in this,
 May I always be careful
 To do only virtuous deeds
 And abandon even the slightest non-virtuous actions.

The door to all misery is seeking satisfaction in pleasure.
 Having realized that there is no security
 In the pernicious perfections of saṃsāra,
 May I be strongly intent on the bliss of liberation.

That pure thought produces
 The great heedfulness of remembrance and discernment.
 May I accomplish by this means the essence
 Of the individual vow, which is the root of the doctrine.

Having seen that all beings, my kind mothers,
 Have fallen like myself into the ocean of saṃsāra,
 May I practice pure bodhi-mind,
 Which assumes the obligation to free all living beings.

Bodhi-mind alone, without cultivation
 Of the three moral practices, does not lead to enlightenment.
 Having realized this, may I practice
 With intense effort the bodhisattva vow.

By quieting attraction to objects that are false
 And analyzing the meaning of reality,
 May I quickly produce within myself
 The path that unifies tranquility and insight.

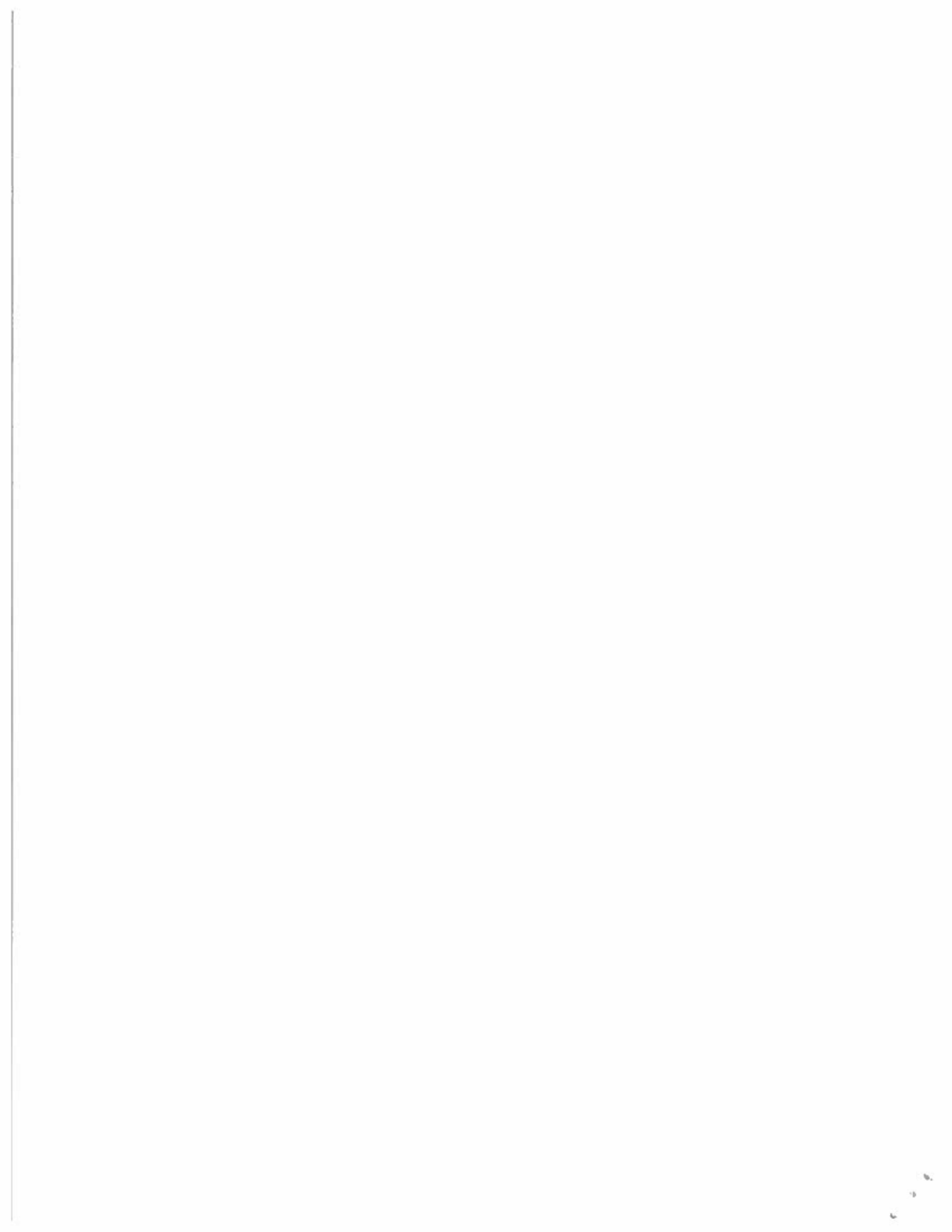
When, by this practice, I become a vessel of the general path,
 May I soon enter
 The great gateway of the fortunate ones:
 The Vajrayāna, supreme of yānas.

