

**The Asian Classics Institute**  
**Course III: Applied Meditation**  
*Level Two of The Steps to Buddhahood (Lam Rim)*

**Course Syllabus**

**Readings One and Two**

Subject: The Six Preliminaries to Meditation, and the Seven Ingredients

Reading: Je Tsongkapa's *Great Book on the Steps of the Path*, folios 37a--40a, a commentary upon selections from the *King of All Prayers*, the *Prayer of the Realized One*, *Deeds of All Goodness*, folios 198b-199a *A Thousand Angels of the Heaven of Bliss*

**Reading Three**

Subject: The Six Conditions for Meditation

Reading: Je Tsongkapa's *Great Book on the Steps of the Path*, folios 314a-315b

**Reading Four**

Subject: The Eight-Part Posture

Reading: Je Tsongkapa's *Great Book on the Steps of the Path*, folios 315b-316a

**Readings Five and Six**

Subject: The Five Problems of Meditation, and the Eight Corrections

Reading: A special chart on the stages of meditation designed by Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche (1901-1981)

**Reading Seven**

Subject: The Nine States of Meditation

Reading: Pabongka Rinpoche's *A Gift of Liberation*, folios 357a-359a

**Reading Eight**

Subject: The Steps to Buddhahood, and Finding a Lama

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**Reading Nine**

Subject: Getting the Essence of Life

Reading: Pabongka Rinpoche's *Opening Your Eyes to What You Should Keep, and What You Should Give Up*, a commentary on Je Tsongkapa's *Source of All My Good*, Part Two

**Reading Ten**

Subject: Steps for Those of Medium and Greater Capacity

Reading: Pabongka Rinpoche's *Opening Your Eyes to What You Should Keep, and What You Should Give Up*, a commentary on Je Tsongkapa's *Source of All My Good*, folios Part Three



**The Asian Classics Institute**  
**Course III: Applied Meditation**  
**Readings One and Two**

**The Six Preliminaries to Meditation, and the Seven Ingredients**

The following selection is taken from the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path (Lam-rim chen-mo)* written by Je Tsongkapa (1357-1419). This part of his work is a commentary on a special prayer called the *King of All Prayers, the Prayer of the Realized One, Deeds of All Goodness*.

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From the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path* by Je Tsongkapa:

Here we begin a brief presentation of how to practice the steps of the path to Buddhahood. First we will make the actual presentation, and after that refute certain mistaken ideas about the steps. The presentation itself comes in two sections; the first is how to proceed during meditation periods. This starts with Six Preliminaries to meditation.

[1] Here we are following the descriptions of how Serlingpa practiced during his life. The first preliminary to meditation is to make the room tidy and clean; then set up a beautiful altar, with representations of the Buddha's body, speech, and mind.

[2] The second preliminary is to go and find offerings that you obtain without using any dishonest means. Put them forth in an attractive arrangement.

[3] Now the *Levels of Listeners* [by Master Asanga] says that, when you are practicing to purify the mind of the obstacles of sleepiness and fogginess, you should "press them upon each other." It also states that, when you are practicing to purify the mind of other kinds of obstacles, such as attraction to the objects of the senses, you should seat yourself upon a platform or smaller seat and assume the full lotus position. Therefore the third preliminary is to seat yourself on a comfortable cushion, sit up straight, and assume a full lotus position with your legs (a half lotus is also acceptable). In this pose then sink your mind deep into the thoughts of taking refuge, and the wish for enlightenment.

[4] The fourth preliminary is to visualize the garden for gathering the power of good. In the space before you, imagine the Lamas of both the far-reaching lineage, and the lineage of the profound view. Together with them are an inconceivable mass of Buddhas, and bodhisattvas, listeners, self-made Buddhas, and protectors of the Dharma.

[5] It is extremely difficult to bring the path to grow within the stream of your mind if all you practice is the various principal causes. You also need the supporting causes for the path to grow; you need to gather together the different factors that are conducive to the path, and you need to clean yourself of the factors that are obstacles, the ones that oppose the path. Therefore you must train your mind in the Seven Ingredients, which include in them all the critical points for gathering good and cleaning away obstacles.

[a] The first ingredient is prostration. There is one kind of prostration that combines all three doors of expression. It is found in the verse [from the *King of All Prayers, the Prayer of the Realized One, Deeds of All Goodness*] that includes the words "Whosoever they are, as many as there may be." [The full verse reads:

I bow down, and purely, in body and speech and mind, to all those Lions of living kind,  
Whosoever they are, as many as there may be, to those Who are Gone;  
Gone in the past, in the present or the future, on any of the planets in the ten directions of space.]

Here we are not talking of a Buddha on a certain planet in a certain direction of space, nor are we talking of a Buddha of a particular time; our prostrations rather are directed at each and every Victorious Buddha, those who live in every one of the ten directions of space itself—those who have already come before, those who are going to come in the future, and those who now are here. Don't do your prostrations just to go along with the crowd; do them rather out of deep respect, from the depths of your heart.

On this the master Yeshe De, in his commentary, notes that "The good deed you do by prostrating to a single Buddha is beyond any means of measuring. So there's no need to mention what a goodness it is to picture this many Buddhas, and then prostrate yourself to them."

This is how we explain what it is to prostrate through each one of the three doors of expression. The first is the prostration in body, and is found in the one verse that includes the lines "Deeds of Goodness" The full verse reads:

By all the power of the prayer of Deeds of Goodness  
Each and every Victorious One is actually here before my mind,  
And I bow myself to them perfectly,  
With bodies that are as many as the atoms of all the worlds of the universe.

Here first picture each and every Victorious One, those of every place, and those of every time; see them in your mind, as if they were actually here before you. Then send forth copies of yourself, bodies that are equal in number to the atoms of all the worlds of the universe, and bow down to them.

Next is the prostration in mind. This too is found in a single verse, the one with the words "Atop a single atom." The full verse reads:

Atop a single atom are Buddhas as many as all the atoms there are.  
Around them are their sons and daughters.  
I see every corner of space, each and every place, filled like this, with Victors.

Imagine every single atom of the universe, and atop each one see Buddhas, as many as all the atoms there are. These Buddhas are surrounded by their followers, all the bodhisattvas. Try to have a feeling where you see, where you sense you are in the presence of, all their incredible good qualities.

Last is the prostration in speech. This one is found in the single verse which mentions "my words of admiration." The full verse reads:

I sing the praises of all those who have Gone to Bliss;  
I proclaim the high qualities of each and every Victor;  
And my words of admiration are an ocean that will never dry,  
a sea of sound from the seed of harmony.

Speak now words of admiration, words that never end, for each of the holy beings before you, in a song of lovely harmony. Do this the way it is described in the other books; turn each head of your bodies into an infinite number of tongues, and sing. Here in the verse the word "harmony" refers to the praises you sing, and their "seed" is what makes them come out; that is, your tongue. The words "sea" and "ocean" express the idea of a multitude.

[b] This brings us to the second ingredient: offering. The offering which does have something higher is

found in the two verses that contain the words "holy flowers". The full verses read:

I make offerings to all of these Victorious Ones; Holy Flowers, holy garlands, cymbals and ointments, the highest parasol, the highest lamp, and holy incenses.  
I make offerings to all of these Victorious Ones; Holy silken clothing, the highest scent, and a mountain of incense powder high as Meru—  
All set forth in a way more lovely than any other thing there is.

The words "holy flower" refer to the most wondrous blooms of all in the lands of both pleasure beings and humans; here they are single flowers. "Garlands" are assortments of flowers pressed together on a string. Either way, the flowers can be real ones, or made of other things.

The word "cymbals" refers to all types of music, whether it's on a stringed instrument, a wind instrument, or percussion like drums or cymbals. "Ointments" are thick potions with a delicious smell of incense. The "highest parasol" is the finest of all umbrella-like coverings. The "highest lamp" is one that burns from a fragrant mixture like incense and butter; it shines bright, and gives forth a light as lovely as the flask of a precious gem. The incense mentioned can be either the kind that is a concoction of various sweet-smelling substances, or just one of these substances by itself.

"Holy silken clothing" refers to the finest of all the clothing there is. "Highest scent" means perfumed liquid presented in the form of a water offering; it is made of water, or something similar, imbues with a delicious scent so powerful that it can spread throughout the entire system of a thousand thousand planets. "Incense powder" refers to incense in the form of powder, which you either spread itself or sprinkle atop a fire to make a fragrant smoke. It is in packets, or else laid out in lines like the colored sand used to draw a mandala, in a huge mass as high and wide as Meru, the great mountain in the center of the world.

The phrase "set forth" applies to each of the substances that are being offered; the original Sanskrit word here can mean "majority," or "put forth," or "various."

The other kind of offering is the one which does not have anything higher. This one is found in the single verse which includes the words "Any and every offering." [The full verse reads:

I see as well any and every offering unsurpassed, reaching far and wide, handed up to every Victor;  
By all the power of my faith in the Deeds of Goodness may I truly bow down and make offerings  
onto all the Victors.]

Offerings which we say "have something higher" are those of worldly beings. Therefore the offerings made in this verse consist of all the many wondrous things that very powerful beings, such as bodhisattvas, are capable of emanating with their mind.

The words of the second half of this verse should be applied anywhere in the verses before where the intent is not stated directly. Their function is to express both the motivation with which the prostration and offering are made, as well as the object towards which they are directed.

[c] The third ingredient is confession, and is found in the single verse with the words "like and dislike".  
[The full verse reads:

I confess, one by one, each and every one of all the wrong deeds I may have committed in action or word, and also thought, motivated by like or dislike, or by dark ignorance.]

This refers to what was done with one of the three mental poisons as its cause; and with my body or of

the rest as the vehicle; and with a nature of having been committed, either directly by myself, or by someone else at my bidding, or by someone else with my gladness that it was done. The words "all the wrong deeds I may have committed" are meant to include all these elements.

Try to bring to mind all the problems that these deeds will bring you, and so feel regret for whatever you have done in the past, and a sense to restrain yourself in the future. Then make your confession. Doing this prevents any future wrong from starting at all.

[d] The fourth ingredient is rejoicing, and is found in the one verse with the words "Victors in any of the ten directions." [The full verse reads:

I rejoice over every single one of the good deeds ever done by beings in any of the ten directions: by all of the Victors, by all of their Sons and Daughters, by those Self-Made, by those on the paths of learning, by those on the paths done learning, by anyone at all.]

Try to think about the great goodness that comes from the virtuous deeds of these five different kinds of holy beings, and dwell in a sense of gladness, like a beggar who has stumbled across a mine of gold.

[e] The fifth ingredient is urging holy ones to turn the Wheel of the Dharma. This is found in the one verse with the words "Who in all the ten directions." [The full verse reads:

Lamps who light each of the worlds in all the ten directions of space; Those who have taken each of the steps to Buddhahood, and so reached the state beyond desire, the Buddha's enlightenment; Savors I urge You all, turn the Wheel of the Dharma, nothing is higher.]

This verse is addressed to those who in paradises in all the ten directions of space have but only recently found Buddhahood in the Buddha's perfect enlightenment—who have reached the state beyond desire, a knowledge which goes anywhere it wants, unstoppable. We are urging them to send forth an equal number of bodies, to come and teach the Dharma.

The commentary by Yeshe De gives the root text here as "found Buddhahood in the Buddha's perfect enlightenment" [rather than "taken each of the steps to Buddhahood," and I have followed him.]

[f] The sixth ingredient is supplication, and is found in the one verse which contains the words "pretend to pass into nirvana." [The full verse reads:

I press my palms at my breast, and make this supplication to all of those who may intend to pretend to pass into nirvana: stay, I pray to help all beings and bring them to happiness; stay for eons equal in number to the atoms of every world.]

Here we are making supplication to all those in worlds of the ten directions of space who might pretend to pass into nirvana. We are requesting them to stay, ultimately to bring all beings help, and in the interim to give them happiness. We ask them to stay, and not to pass on, for eons equal in their number to all the atoms that make up the various worlds of the universe. We make our supplication, praying that they will remain, in bodies beyond all counting.

[g] The seventh ingredient is dedication, which is found in the verse with the words "prostrations and..." [The full verse reads:

I dedicate to my future enlightenment all my merit, whatever little goodness I may have gathered here by bowing myself and offering, by confessing and rejoicing, by urging and supplication.]

Here we are taking all the virtuous seeds within us, represented by the goodness we have accomplished in practicing the six ingredients that have already come, and dedicating them as a cause for the full enlightenment of ourselves and every living being, together. Make this dedication with tremendous will, and the power of your good will flow forever, and never finish.

Read this prayer as I have taught you to here; understand what each verse means, and say it out slowly, without letting your mind wander to something else. If you can do this, then you will gain a great mountain of good deeds, beyond any kind of measuring.

Five of the ingredients we have listed here — prostrating, offering, urging, supplicating, and rejoicing — help you to gather together the different factors that are conducive to the path. One of them, confessing, helps you clean yourself of the factors that are obstacles, ones that oppose the path. One part of rejoicing — dwelling in a sense of gladness over the good you have done yourself — also functions to multiply your virtue.

Dedication works to multiply, fantastically, even the minor good deeds you have done in the acts of gathering, and cleaning, and multiplying. It also takes good deeds that are short-term, those that are going to give a good result and then disappear, and changes them so that they will never be exhausted. In brief, it functions in all three ways: to gather, to clean, and to multiply such that goodness never ends.

For the sixth and final preliminary, refresh your visualization, and make an offering of a mandala. Then make a request that the Lamas bless the stream of your mind. Ask Them to help you stop, quickly, everything from disrespecting your Spiritual Guide on up to grasping to some ingrained selfnature, in either of its two forms. Ask Them to help you develop, smoothly, every single kind of thought which is perfect and unmistakable; everything from respect for your Spiritual Guide, on up to the realization of suchness, the fact that nothing has any nature of its own. And ask them finally to help you put a final end to all the things, within you or outside of you, that might obstruct your spiritual progress.

Make this supplication over and over, many times, with fierce hopes for its success.

**A Thousand Angels Of the Heaven of Bliss,  
A Prayer of Lama Devotion**

*lamay nelnkor ganden hlagyama*

*ganden hla-gyay gungyi tukka ne,  
rabkar shosar pungdray chunzin tser,  
chu-kyi gyalpo kun-kyen losang drak,  
sedang chepa nendir sheksu sol.*

Please come to me, Lobsang Drakpa, King of the Dharma, who knows all things,  
Come with your Sons, riding upon the tops of clouds like mountains of pure white snow;  
Come, come from the heart of the Lord of a Thousand Angels living in the Heaven of Bliss.

*dun-gyi namkar sertri penday teng,  
jetsun lama gyepay dzumkar chen,  
daklo depay sunam shingchok tu,  
tenpa gyechir kalgyar shuksu sol.*

Sit in the air in front of me, on a throne with cushions of the moon, and the lotus; Set on the backs of lions.

My holy Lama, with pure white smile, happy with me, I ask you to stay for a million years to spread the teaching; Stay, for there is no one higher than you with whom I may make merit by goodness of my faith.

*shejay kyunkun jelway lodru tuk,  
kelsang naway gyengyur lekshe sung,  
drakpay pelgyi hlammer dzepay ku,  
tongtu drenpe dunden la chaktsel.*

Your Mind is knowledge that wraps around the entire mass of knowable things.  
Your Words are jewels of good explanation that we the fortunate wear on our ears.  
Your Body shines forth, shines with brightness, shines with a glory the world will see.  
I bow to You; just to see You, just to hear You, just to think of You, brings great things.

*yi-ong chuyun natsok metok dang,  
drishim dukpu nangsels drichab sok,  
ngusham yitrul chutrin gyatso di,  
sunam shingchok kyela chupar bul.*

I make in my mind and place here as well an ocean of gifts that could cover the sky;  
Presents to please all of Your senses, every different color of flower, sweetest fragrant incense,  
Lamps of light, perfumes upon your body, and other gifts as well,  
Do I offer You, there is no higher with whom I may make merit.

*gangshik tokme dune sakpa yi,  
lu-ngak yisum mige chigyi dang,  
kyepar dompa sumgyi mitun chok,  
nyingne gyupa drakpu sosor shak.*

From deep within my heart, a I am sorry, deeply, and openly confess one by one the harm that I have done in my acts or words or thoughts; any and every wrong kept with me from time with no beginning; Especially what I may have done against any one of the three different kinds of vows.

*nyikmay dundir mangtu drupla tsun,  
chugye pangpe delnjor dunyu je,  
gunpo kyukyi labchen dzepa la,  
dakchak sampa takpe yirang ngo.*

Here in the age of degeneration you made every effort to gain great learning;  
You threw away the eight worldly thoughts and so made use of Your leisure and fortune.  
Savior, we rejoice we are glad, happy deep inside, for what you have done, so good and powerful.

*jetsun lama dampa kyenam kyi,  
chukuy kala kyentsey chunzin trik,  
jitar tsampay duljay dzinma la,  
sabgye chukyi charpa aptu sol.*

Holy lamas high, wrap the sky of your dharma bodies in massive clouds of knowledge and love and let them pour upon the earth of your disciples, as we are ready, a shower of rain, the Teachings deep and wide.



*dakki ji-nye sakpay gewa di,  
tendang drowa kunla gangpen dang,  
kyepar jetsun losang drakpa yi,  
tenpay nyingpo ringdu selje shok.*

May any goodness I have done with this my prayer be a help to the teachings and to every living being. I make a special prayer too that for many years to come I may carry forth The Light, The Essence of the Word, The Teachings of Je Tsongkapa.

*pelnden tsaway lama rinpoche,  
dakki chiwor penday tengshuk la,  
kadrin chenpoy gone jesung te,  
kusung tukkyi ngudrup tsoldu sol.*

Come I pray and sit my root Lama shining and precious upon the lotus atop my head; Take me after You in great kindness, grant that I attain your body, speech and mind.

*ngudrup kuynjung tubwang dorje chang,*

I pray to the One who Holds the Diamond The source from where Every goal is found;

*mikme tseway terchen chenre sik,  
drime kyenpay wangpo jampel yang,  
dupung malu jomdze sangway dak,  
gangchen kepay tsuk-gyen tsongkapa,  
losang drakpay shabla solwa deb.*

I pray to Loving Eyes Treasure of love With no one it loves; I pray to Soft Glorious Voice Lord of knowledge that has no stain; I pray to the Keeper of the Secret who smashes all the army of demons; I pray to Tsongkapa crowning jewel of masters of the Land of Snow; I pray to One, I pray at the feet, I pray to Lobsang Drakpa.

*pelnden tsaway lama rinpoche,  
dakki nying-kar penday tengshuk la,  
kadrin chenpoy gone jesung te,  
kusung tukkyi ngudrup tsoldu sol.*

Come I pray and sit my root Lama shining and precious upon the lotus in my heart; take me after You in great kindness, grant that I attain your body, speech and mind.

*pelnden tsaway lama rinpoche,  
dakki nying-kar penday tengshuk la,  
kadrin chenpoy gone jesung te,  
chokdang tunmong ngudrup tsoldu sol.*

Come I pray and sit my root Lama shining and precious upon the lotus in my heart; take me after You in great kindness, grant that I attain both common and highest goals.

*pelnden tsaway lama rinpoche,  
dakki nying-kar penday tengshuk la,  
kadrin chenpoy gone jesung te,*

*jangchub nyinpoy bardu tenpar shuk.*

Come I pray and sit my root Lama shining and precious upon the lotus in my heart; take me after  
You in great kindness, stay here never moving until the Buddha's essence.

*tserab kuntu gyalwa tsongkape,  
tekchok she-nyen ngusu dzepay tu,  
gyalwe ngakpay lamsang de-nyi le,  
kechik tsamyang dokpar magyur chik.*

Through all the string of my future lives may Tsongkapa the Victor come to me and serve himself  
as my spiritual guide in the teachings of the Greater Way.

*kyewa kuntu yangdak lama dang,  
drelme chu-kyi pella longchu ching,  
sadang lamgyi yunten rabdzok ne,  
dorje chang-gi gopang nyurtop shok.*

In all my lives may I never live apart from my perfect lamas, May I bask in the glory of the  
Dharma. May I fulfil perfectly every good quality of every level and path, and reach then quickly  
the place where I become myself the One who Holds the Diamond.

# The Asian Classics Institute

## Course III: Applied Meditation

### Reading Three: The Six Conditions for Meditation

The following selection is taken from the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path (Lam-rim chen-mo)* written by Je Tsongkapa (1357-1419).

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### The Conditions for Developing Quietude

From the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path*:

The explanation of how to train yourself in each of the two [quietude and special sight] has three parts: how to train yourself in quietude, how to train yourself in special sight, and how the two are joined in union. The first of these parts itself has three sections: how to gather together the conditions for quietude, how to meditate on quietude after you have gathered together these conditions, and how to know when your meditation has actually brought you to quietude. The first is described in the words, "Holy practitioners should first gather together the conditions for quietude: the causes that will allow them to develop quietude quickly and easily." Here there are six different conditions.