The basis of achieving the two siddhis
 Is the pure vow one takes on entering this path.
 Having found real understanding of it,
 May I keep this vow though it cost my life.

Having realized the significance of the two stages,
 Which are the essence of the Vajrayāna,
 By unswerving effort in the four sessions of yoga
 May I achieve what the holy lama has taught.

May the spiritual teacher who has shown me the good path
 And all my spiritual friends who practice it have long lives.
 May I at last completely surmount
 All inner and outer obstacles.

May I in all births enjoy the glorious Dharma
 Inseparable from the perfect lama;
 Having completed the stages⁴⁷ and paths,⁴⁸
 May I quickly obtain the high stage of Vajradhara.



THE ATTITUDE OF A PERSON OF SMALL CAPACITY

- b) The measure of the attitude of a person of small capacity
 c) Clearing up misconceptions concerning the attitude of a person of small capacity

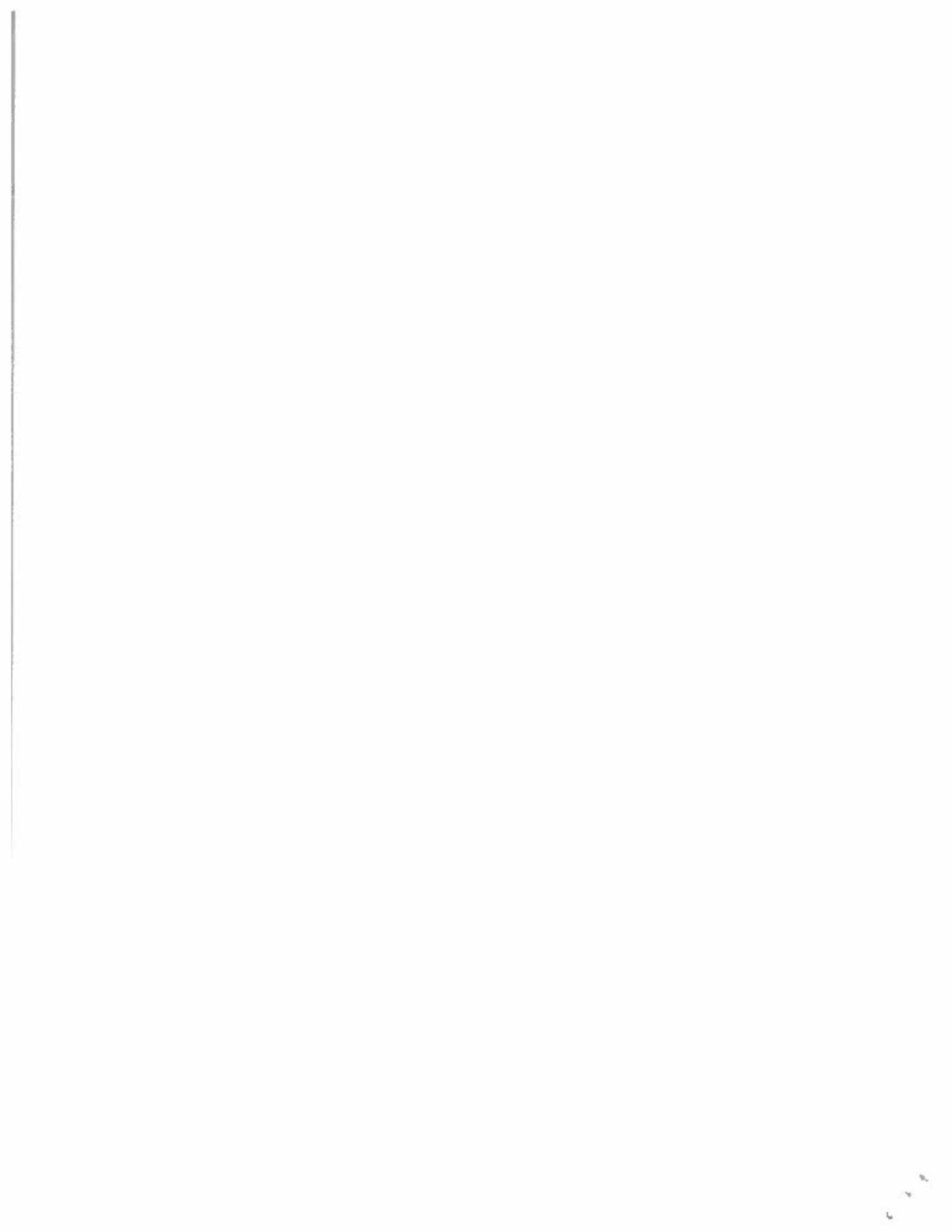
— 538 —

b) **The measure of the attitude of a person of small capacity**
 Previously you have had an uncontrived interest in this life, while your interest in future lives has merely been an understanding that follows what others say. You have generated the attitude of a person of small capacity when these interests change places, and your interest in the future has become paramount, while your interest in this life has become merely incidental. However, you must make this attitude stable. Thus, once it has occurred, cultivate it diligently.

c) **Clearing up misconceptions concerning the attitude of a person of small capacity**

Misconception: In the scriptures it says that you must turn your mind away from all the excellent things of cyclic existence. Someone could misinterpret this and think that is improper to develop an interest in high status [as a human or deity] in which body, resources, and the like are excellent, because it is within cyclic existence.

Response: There are two kinds of objects of interest: those which you diligently seek temporarily and those which you diligently seek ultimately. Even persons who strive for liberation must diligently



but temporarily seek excellent bodies, etc., in cyclic existence. For, they will ultimately attain certain goodness through a succession of lives in high status. [204]

Further, not everything within high status—excellent body, resources, and attendants—is included within cyclic existence. The most excellent body is a buddha's embodiment as form; the most excellent resources are the riches of this embodiment's realm; and the most excellent attendants are this embodiment's retinue. Intending this, Maitreya says in the *Ornament for the Mahāyāna Sūtras*⁵⁰ that you achieve high status as a human or deity by means of the first four perfections:

Excellent resources and body
And excellent retinue—high status.

Again, it is said in many texts that you achieve a buddha's embodiment as form by means of the first four perfections.

Therefore, those who achieve omniscience accomplish a great amount of exceptional ethical discipline, generosity, patience, and the like for a long time. Consequently, they diligently seek the effects of these as well—exceptional high status with its body and so forth.

The achievement of the final goal, certain goodness, is spoken of in *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*.⁵¹

Relying on the boat of the human body,
Free yourself from the great river of suffering.

As Śāntideva says, you must rely on a life in a happy realm—emphasized in the verse by the human body—and cross the ocean of existence, reaching omniscience. Moreover, you must pass successively through many lifetimes. Consequently, ethical discipline—the preeminent cause of achieving a body in a happy realm—is the root of the path.

Moreover, you need a body in a happy realm that is fully qualified, for even if you have achieved the path, you will make little progress with a body that is not completely qualified and only possesses good qualities to some extent. For this, it is not enough to partially observe the fundamental trainings of novice monks and the like. You must strive to maintain the fundamental trainings of monks and so on in their entirety.

Miscellaneous: Some say that if maintaining ethical discipline is for the purpose of achieving a rebirth in a happy realm, you can achieve this even by a one-day vow. So, why become a monk, which

is a difficult life with little purpose? Others say that if the purpose of vows of individual liberation is to become an arhat, why become a monk and lead a life which is difficult and of little purpose? Rather, we should value a life as a lay practitioner, for you can also become an arhat in such a life, and, besides, you cannot become a monk until you reach the age of twenty. [205]

Reply: Understand these claims to be great nonsense from persons who do not understand the key points of the teaching. Rather, strive to maintain the fundamental trainings completely, gradually assuming the higher vows while using the lower ones as supports.

This concludes the explanation of training the mind in the stages of the path that are shared with persons of small capacity.

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