[1] The first condition is to do your meditation staying in a place which is conducive for it. The place should have five different qualities:

- a) It should be a place with things that are "easy to find," in the sense that you can find food, clothing, and other necessities without any trouble.
- b) It should be a "good place," in the sense that there are no fearful creatures like wild animals or the like, nor any persons like enemies who would try to harm you.
- c) It should have a "good environment," in the sense that the environment doesn't cause any kinds of sickness to develop in you.
- d) There should be "good friends" there, in the sense that your companions in the place share your sense of morality, and your world view.
- e) The place should "have goodness," in the sense that, during the day, there should not be many people around and, during the night, there should not be many sounds.

As the *Jewel of the Sutras* says,

The place where intelligent people practice should have things that are good to find, it should be a good place, with a good environment, a place where good friends stay, with all the practitioner needs, with ease.

[2] The second condition is that you keep your wants few; you have no great attachment to things like fine robes, or a lot of things, or the like.

[3] The third condition is that you are easily satisfied; you always feel like you have enough, even if all you can find is robes or the like that are the worst.

[4] The fourth condition is that you give up trying to do too many things. You give up undesirable actions like business; you avoid being too familiar with laymen or monks; you stop practicing the minor arts of medicine, astrology, or the like.

[5] The fifth condition is that your morality is perfectly pure. With regard to your vows of individual freedom, and your bodhisattva vows, you never break down the foundation of your training, the things you have been taught that are naturally wrong to do, and those that the Buddha has prohibited. If out of a lack of attention you do commit such deeds, you are quick to regret them, and you try to make up in the proper way.

[6] The sixth condition is that you totally rid yourself of the stupid thoughts of desire and the rest. You meditate on the problems of desire in this life—how it can bring you to death, and to bondage; and you meditate on the problems it brings you in the life after—a birth in the realms of misery, or the like. Or else you can meditate on how each and every one of these pretty things in the suffering cycle of life is going to end; how quickly it disappears; how surely it will be torn from me before very long. Try then to get accustomed to thoughts like this: So why do I find myself caring at all about these things? What use are they for me? Use these to rid yourself of every stupid thought of desire.

I have explained all these following the *Stages of Meditation*; for a more detailed presentation, you can refer to the *Levels of Listeners*. These six include in them all the essential points, all the causes and conditions you need to know to first develop good concentration; and to keep from losing it once you have developed it; and to bring it to an ever higher and higher state. The most important points here are that you keep your morality pure, and that you realize all the problems of desire, and that you stay in a place which is conducive to meditation.

Geshe Tonpa has said, "When we find ourselves unable to develop deep concentration, we blame it on the instructions we got, and we go and look for some different ones. The real reason though is that we fail to do the gathering." Here "gathering" refers to the six conditions and so on that I have explained above.

We can also say that the first four of the perfections function as conditions for the fifth perfection, of meditation. The first book of the *Stages of Meditation* says,

If you want to reach quietude quickly, then make great effort: don't be concerned with a desire for things; keep your morality well; and be ready to undergo whatever pain or such you must.

This is in fact why texts like the exalted *Commentary of the True Thought* teach that giving and the rest are causes for each of the perfections above them.

*A Lamp for the Path* says as well,

You may try meditation as hard as you can, but if the parts of quiet are lost you may sit and practice for thousands of years and never achieve this deep concentration.

Therefore those who are really serious about achieving the state of concentration where quietude ("quiet") and special sight are joined must make special efforts in the various "parts" or conditions of concentration, for example in the thirteen conditions outlined in the *Levels of Listeners*. These conditions are absolutely vital for your success.

**The Asian Classics Institute**  
**Course III: Applied Meditation**  
**Reading Four: The Eight-Part Posture**

*The following selection on the proper way to sit for meditation is taken from the Great Book on the Steps of the Path (Lam-rim chen-mo, ACIP electronic text S5392), written by Lord Tsongkapa (1357-1419).*

Here then is the section on how to meditate on quietude, once one has assembled all the proper circumstances. There are two parts here: the preparation, and then the actual meditation.

Here is the first of the two. As a preparation, one should begin with the six preliminary practices presented above. One should, most especially, meditate for an extended period of time on the Wish for enlightenment. As an auxiliary to this meditation, one should finally train oneself in the subjects that are shared with people of lesser and medium capacities.

Meditating itself can be presented in two parts: an explanation of how one should position ones body during meditation, and an explanation of the actual steps of meditation itself.

The middle and the final books of the *Steps of Meditation* explain how one should position ones body; that is, one should sit on a very soft and comfortable meditation cushion, in a position with eight different features.

- [1] As for the legs, one should sit in a full lotus, similar to the full-lotus position of the holy being named Vairochana. It is also quite acceptable to sit in a half lotus position.
- [2] Ones eyes should be loosely focused around the plane of the tip of the nose, and neither opened too wide nor completely closed.
- [3] Avoid having your body lean too far back or too far forward: straighten up your spine, and sit there directing your thoughts within.
- [4] The shoulders should be even, on a straight line.
- [5] The head should be kept erect: neither tilted down nor up, nor pointed off to the side. The nose should draw a straight line to the navel.
- [6] Leave your teeth and your lips in their normal, natural position.
- [7] The tongue should be kept close to the palate, behind your upper teeth.
- [8] As for the breath, see that it makes no noise as you breathe it in. Don't let it be too rough, and don't just remain thoughtless about it. Try to reach a point where you can hardly tell when it is coming and going; where it runs very slowly and effortlessly.

In the *Levels of Listeners*, five different reasons are given for sitting in a crosslegged position on a platform or seat of the kind allowed by Lord Buddha, and covered with comfortable straw or grass.

When you position your body a bit strictly, it is quite conducive to reaching the state of practiced ease; as a result, you will then be able to reach practiced ease very quickly.

When you sit this way, you find yourself able to sit for a long period of time. It also helps to prevent you

from feeling tired.

Another advantage is that this position is unique to Buddhists, and cannot be confused with the position of non-Buddhists in general, or of those whom you may be debating.

Whenever someone else sees you sitting in this position, then they start to have deep feelings of faith in you.

This position, finally, is one that Lord Buddha, and the disciples of Lord Buddha, have granted us, and have used themselves. Understanding these five reasons for doing so, states the text, one should determine to sit in a cross-legged position.

It is stated as well that the purpose of sitting up very straight is that this prevents mental fogginess and sleepiness.

Practice then as we have explained it: start by putting your body into the meditation position, and remember especially to bring your breathing down first.

# The Asian Classics Institute

## Course III: Applied Meditation

### Readings Five and Six

#### The Five Problems of Meditation, and the Eight Corrections

*The following is a translation of a special chart on the stages of meditation designed by Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche (1901-1981), tutor to His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama, and Root Lama of Khen Rinpoche Geshe Lobsang Tharchin. The chart itself is found in the pocket of the notebook for this course.*

It has been spoken that each and every high spiritual quality of all three ways is a result of meditation, either in the form of quietude (*shamata*), or some state which is close to it. The benefits of meditation are many, beginning with the fact that—once you have attained quietude—then any virtuous practice you undertake becomes extremely powerful. It is an absolute necessity, and so attaining the state of quietude is extremely important for any deep practitioner who really hopes to reach freedom.

And here is how to do it. A meditator must first seek out all six of the conditions that support the attempt to reach quietude. Then they should acquaint themselves with the five obstacles to one-pointed concentration; these are explained, in Lord Maitreya's work entitled *Distinguishing the Middle and the Extremes*, as not feeling like meditating, losing the object, dullness and agitation, failing to take action, and taking action when there is no need to do so.

The corrections for the first of these obstacles are a deep belief in the benefits of meditation, a strong desire to master it, the physical and mental pleasure of a person who gets good at meditation, and the hard work needed to get good at it.

The correction for the second obstacle is to bring the mind back to the object. The correction for the third problem is watchfulness, and the correction for the fourth is taking the necessary action. The correction for the fifth problem is to leave well enough alone. Thus one must attain quietude through undertaking eight different corrective actions.

It is further stated that—if you come to understand how these can be divided into nine mental states, and how these in turn are achieved through six different powers and grouped into four modes of focus—then you can quite easily attain a state of single-pointed concentration which is perfect.

The text called *The Essence of the Middle Way* includes a verse that says,

Master the elephant of the mind step by step, as follows:

He wants to go the wrong way, so be sure to tie him to the stake of the object of your meditation with a strong rope made of bringing the mind back to your object; then finally use the iron hook of your wisdom to take control.

Here the process of learning to meditate is being compared to the way in which you tame a wild elephant, and this is the point of the illustration above. Here I will give you just a rough explanation of each of the steps you see here.

The nine mental states are as follows: setting the mind on the object; keeping the mind on the object with brief continuity; keeping the mind on the object with patches where you lose the object; maintaining the mind tightly on the object; controlling the mind; quieting the mind; completely quieting the mind; attaining single-pointedness; and reaching deep meditation.

Here is how you use the six powers to attain these nine states. The first of the states is attained through the power of learning the instructions for meditation from your Lama. The second is reached through the power of contemplating these instructions. You achieve the third and fourth mental states through the power of bringing your mind back to the object. The fifth and sixth are attained by the power of watchfulness. The seventh and eighth you bring about through the power of effort, and the ninth with the power of complete habituation.

Here is how these nine are grouped into four different modes of focus. During the first and second mental states, you focus by forcefully concentrating the mind. Over the course of the middle five states, you focus in a stream, but with interruptions. In the eighth mental state you focus in an uninterrupted stream, and during the ninth you focus on the object completely effortlessly.

The final result of attaining these nine states, one by one, is that you reach an unshakeable state of physical and mental meditative pleasure. Simultaneous to achieving this pleasure, you attain a state of quietude which is taken in by the preparatory stage of the first concentration level, [which is the meditative platform needed to see emptiness directly].

Suppose that, after achieving quietude in the way described above, you go on to meditate one-pointedly upon the profound worldview of the middle way, reaching a balance in your practice between the ability to analyze reality and the ability to hold your mind fixed in meditation on the conclusions gained from your analysis. This analysis will automatically enable you to reach an extraordinary level of physical and mental meditative pleasure—and it is at this point that we can say you have attained the special insight into reality (*vipashyana*), in its authentic form.

If you practice these instructions correctly, then you will gain the razor-sharp sword of wisdom, a form of one-pointed concentration where quietude and special insight (*shamata* and *vipashyana*) are married together. You can then carry this mighty sword onto the field of battle, and as time goes by smash the two great obstacles [those to achieving nirvana, and those to achieving total enlightenment]; that is, you can eliminate within you every undesirable quality. With this you will win the great victory of the four bodies of a Buddha, and find yourself able to perform enlightened deeds, constantly and spontaneously, without any conscious thought—fulfilling the hopes of every living creature, for as long as space itself endures.

May every monk who's taken their vows also attain those quiet places; may they give up all distraction, and master the art of meditation.

This has been written by the one they gave the name of Trijang Trulku, in response to a request by the artist called Udrung Sunam Rinchen, who said to me, "You know, we see a lot of different versions of that chart, but would you mind to write for us a new one, with captions clear to read?"

The cost of printing this chart was donated from the estate of Asong, now deceased, by those who served him well, the House of Gyaltun and also that monk from Dungun Monastery whose name is Lobsang Dorje.

By the virtue of this deed, undertaken as it was with the material wealth of the dead, may every being who ever died, with Asong at their head, come to see the wrong they've done, collected over every life they ever lived, cleaned forever from them.

And may they then perfect, one by one, the paths and levels, quickly reaching that excellent road, the matchless state of enlightenment.



The carving of this blockprint was completed in the Tibetan Fire-Sheep year (1967), in Bene Dremo Jong. The block itself has been stored at the Tarndu Ling Temple of Baksa Monastery.

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*The following is a list of the scenes found in the middle of the blockprint chart just described.*

- [1] 1) Setting the mind on the object
- [2] Bringing the mind back to the object
- [3] Watchfulness
- [4] The six bends in the road represent the six powers. The first represents the power of learning the instructions. Based on this, one achieves the first mental state.
- [5] The elephant represents your mind, and his black color symbolizes dullness.
- [6] The monkey stands for distraction, and his black color represents agitation.
- [7] The presence of the flames, and their relative size, from this point up to the seventh mental state represent the relative amount of effort needed to bring your mind back to the object, and the degree of watchfulness needed.
- [8] The power of contemplating the instructions. You use this to reach the second mental state.
- [9] 2) Keeping the mind on the object with brief continuity
- [10] The gradual increase in the white patch from this point on, starting with the elephant's head, represents a gradual increase in the clarity and fixation of the mind.
- [11] This symbol stands for the five objects of the senses, which themselves represent the various objects that agitation focuses upon.
- [12] The power of bringing the mind back to the object. This allows you to attain the third and fourth mental states.
- [13] 3) Keeping the mind on the object, with patches where you lose the object.
- [14] Subtle dullness. From this point on, you are able to recognize the distinction between obvious and subtle dullness, and other such details.
- [15] The monkey looking back represents the ability both to tell when your mind is wandering, and to re-focus it upon the object of meditation.
- [16] 4) Maintaining the mind tightly on the object.
- [17] The power of watchfulness. This allows you to reach the fifth and sixth mental states.
- [18] Agitation is the first of the two that loses its power to appear in your mind.

When you are trying to develop quietude, even allowing your mind to be distracted to a virtuous object becomes an obstacle, and you must seek to stop it. When you are doing other practices though you do not have to stop it. And so we see the monkey reaching for the fruit of a second activity.

- [20] Watchfulness will not let the mind get distracted; and uplifting your heart leads you to a state of one-pointed concentration.
- [21] 5) Controlling the mind.
- [22] 6) Quieting the mind.
- [23] The power of effort. This allows you to reach the seventh and eighth mental states.
- [24] 7) Completely quieting the mind. At this point it is difficult for even subtle forms of dullness and agitation to occur. Even if they do come, you are able to eliminate them immediately with a minimum of effort.
- [25] Here the fact that the elephant has lost all the black, and left behind the monkey as well, represents your ability to engage in one-pointed concentration in an uninterrupted stream: if you apply just a little effort to bring your mind to the object and maintain watchfulness, then dullness, agitation, and distraction can no longer interrupt your meditation.
- [26] 8) Attaining single-pointedness
- [27] The power of complete habituation, which enables you to reach the ninth mental state

[28] 9) Reaching deep meditation

[29] Achieving quietude [*shamata*]

[30] Physical meditative pleasure

[31] Mental meditative pleasure

[32] Special insight [*vipashyana*] and quietude [*shamata*] marry together, focusing on emptiness, and allow you to cut the root of this suffering life.

[33] One goes on to seek the correct view of reality, with a great ability to bring the mind to the object, and to maintain watchfulness.

# The Asian Classics Institute

## Course III: Applied Meditation

### Reading Seven

The following selection is taken from the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path (Lam-rim chen-mo)* written by Je Tsongkapa (1357-1419).

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#### The Nine States of Meditation

Here is the third division, which is a description of how one achieves the nine states of meditation using the steps explained above. Anyone who hopes to practice meditation must become proficient in these nine states; and to become proficient in them, one must know what they are. So here is an explanation of the nine states, which are called (1) placing the mind on the object; (2) placing the mind on the object with some continuity; (3) placing the mind on the object and patching the gaps; (4) placing the mind on the object closely; (5) controlling the mind; (6) pacifying the mind; (7) pacifying the mind totally; (8) making the mind single-pointed; and (9) achieving equilibrium.

Here is the first state of meditation, called "placing the mind on the object." You achieve this state by means of receiving instructions from your lama about the object you should use for your meditation. The mind at this point stays on the object only from time to time, and for the most part is not fixed on the object at all: you are unable to keep your mind on the object for any continuous length of time. The two mental functions of noting and examining are present, and due to this you often lose yourself to scattering and agitation. You become aware of this condition and so you get the impression that you have even a greater problem of too many thoughts coming up to your mind than you ever had before. What's really happening though is not that you have more of these thoughts than before; it's just that you have now become aware of the problem.

Here is the second state of meditation, called "placing the mind on the object with some continuity." This state is reached when you practice placing the mind on the object enough that you can now keep your mind on it for some continuous, although brief, period of time. You could say it would be like being able to keep your mind from wandering for as long as it would take to do one round of the *mani* mantra on your rosary. At this point your problem of having too many thoughts goes away for a while, and then comes back for a while, so the impression you have is that these thoughts are making a periodic resurgence. This particular state of meditation is achieved through contemplating.

During these first two states of meditation, you have an abundance of dullness and agitation, and only occasionally fix your mind on the object. Therefore at this point we say that your mind is in the first of the four mental modes, the one described as having to "concentrate to focus." During these stages, said our Lama, the periods of distraction last longer than the periods in which the mind is fixed on the object.

Here is the third state of meditation, called "placing the mind on the object and patching the gaps." The place where you put a normal patch is a piece of cloth; here the place you put the patch is the continuation of your focus. What this means is that you catch your mind quickly after it wanders away from the object, and so "patch" the hole in the continuation. The difference between this state of meditation and the two that come before it is in the length of time you are distracted. Our Lama also noted that this is the time when you are able to develop your recollection to a high degree.

Here is the fourth state of meditation, called "placing the mind on the object closely." Since by now your recollection is highly developed, you are able to place your mind on the object of meditation in such a way that it is no longer possible to lose it completely; this then is what differentiates this state from the three

before it. Even though you are succeeding in keeping the object from being lost, nonetheless dullness and agitation are present in your mind, and they are very strong. Therefore you must at this point apply the correction for dullness and agitation. These two levels, the third and fourth, are achieved by means of recollection. Our Lama noted that from this point on the power of our meditation was complete, or full-grown, like a person who has reached maturity.

Here is the fifth state of meditation, called "controlling the mind." There is a tendency during the fourth state to draw your mind too far inside, and there is a great danger that this can lead to subtle dullness. Therefore we must now develop our watchfulness to a high degree. It goes and spies on the mind, and finds something wrong; in response then we must uplift the mind by thinking over the many benefits that single-mindedness can bring to us. The difference between this state and those before it is whether or not obvious dullness can occur.

Here is the sixth state of meditation, called "pacifying the mind." The great danger at this point is that subtle agitation occurs, as a result of uplifting the mind too far while in the fifth state. Whenever this subtle agitation comes, you must raise up a powerful kind of watchfulness to detect it; realize that even very subtle agitation is a serious fault in your meditation, and stop it. What distinguishes this stage from the one before it is whether or not there is a great danger of having subtle dullness. These last two states, the fifth and the sixth, are achieved by means of watchfulness. From this point on, said our Lama, the power of our watchfulness is complete.

By the time you reach the seventh state of meditation, which we call "pacifying the mind totally," your recollection and watchfulness are total, and so it is unlikely that dullness and agitation are going to occur. At this point you must bring your effort up to a powerful level; see how destructive even subtle forms of dullness and agitation are, and do whatever you can to eliminate them altogether. The difference between this state and the ones before it is whether or not you should worry much about slipping into subtle dullness or agitation. Although there is no great danger at this point that subtle dullness and agitation will occur, you must still make great effort to implement the various methods for eliminating them. While you are in the fifth and sixth states of meditation, you still have to be concerned whether or not dullness and agitation are going to attack you. Here in the seventh state though you have the ability to initiate the effort necessary to block them; and so, said our Lama, dullness and agitation are unable to attack and create an obstacle. During these last five states of meditation—that is, from the third through to the seventh—the mind is for the most part in single-pointed meditation. Nonetheless, conditions such as dullness and agitation are interrupting ones concentration, and so we describe the mental mode during these periods as "engaging but interrupted."

Here is what happens when you reach the eighth state of meditation, called "making the mind single-pointed." When you begin a meditation session, you must still make a slight effort to bring up the various corrections. After that though you are able to go for an entire session without even the subtle forms of dullness and agitation coming up in the mind. These last few stages are like having an enemy who is at full strength, one who has lost part of his strength, and one whose strength is completely lost. Since these examples describe how dullness and agitation gradually lose their power, we can say that from the eighth state of meditation you no longer need to make any conscious effort to apply watchfulness. Because in this eighth state you can make a little effort at the opening of a meditation session and then pass the entire period without being interrupted by problems such as dullness and agitation, the mental mode at this point is described as "engaging without interruption." The seventh and eighth states of meditation are achieved through applying effort.

Here is the ninth state of meditation, called "achieving equilibrium." Here your mind is engaging in the object without any conscious effort at all. This state comes about as a result of having repeated the eighth state over and over until you are completely accustomed to it, and then you can go into meditation

spontaneously, effortlessly. This is similar to the point you reach in your recitations when you can read out a text from memory without any effort, since you have practiced reciting it repeatedly. You go into single-minded meditation in a single swoop. This state of mind is for all intents and purposes a desire-realm form of single-pointed quietude. The ninth state is achieved through being totally accustomed.

The impression you have during the first state is one of recognizing that you have too many thoughts. In the second state you have a feeling that they are making a resurgence. By the third state the impression is that the problem of too many thoughts has in a sense tired out. In brief then we can say that in the first two states there is a question of how long the mind can stay fixed on the object. What distinguishes the third and the fourth states is whether or not one can lose the object or not. The fourth and fifth states are differentiated by whether obvious dullness can arise or not. The fifth and sixth states are separated by whether or not you have to be worried about subtle dullness coming up. Moreover, there is the distinction that—although it is possible for subtle agitation to occur during the sixth state—it is much less likely that in the one before it. The sixth and seventh states are distinguished by whether or not you have to be very concerned about slipping into subtle agitation or dullness. States number seven and eight are separated by whether there is any agitation or dullness at all; and eight and nine are differentiated by whether or not you have to rely on any conscious effort. The seventh level is devoted to eliminating dullness and agitation, rather than having to think about any serious danger that you could slip into them. Our Lama said that at this point it was like having a fist-fight with an enemy who was already weakened to the point of exhaustion; it's not like you need to be on your guard especially, it's enough just to be thinking about how to finish him off.

**The Asian Classics Institute**  
**Course III: Applied Meditation**  
**Reading Eight: The Steps to Buddhahood, and Finding a Lama**

*Expanded Outline to the Lam-Rim Source of All My Good*

- I Root of the Path: How to Take a Lama (**Root text verse: "The source..."**)
  - A. The Root Practice: Developing Faith for Him/Her
    - 1. How to Serve Him/Her in Your Thoughts
    - 2. How to Serve Him/Her in Your Deeds
  - B. Developing Reverence by Remembering His/Her Kindness
- II How to Purify the Mind, Once You Have Taken a Lama
  - A. Urging by the Lama that We Should Take the Essence of this Life (**Root text verse: "Bless me first..."**)
    - 1. Recognizing our Leisure and Fortune
    - 2. Contemplating How Very Important They Are
    - 3. Contemplating How Hard They Are to Find
  - B. How to Take the Essence of this Life
    - 1. Training the Mind in the Steps of the Path Shared with Practitioners of Lesser Scope  
**Root text verses: "My body and the life..." "And help me to find..."**  
includes:
      - a. Developing a Concern for the Next Life
        - i. Staying Aware of Death, the Fact that We Will not be Here Long includes:
          - a. Contemplating How Death is Certain
          - b. Contemplating How the Time of Death is Uncertain
          - c. Contemplating How, at Death, Nothing At All but Dharma Can Help Us
        - ii. Contemplating What Will Happen to Us in the Next Life: the Sufferings of the Two Divisions of Living Beings  
includes:
          - a. Contemplating the Suffering of Hell Beings
          - b. Contemplating the Suffering of Animals
          - c. Contemplating the Suffering of Craving Spirits
      - b. Using Methods of Achieving a Higher Birth in the Next Life
        - i. Practicing How to Go for Refuge, Which is the Door to Enter the Dharma
          - a. The Reasons for Taking Refuge
          - b. The Places in which then to Take Refuge
          - c. What Then You Must Do to Take Refuge
          - d. Various Advices on How to Act After Taking Refuge
        - ii. Developing the Faith Which Believes, for This is the Root of Every Goodness
          - a. Karma is Fixed (Good Karma must Cause Pleasure, Bad Karma must Cause Pain)
          - b. Karma Expands
          - c. Karma not Committed Cannot Bring a Consequence
          - d. Karma when Committed Must Bring a Consequence
    - 2. Training the Mind in the Steps of the Path Shared with Practitioners of the Medium Scope
      - a. Developing the Wish to Achieve Nirvana (**Root text verse: "Bless me to perceive..."**)
      - b. Establishing What Path Leads to Nirvana (**Root text verse: "Grant that these pure thoughts..."**)  
includes:  
*Nature of our suffering life:* Contemplate the Eight Sufferings

- i. The Suffering of Being Born
  - ii. The Suffering of Getting Old
  - iii. The Suffering of Getting Sick
  - iv. The Suffering of Dying
  - v. The Suffering of Having to Encounter Things that We Don't Like
  - vi. The Suffering of Having to Lose Things that We Do Like
  - vii. The Suffering of Trying to Get Things We Want, and Not Being Able To
  - viii. To Put it Briefly, the Suffering of the Fact That We Have Taken On a Mind and Body and Other Parts Which Must Suffer
- Cause of our suffering life: The Ten Mental Afflictions*
- i. Desire
  - ii. Anger
  - iii. Pride
  - iv. Ignorance
  - v. Destructive Doubts
  - vi. Ignorance about My Own Nature
  - vii. Belief in One of the Two Extremes
  - viii. Belief that One's Wrong Views are the Best
  - ix. Belief in Excessive Spiritual Practices
  - x. Belief in a Wrong Worldview
- How to get out of our suffering life:*
- i. The Training of Morality
  - ii. The Training of Meditative Concentration
  - iii. The Training of Wisdom
3. Training the Mind in the Steps of the Path Shared with Practitioners of Greater Scope
- a. How to Develop the Wish for Enlightenment (**Root text verse: "I have slipped and fallen..."**) includes:
    - i. Practicing with the Seven-Step, Cause-and-Effect Method found in the Books of the Lord, Atisha
    - ii. Practicing with the method known as "Exchanging Self and Others," which is found in the Books of the Realized One, Shantideva
  - b. How to Train Oneself in the Deeds of a Bodhisattva, Once One Has Developed the Wish for Enlightenment
    - i. Training Oneself in the Open Ways
      - a. Training Oneself in All the Deeds of a Bodhisattva (**Root text verse: "Bless me to see clearly..."**) includes:
        - i. How to Train in the Perfection of Giving
        - ii. How to Train in the Perfection of Morality
        - iii. How to Train in the Perfection of Not Getting Angry
        - iv. How to Train in the Perfection of Joyful Effort
        - v. How to Train in the Perfection of Meditation
        - vi. How to Train in the Perfection of Wisdom
      - b. Training Oneself Specifically in the Final Two Perfections (**Root text verse: "Grant that I may quickly..."**) Includes teachings on(*shamata*, or concentration); and(*vipashyana*, or insight)
    - ii. Training Oneself in the Secret Ways
      - a. Entering the Diamond Path, Once You Have Made Your Mind a Worthy Vessel, and Have Taken the Four Empowerments, in a Pure Form (**Root text verse: "Grant that once I've practiced..."** )

- b. How to Keep Pure the Pledges and Vows You Committed Yourself to When You Took the Empowerment
- c. How to Meditate Upon the Two Levels, Now that You are Keeping Your Pledges and Vows Pure (**Root text verse: "Bless me next to realize..."**)

**III** Requesting that You Be Able to Find Those Conditions which Help You Succeed in the Path, and that Those Conditions which Prevent this Come to an End (**Root text verse: "Bless me, grant that the spiritual Friend..."**)

**VI.** Making a Prayer that in All Your Lives Your Lama Will Come to Guide You, and so Help You Reach the Path's Final Goal (**Root text verses: "In all my lives..." "...The One who Holds the Diamond."**)

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The following selections are taken from *Preparing for Tantra: The Mountain of Blessings*. *The root text of this book was written by Je Tsongkapa Lobsang Drakpa (1357-1419), and the commentary by Pabongka Rinpoche (1878-1941). The book was translated by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Lobsang Tharchin (1921-2004) and Geshe Michael Roach (1952-), who also wrote the following introductory sections.*

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## FOREWORD

Before you start this little book, decide on your motivation for reading it. Think to yourself, I want to reach enlightenment as soon as possible. I want to reach it in this very life. And when I do, I will free every living being from every pain of the suffering existence we all live now. Then I will take all these beings up to the level of a Buddha, which is the ultimate state of happiness. This is why I am going to read this book, which shows all the steps to enlightenment.

Take a moment now before you go on. Make sure you have this motivation.

This little book covers absolutely everything that the Buddha ever taught. In Tibet we have a hundred great volumes of the Buddhas' own teachings, translated into Tibetan from Sanskrit, the language of ancient India. And this small book covers all of them.

All the old, great books of Buddhism have but one main goal, and that is to show how any one of us can reach the state of perfect enlightenment. They tell us everything we have to do: how to reach the goal, how to practice, and how to learn. They show us how to begin; they show us how to finish. Everything we need is in those books.

Five hundred years ago in Tibet there came a master monk and teacher, whose name was Tsongkapa the Great. He took these ancient volumes and arranged them into a kind of book known as the *Lam Rim*, which means "Steps of the Path to Enlightenment." Here he laid out all the steps that any of us can go through, one by one in the proper order, if we truly wish to reach enlightenment. He took care to present the steps clearly and simply, yet covering everything that must be done, as we start on the path, and travel along it, and finally reach its end.

The small book here is called the *Source of All My Good*. It is the absolute essence of all the *Lam Rims*, of all the books on the Steps to enlightenment. The text was written by Tsongkapa himself, and it is named from the opening lines, which read: "The source of all my good is my kind Lama, my Lord."

In the teachings on the Steps this work is also known by another name, something of a secret name, which is *Begging for a Mountain of Blessings*. The word "blessing" here refers to the blessings of all the



Buddhas of the universe. "Mountain" comes from a Tibetan word which means a huge pile, a great mass of things all heaped together in one place. The word "begging" is meant to show how much we need and want these blessings.

When we recite this work out loud, then, it's as though we are begging the Buddhas to grant us their blessings, to help us achieve everything from the beginning up to final enlightenment. We are asking them to help us reach all the various paths, all the different levels of knowledge; we are asking for the power of their blessings, we are begging them for help.

Just whom are we asking for help? Normally when we perform the secret Ceremony of the Tenth, we begin with the Practice of Six, followed by the Thousand Angels. Just after that we start this *Source of All My Good*. Therefore we still have in front of us the same holy beings who were there during the Thousand Angels.

Sitting in the center, in mid-air before us, is Tsongkapa. Inside his heart is Gentle Voice, or Manjushri, who is the image of all the Buddhas' wisdom. In the heart of Gentle Voice is another holy being, Vajradhara—this is the Keeper of the Diamond, or the Buddha of the secret teachings. His body is blue, and within his own heart is the Sanskrit letter *huung*. This letter is marked with another letter, *mam*.

On Tsongkapa's own right is his disciple Gyaltsab Je, whose full name is Gyaltsab Darma Rinchen. Within this disciple's heart is Loving Eyes, whose Sanskrit name is Avalokiteshvara, and who is the embodiment of all the Buddhas' love. Inside the heart of Loving Eyes is again the Keeper of the Diamond, and in his heart the letter *huung*, marked with a *mam*.

On the other side, to Tsongkapa's left, is his disciple Kedrup Je, whose full name is Kedrup Je Gelek Pelsang. Inside of his heart is the Holder of the Diamond, or Vajrapani, and in the Holder's heart is the Keeper of the Diamond. Within the Keeper's heart is a letter *huung*, marked with a *mam*.

All of these beings are seated in the air in front of you, and they are the ones whom you are asking for their blessing. They are the ones that you are requesting to help you, to grant you every kind of knowledge, from the beginning of the path on up to final enlightenment.

Now I want you to think about something. What is the difference between a Buddha and us? What is it that makes all the Buddhas different from us? And what about you, yourself? You are trying to reach Buddhahood; but what is the difference between all these Buddhas, and you? This is a question you must examine, and then the answer will come to you.

What are the Buddhas? First of all the places where they live are paradise. Pure paradise. The paradises where the Buddhas live are completely pure, they are pure by their very nature, and there is not a single thing about them which is not pure.

Inside themselves too the Buddhas are pure. They have no inner obstacles at all, no bad deeds stored up in them, no problems of any kind. They have none of the problems that are caused by any of the four elements of the physical world, either around them or within them. They have no sickness, no getting old, no death. They do not even have a word for these things where they live. This is why their paradises have names like the "Heaven of Bliss," for they live in the highest happiness that there is.

When we think about our own lives then we can see the big difference between Buddhas and us. In one sense we are very fortunate; we have all had the very great fortune to be born as a human being, and we can enjoy that small amount of happiness which human beings sometimes experience. And so sometimes we think we are happy.

But still we have problems, a lot of problems. We have problems all around us, and we have problems inside of us. We have problems that come with the very nature of the kind of life we live. The Buddhas have none of these problems.

Try to think about this difference between the Buddhas and you. Why did you get this book, why are you going to read this book? The main purpose is to reach enlightenment, to gain the highest state of happiness that exists. And to get there you must escape all the sufferings that come with our present kind of life.

To do all this you are going to have to follow some kind of practice. You are going to have to move up through certain levels, certain paths, one by one through a great many different Steps. You will have to go in order, gradually, through each of these Steps. Each higher Step you will have to reach by practicing, and to practice you must learn what to practice. If you never learn what to do, you will never be able to do it.

In this little book you are going to learn what to do. But this is only a preparation for something else.

Generally speaking, this book is all you need. If this is all you ever learn, and if you practice what you learn here, then you will reach enlightenment. But it will take a long time to do so if you restrict yourself to this way, to the way of the open teachings of the Buddha. It will take a very, very long time.

But you want enlightenment, you need it, and you need it now. Why? Because the reason you are reading this book, the whole point of studying these things and reaching these goals, is to help each and every living being. All of them have been your own mother, and the purpose of everything is to help them.

Right now they are suffering, by the very nature of the life we live. Most of them are living in the three lower kinds of birth. Even those who live in one of the higher kinds of birth are suffering too; by the very nature of things, they are in some kind of pain, all the time. Your goal is to save them from this pain, your goal is to help them reach enlightenment, which is absolute happiness. This is why you are studying, this is why you are practicing.

If you only use the way of the open teachings, it will take a long time to reach the goal. But you want the goal now, you want to reach it quickly, because all these living beings around you, all who have been your mother during some lifetime in the past, are suffering in this kind of existence. You cannot stand to have their pain continue, you cannot let them go on suffering so long.

And so you will free them, and you will free them quickly, now. But is there any way to do it so fast? The answer is yes, there is a way, a path that works faster than any other, a path which is very deep and powerful and holy. This is the Tantric path, the secret path of the Diamond Queen: Vajra Yogini.

To practice this path you must receive an initiation to enter it, and then you must receive her teachings. But before you can do this you must first be granted another initiation, one which will qualify you to study and follow her path. There are four great groups of secret teachings, and to qualify to practice the path of this Angel you must be granted an initiation that belongs to the group which is called the "unsurpassed." Therefore the most important thing for you to do first is to seek an initiation of the "unsurpassed" group.

According to the tradition of the Diamond Queen, the best initiation to prepare yourself for her own initiation and path is the one we call the "Union of the Spheres," or Chakrasamvara. There are though other initiations of the unsurpassed group which you can seek if you cannot get this one; for example, there is the initiation of the being known as Frightener\*, or Bhairava, which is much shorter and easier

than the one for the Union of the Spheres, and still qualifies you to take her initiation later.

There is another step you should take too before seeking her initiation. When you go to a college to get an advanced degree, or any degree at all, you must first enter the college. Then you go to classes, do your study, and finally after a number of years you complete all the requirements, and reach your goal. To reach the goal then it is very important that you study and learn, on a constant basis. But to study, and learn, you first have to gain entrance into the college.

It's all the same here. The first thing you have to do is to gain entrance into the unsurpassed group of the secret teachings of the Buddha. To enter these teachings you have to go through the gate, and this is the initiation. The initiation is the door.

When you take the initiation, you commit yourself to a number of vows. Keeping these vows is like doing your study on a daily basis once you've been allowed to enter the college. In a school you have to learn what to study, and then you have to maintain a regular schedule of study. Here in the secret teachings, the vows that you took when you received your initiation are what you have to study: these are what you have to maintain on a regular, daily basis.

To keep the vows, you have to learn all about them. This is why it's essential that after your first initiation you study, in detail, the secret vows, along with the regular vows of morality, and the bodhisattva vows. The very function of these vows, the result of these vows, is very simple. *If you keep them, they produce enlightenment in you.*

Aside from this main function, keeping the vows has another effect as well. In the short run—that is, while you are still on the path, from the very beginning on up to the day you reach the ultimate goal—they help you, they keep you, they preserve you. They make you sweeter and sweeter, more and more pure, every single day you keep them. Everything about you gets better and better: the way you act, the way you think, higher and higher, day by day, month by month.

The vows then are your dear companion, the vows are your devoted helpmate. Vows are not some kind of punishment; the Lama doesn't come to the sacred place of initiation, and say to you, "Well now that you've got the initiation, here are some vows to keep, as a punishment." You must understand all the great good which the vows do for you, and you must learn what they are.

Once you have learned the vows, you must keep them as your daily practice. You should reach a point where, as you look back after some time has passed, you can see progress, you can say to yourself, "A number of years ago, I used to act like that; I had a certain kind of attitude, certain ways of behaving, the limitations of my knowledge were such, and my ability too was only so. Now they have all changed, for the better. Even in the last two years I have changed; no, even in the last year I have changed." You should be able to see for yourself, you should be able to judge, by yourself, whether you are keeping the vows, and how it changes everything about you.

So we are working mainly towards the day when we can receive initiation into the practice of the Diamond Queen. This will allow us to receive her teachings, and then to carry them out. To do this, we will first have to seek any one of the preliminary initiations into the secret teachings of the unsurpassed group, the highest group of secret teachings.

A person who seeks to be granted an initiation into this highest group should himself be highest, in the sense that he is highly qualified to receive the initiation. Becoming highly qualified is something that you must do in the proper stages, in certain steps, one by one.

Above I asked you to think about what it was that made Buddhas different from us. In the beginning though all the beings who are Buddhas now were just the same as we are at present. They lived the same kind of suffering life that we pass our days in now, and they did so over millions and millions of years, over very many lifetimes.

At some point though these beings were able to achieve an excellent life as a human; the same kind that you have now. Within that human life they were able to meet with an excellent spiritual teacher as well. He or she gave them the proper training, and the necessary initiations, and as a result these beings began to get better and better. Finally they achieved enlightenment: they were able to stop all the problems within them and outside of them, everything. If they have been able to practice and achieve this goal, then why can't you? Why not?

And so it is possible for you to become someone who is highly qualified, who is qualified to an unsurpassed degree to take one of the initiations of the unsurpassed group of the secret teachings. To be qualified to take this initiation, to be a highly qualified practitioner in this sense, means that you must be a practitioner of what we call the *Mahayana*: the Greater Way. This is because all the secret teachings also belong to the greater way; they are in fact the highest teachings and practices of the greater way. You too then will have to be an unsurpassed practitioner, of the greater way. But how do you reach this point?

You must first prepare yourself, with what we call the "shared" practice. The word "shared" means that this preliminary practice is shared by the way of the open teachings, and the greater way, and the way of the secret teachings—all three. It is a practice which all three ways share in common.

Suppose you are planning to construct a very high building, a building with many stories. The most important thing to do first is to build a good foundation, a very strong foundation. If the foundation is strong, then you can build as many stories as you like on top of it.

The little book you have here—*Begging for a Mountain of Blessings*, complete with the commentary of the great Pabongka Rinpoche—presents this foundation. It shows you the practice which is shared by all three ways, and which will prepare you for initiation into the secret teachings. This is the strong foundation upon which you will build your great, high house.

Think about it, and be happy. Take some joy now in what you are about to do. You must realize what a precious opportunity you have in your hands at this very moment, this one good time. Read, and learn, and try not to forget. Try to remember what you learn in this little book, and then try to put it into practice, in your daily life, in a regular way.

By the time you finish this book you should be a different person. The person who picks this book up to read, and the person who sets it down after finishing the last page, should be totally different people. On the inside. You must change: you must change in the way you think, you must change in what you know, in the way you behave all day, in everything about you. Try to change yourself. If you do, then you will win the result of reading this book, of picking it up, and of entering into what it stands for.

Khen Rinpoche Geshe Lobsang Tharchin, Abbot Emeritus, Sera Mey Tibetan Monastery Abbot, Rashi Gempil Ling Kalmuk Buddhist Temple, Freewood Acres Howell, New Jersey, USA,  
Je Tsongkapa's Day December 27, 1994

## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

**JE TSONGKAPA (1357-1419)**, also known as Je Rinpoche Lobsang Drakpa, was perhaps the single greatest commentator in the 2,500 year history of Buddhism. He was born in the district of Tsongka in

eastern Tibet and took his first vows at a tender age. As a teenager he had already mastered much of the teachings of Buddhism and was sent by his tutors to the great monastic universities of central Tibet. Here he studied under the leading Buddhist scholars of his day; it is said as well that he enjoyed mystic visions in which he met and learned from different forms of the Buddha himself.

The 18 volumes of Tsongkapa's collected works contain eloquent and incisive commentaries on virtually every major classic of ancient Buddhism, as well as his famed treatises on the "Steps of the Path to Buddhahood." His students, who included the first Dalai Lama of Tibet, contributed hundreds of their own expositions of Buddhist philosophy and practice.

Tsongkapa founded the Great Three monasteries of Tibet, where by custom nearly 25,000 monks have studied the scriptures of Buddhism over the centuries. He also instituted the great Monlam festival, a period of religious study and celebration for the entire Tibetan nation. Tsongkapa passed away in his 62nd year, at his home monastery of Ganden in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet.

**PABONGKA RINPOCHE (1878-1941)**, also known as Jampa Tenzin Trinley Gyatso, was born into a leading family in the state of Tsang in north-central Tibet. As a boy he entered the Gyalrong House of Sera Mey, one of the colleges of the great Sera Monastic University, and attained the rank of *geshe*, or master of Buddhist philosophy. His powerful public teachings soon made him the leading spiritual figure of his day, and his collected works on every facet of Buddhist thought and practice comprise some 15 volumes. His most famous student was Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche (1901-1981), the junior tutor of the present Dalai Lama. Pabongka Rinpoche passed away at the age of 63 in the Hloka district of south Tibet.

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Herein contained is a book named *Opening Your Eyes to What You Should Keep, and What You Should Give Up*.<sup>1</sup> It consists of a brief series of notes that were taken at a teaching delivered by the Lord of the Secret World, Vajradhara, the Keeper of the Diamond, the Good and Glorious Pabongka.<sup>2</sup> The teaching was a profound explanation of the text known as the *Source of All My Good*,<sup>3</sup> a work which is the distilled essence of the Steps of the path to Buddhahood.

In deepest reverence, expressed through all three doors,<sup>4</sup>  
I bow to the lotus feet of the person who is the Essence  
of Great Bliss, the Venerated One, the Holy Lama,  
Lobsang the Great, Lord of All Buddhas,  
the One Who Keeps the Diamond.<sup>5</sup>

## HOW THE TEACHING WAS GIVEN

*Here I will give just a brief account of a wonderful teaching bestowed upon us by the One, the Lord of the Secret World, the Savior of His Followers, and the Keeper of the Diamond: Pabongka Rinpoche, whose kindness knows no match.*

*His teaching was a profound clarification of the one and only highway used by each and every Victor of the past, present, and future to reach the highest goals; the Steps on the path to Buddhahood, its very essence distilled; the inner nectar of the instructions imparted by our Father, the Lord, the Buddha himself come again; and the ultimate elixir extracted from the highest of words, the Speech of the Enlightened Ones: that is to say, the work known to us as the Source of All My Good, also called Begging for a Mountain of Blessings.<sup>6</sup>*

*As he began the teaching, the Lord himself led us in reciting the Essence of Wisdom, and then the prayer of Simhamukhi—the Angel with the Face of a Lion, from the part where we ward off any evil that might disrupt the teaching, all the way up to the words "May goodness come to be," in the way we usually do*

them.

*Then in turns we took the lead, sounding out in unison the various verses that include the words "Virtues perfected finally," and "Loving One, Avalokiteshvara, with Asanga," and "Gentle Voice, Manjushri, with the one who destroyed the extremes of being and not," and "The one of great compassion," and "Teaching what to learn, to reach," and "Founder from the Land of Snows," and "All three places of refuge in one," and "The constellations of the highest of words," and "In all my lives."*

*The lead then went to the chanting master, who guided us in the offering of the mandala, beginning with "The great Earth, filled with the smell of incense," and on through "Atop a lion throne in the space before me," as well as "Sponges of the sky, made of most excellent knowledge and love," along with the lines that begin with idam guru.*

*The lead returned to the Keeper of the Diamond, who deigned to direct us thrice through the prayer for taking refuge and developing the wish for enlightenment, the one that includes the words "To the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha." Here finally the Lord himself bespoke the verses containing the lines "Pleasure beings and those near so," along with "In the language of pleasure beings" and the rest.<sup>7</sup>*

## **THE PRELIMINARIES**

### **I. Why the Steps?**

"And so we begin," said the Lama.

Let me remind you, he said, of those lines by the King of the Dharma of all three realms—Tsongkapa the Great; the ones that mention "This life of spiritual leisure, more precious than a jewel that can give you whatever you wish for."<sup>6</sup> The refrain throughout these verses reads: "Those of you who wish for freedom should seek to master this, as I have done." You and I have lived in this circle of suffering life forever; and there is not a single form of life, in any of the six realms of pain, that we have not already lived.

In these lives we have suffered, and enjoyed the occasional short-lived pleasure, wandering aimlessly from that high level known as the "Peak of Existence," then down to the lowest hell, "Torment with No Respite," then back, and back again. We have lived this way for time with no beginning, and yet we have never gotten any meaning out of it; the time has slipped away from us useless, senseless, empty. And so still we are here, circling up and down in the three realms of the wheel of life, and certain we are to continue the round.

At some point in days gone by, you and I through sheer good luck were taken for some brief moments under the care of a Lama, or the Three Jewels, and so were able to gather together some bit of pure and powerful karma. The force of this karma, I will admit, has allowed us to gain, just this once, the present life we enjoy—full of the various leisures and fortunes, free of the problems that come when we lack the conditions that allow a proper spiritual practice.

I will admit as well that everything we need has come together for us this time: we have a Lama, we have some Dharma to practice, we have every favorable condition that we need. And so the capability to follow the spiritual path is something we now hold in our own two hands. Yet suppose we fail; suppose that we find ourselves unable to achieve the ultimate goal of the infinite lives we have led.

Beyond a doubt then we will fall back again to the births where we have no chance for Dharma. And when we fall it matters not where we fall; wherever we fall in a birth without the Dharma, our life can never be anything but pain.

The way to avoid ever taking another birth where we have no chance for Dharma is to practice the Dharma purely now; there is no better way at all. And our practice must start this minute; you will die, you must die, it is certain you will die. But you've no idea when. And what will happen after that?

Whatever we do now decides where we go then: if we do good, it will throw us forth into one of the better births; if we do wrong, it will throw us to a birth of misery. So suppose we fail to practice; suppose we die in the middle of our present evil way of life. It is only fitting then that we should go right where we belong: to these very births of misery.

We must then for the short term go for shelter to the Three Jewels, to keep ourselves from a birth in the lower realms. We must as well open up and admit the things we have done wrong before, and restrain ourselves in the future. To do so we must make strong and heartfelt use of the four forces<sup>9</sup> that counteract the power of the wrong. We must too put all our effort into taking up even the smallest virtue, and giving up even the slightest harms we commit against others.

If in addition to all this we are able to follow perfectly the path of the three extraordinary trainings,<sup>10</sup> then we ourselves will come to be free of each and every fear of the circle of suffering life. But it's not enough if it is only you who escapes the circle, for we must recall the words of the Master Chandragomi:

Even a cow knows how to take care of himself, to eat a few clumps of grass he easily comes across; Even the beast can merrily drink from a pool of water he finds as bitter thirst Torments him. But think now what it is to put your whole heart into taking care of others; This is glory, this is a park of pleasure, this is the ultimate.

The Sun climbs aboard his fantastic chariot, flies across the sky, lights up all the world. The Earth raises up his mighty arms, bears the load, holds up all mankind. And so is the way of those great beings who wish nothing for themselves, their lives devoted to a single song: The well-being and the happiness of every living thing.<sup>11</sup>

We must do as the verses say: we must distinguish ourselves from common animals, we must find that great courage of heart to accomplish the goals of all other sentient kind. And there is a good reason why we should.

Every single creature in the universe has been our father, and been our mother, not once, but more times than numbers can count. And there is not a one who when they served as our parent did not shower us with every deep kindness, over and over again.

Suppose then I were to forget their kindness, and give no thought to returning it. This would truly be an evil way to act, the way of a person without a conscience, of one who had no shame. For the *Verses of Drumsong, King of the Serpentes*, say as well:

The sea is not my problem, my task is not the mountains, my job is not the earth; My calling's rather to attend that I should never fail repaying kindness granted me.<sup>12</sup>

So too say the lines,

A kindness returned is goodness, And evil is kindness unreturned.<sup>13</sup>

Think: everything we have now, from this precious human body on up, has come to us through the kindness of other living beings. And so it is now that we must repay them. The repayment must begin here, in these circumstances, while I am able, while I possess this perfect form for the practice of the Dharma.

If now I cannot accomplish this great goal, if all I have gained is wasted, then there is little point in claiming to work for every living being: it is little likely that I myself will be able even to reach the higher realms of suffering life again.

What is the way then to pay this kindness back? No way would be higher than to see to it that every living creature has every happiness there is, and that every living creature is free of every pain which exists. And I will do it! Raise these thoughts of love and compassion up in your heart—bring them on fiercely.

And then you must resolve to take the load upon yourself: "I will rely on no one else in this work; it should be I, and I alone who brings every happiness to every being, and frees each one from every pain."

And yet the ability to perform this noble task is had only by a single being: only by a Buddha, there's no one else at all who can do it. If for the sole purpose of all other living creatures I can reach the state of a Buddha, then I can fulfill completely both of the ultimate goals,<sup>14</sup> and so by the way achieve everything I ever needed as well.

If this is not the way I go—if instead I achieve a lower nirvana, and become one of those foe destroyers they call a listener, or a "self-made buddha,"<sup>15</sup> then I cannot achieve all that I need myself, and can accomplish no more than a shadow of what others need from me.

And so I must reach the state of a Buddha, the One who has come to the final end where his own and other's needs are perfectly filled. To do so, I must know how. To know how, I must learn how. I will begin with the Dharma of this very teaching, and others like it; I will follow these instructions well, and I will come to the state of Buddhahood itself. Think these thoughts to yourself, here as our teaching starts, for they are the greater way's Wish for Buddhahood. At the very least, you must try to imitate this line of thinking; even if you cannot do the real thing, let these thoughts dwell in your heart all through the teaching that you are about to hear.

And what is the teaching that you are to hear? It was spoken by our Gentle Savior, by the Lama, the Great Tsongkapa, at Yangon—the hermitage of the Victor. This was at the monastery of Radreng, standing to the north, at the foot of a great crag of rock shaped like the mouth of a lion.<sup>16</sup>

The Lord imparted these vital instructions to his disciples there, acting only for the good of living beings and the Buddha's Word. The title of the text he spoke is the *Source of All My Good*; it is also known by another name, *Begging for a Mountain of Blessings*.

This is a work of the kind we call the "Steps to Buddhahood"; books like this contain within themselves each and every crucial point in all the open and secret teachings of Buddhism. They present these points without the slightest error, from the very beginning to the very end: from finding and serving a spiritual guide on up to the perfect secret Union, where there is nothing more to learn.

These teachings on the Steps are the pure essence of everything that all the victorious Buddhas have ever spoken, the sum rolled into one. They are the one and only form of the Teaching that embodies all of the greater way; they are the point of the tip of the highest, matchless peak.

Our Lord Lama, in his work entitled *Songs of My Spiritual Life*, says,  
When within yourself you've developed the path that is shared, The one that's needed for both  
the highest paths...<sup>17</sup>

What he means is that, speaking in a general way, this instruction on the Steps to Buddhahood is one that you could never do without, whether you are practicing the open or the secret teachings of Buddhism. To



put it more specifically, the Great Fifth of the Dalai Lamas has said,

Everybody talks of it, the Secret Word, The Most Profound, essential thread in the River of Dharma  
For those of the great capacity; But try it before your mind is trained in the path that both them share,  
Climb atop a mighty elephant still wild, and not yet tamed; you will only lose yourself.<sup>18</sup>

It is absolutely vital then, for anyone with hopes of entering the door that leads to the way of the Secret Word, that you train your mind first in this path shared by both the open and secret teachings.

Now there is a reason why this text is known as "Begging for a Mountain of Blessings." As we recite it we are *entreating* our Lama to grant us, in one big *pile* or mountain, each and every spiritual realization: from finding and following a spiritual guide as we should, on up to the perfect Union. And we are asking that he do so in the form of a *personal blessing* from himself.

As the spiritual friend Tonpa has spoken,

The ability to wrap the totality of the teachings into one is a special skill of my Lama's—for the Father, nothing is not a teaching.<sup>19</sup>

He has said as well that:

His wondrous word is all three the collections, advice adorned by teachings of three scopes,  
A gold and jewel rosary of the Keepers, meaningful to all who read its beads.<sup>20</sup>

Geshe Tonpa is describing here what our Lord Lama has spoken in all his presentations of the Steps of the path, both the brief and more detailed: that these very Steps are far superior to every other form of instruction, by virtue of their three extraordinary qualities, and four different kinds of greatness.<sup>21</sup>

They contain each and every crucial point in the three collections, which are the entire teachings of the Buddha. They are the single crossroads where all the 84,000 massive stores of the Dharma intersect,<sup>22</sup> they are the one single way by which each and every victorious Buddha has travelled, or travels now, or ever again will travel. As the shorter *Gem of Fine Qualities* says it,

It is this perfection, nothing else, which is the path that's shared by all the Victors, stay they in the past, the present, or the future.<sup>23</sup>

People like you and I can go to great Lamas all we want, and receive from them high initiations, or special oral transmissions, and teachings on texts or the like. We can claim to have studied the five great classics,<sup>24</sup> and plumbed them to their depths, it doesn't matter. But if in the end we are unable to put these Steps into practice within our own lives, joining them all into one, then there's a risk that we'll end up as the Great Fifth described it:

True we see fools who know no better, doing what's wrong for things of this life.

But we err worse who've studied much the holiest of words, and yet still see our ultimate hopes  
Swept away on the wind.<sup>25</sup>

So you must turn your learning within, into Dharma: you must take those four great qualities of the Steps to Buddhahood and apply them to your own heart.

And there is more you should know; verses like those of the Master Translator of Taktsang:

I sing Your praises, vast treasure house of fine explanation we lacked before, elucidation of all  
The highest of speech, especially the diamond way; teachings on all the secret groups, especially the  
Unsurpassed; on all the parts of both the levels, especially the magic body.

The lines beginning from "Diamond Way" refer to the secret teachings of Buddhism.<sup>26</sup>

There are as well the words of the Karmapa, Mikyu Dorje, who in the later part of his life developed for Lord Tsongkapa an extraordinary level of admiration, a kind that is found among those of high

intelligence, who follow the Dharma not out of faith, but rather out of reason. The lines read in part:

I make this praise to the tradition of The Mount of the Heaven of Bliss; To Tsongkapa, for in these days when the vast majority of those in our Northern Land act only wrong with the teachings of the Victors, he instead has wiped and cleaned away the dirt on them, ever faultlessly.<sup>27</sup>

That highest of Victors, Kelsang Gyatso, has said too:

It is a pure tradition, the lineage of the Heaven of Bliss; It is no biased or limited school of thought. It is the essential nectar, to learn and practice the Teaching so all the open and secret Word seems personal instruction.<sup>28</sup>

And that's just the way it is: our scriptural tradition, that of the Mount of the Heaven of Bliss, is one that is totally complete and spotless, on both sides—in the open and the secret Word. It is a kind of teaching that is found nowhere else. And it possesses a multitude of unique and unrivalled qualities: its depth, the speed with which it works, and so on. Thus it is that this teaching on the Steps of the Path to Buddhahood, as it was inaugurated by the Gentle Protector, Tsongkapa, looks to contain a nearly limitless number of spiritual advices found in none of the other schools, nor even among the older Keepers of the Word.<sup>29</sup>

Could any system be more profound or far-reaching than this Dharma, the Steps of the Path? Certainly not those teachings that others claim are oh-so-deep, or oh-so-high and inscrutable. People chatter about attaining some realization, some supposed zenith of some very secret way: they talk of termination; they talk about the levels of creation and completion; about the channels and winds and drops; the great seal, or the great completion, whatever.<sup>30</sup> But if one never makes use of these very Steps, he can never even plant the seeds, much less bring the path in full to grow within his mind.

This then is why it is so very important to go through the Steps, in the three stages of learning, and contemplating, and meditating upon them. So it is too that I shall now present you, said our Lama, with just a very brief explanation and oral transmission of the work known as the "Source of All My Good," for it contains within it the complete heart of the Steps of the Path to Buddhahood.

## **II. How to Take a Lama**

The text of the *Source of All My Good* may be divided into four different parts:

- 1) the very root of the path, which is how to take a Lama and serve him or her properly;
- 2) how to train your mind, once you have taken a Lama;
- 3) a request so that you can attain all the favorable conditions for succeeding in the path, and stop all the circumstances that might prevent you from doing so; and then finally
- 4) a prayer that in all your future lives you may be taken under the care of a Lama, and so gain the strength to reach the final end of the various levels and paths.

The first of these is presented in a single verse, the first one of the work:

(1)

**The source of all my good  
Is my kind Lama, my Lord;  
Bless me first to see  
That taking myself to him  
In the proper way  
Is the very root  
Of the path, and grant me then  
To serve and follow him  
With all my strength and reverence.**

This Step of taking a Lama is itself divided into two sections: developing clear faith in him, which is the very root of the Path; and then building up reverence for him, by considering the great kindness he has

paid us. The instruction in developing faith comes in two stages: how to follow a Lama in one's thoughts, and then how to follow him in one's actions.

Now the *Secret Teaching of Sambhuta* says,

You will never be able to take a boat to the other side of the river unless you take the oars up in your hands. You will never reach the end of suffering life without a Lama, even if you perfect yourself in every other respect.<sup>31</sup>

The *Shorter Sutra on the Perfection of Wisdom* concurs:

The Victorious Buddhas, who possess the highest of all good qualities, speak as one when They say: "Every single part of the Buddhist way depends on a Spiritual Guide."

It says as well:

And so the wise who seek the high state of enlightenment with a fierce wish deep inside should smash all pride within them, and like a mass of sick men who flock to medicine for a cure, take themselves to a spiritual guide and serve him single-mindedly.

Our Gentle Savior, Tsongkapa the Great, has too spoken these words:

There is a single key for finding a perfect start to reach your every wish, both happiness in the short run and ultimately; and the highest words ever spoken speak it always the same: It is your Lama. And so you must devote yourself to meditation upon him, upon the essence of all the three different kinds of refuge; ask him, for all your goals.<sup>32</sup>

All these lines are saying the same thing: if you have any hope of reaching up to the high spiritual qualities of the various levels and paths, then from the outset you must absolutely find and follow a Lama who can show you how to do so.

And the Lama that we are describing here is not just any one you might happen to come across; it's not just anyone they call a "Lama." Rather, he must have in him the ten high qualities described in the *Jewel of the Sutras*. He must first of all be subdued, at peace, and at high peace; that is to say, he must possess all three of the trainings.<sup>33</sup> He must display fine spiritual qualities that exceed those of his student, and exhibit exceptional effort. He should have a total mastery of the Dharma in the form of scripture, and should have realized suchness. He should be highly skilled in teaching the Dharma, he must have a great love for his disciples, and he must never become tired or discouraged in his teaching, no matter how much or how often he is called upon to do so.

We are though now in the days of degeneration, and so perhaps it is difficult to find someone who possesses each and every one of these qualifications. In such a case, we must follow the advice of the Lord of Lamas:

If you take my advice, man of the land of Gyalkam, take yourself to the ultimate spiritual guide: To one who grasps Reality, to one who has controlled his senses, who takes your heart away as soon as you lay your eyes on him; to the one that, when you follow what he teaches, the good in you begins to flower, and the bad begins to fade.<sup>34</sup>

These and other such lines are telling us that the Lama we seek must at least possess a complete set of five different qualities: He must have brought his mind under control, by following the three trainings; he must have realized thusness; and He must have love.

As a bare minimum, the Lama must surely fit the following description. He must occupy himself more with the Dharma than with the things of the world. He must as well occupy himself more with the concerns of the future life, than with those of the present one. He must occupy himself more with helping others, than with helping himself. He is never careless in what he does, or says, or thinks. And, finally, he

never leads his disciples along a path which is mistaken.

Suppose you are able to find a Lama like the one we have described above. What are the benefits you can expect from following him properly? Simply put, you will win each and every good thing in this and all your future lives. What are the dangers of refusing to follow him, or of following him less than properly? You will undergo a great mass of unendurable pain, in both the short term and the long. You must seek to grasp these facts fully.

Your Lama is like the source, he is like the very root, from which every single good quality of all the different levels and paths of both the open and secret teachings spring. If you ever succeed in stopping a single personal fault, it will be because of him. If you ever manage to cultivate a single spiritual quality, any good at all, that too will come from him. The whole range of virtues, from the final attainment of secret Union on down to having a single wholesome thought, all flow from him.

Your Lama is also the one and only "source" in the sense of being the embodiment or actuality of all the mighty deeds, all the great good, that all the victorious Buddhas perform in their holy actions, words, and thoughts. Try now to develop this root of the path—clear faith in him or her.

If with eyes made clear by this faith you begin to see your Lama as a real Buddha, then the blessing of a real Buddha will follow in your mind-stream. It's essential therefore that you train your mind in the relevant parts described in the texts on the Steps: the reasons why you should see that your Lama is a Buddha; the reasons why you can see that your Lama is a Buddha; how to see him, and so on.

The word "kind" in the verse here is meant to convey the Step of building up reverence for your Lama by considering all the kind things he has done for you. The word "Lord" is a translation of the Sanskrit word *Svami*, a word that applies to someone who is like a crowning jewel which all the beings of the universe, including the great worldly beings of power, humbly place above their heads.

What does it mean to "follow your Lama properly?" You must understand that it means to surrender yourself completely to him or her. Here you should take yourself to him in the way of an obedient child, and with the rest of the nine attitudes described in the *Arrangement of Trunks*.<sup>35</sup>

To put it briefly, you must absolutely conduct yourself correctly in this regard; you must follow precisely every one of the classical descriptions of how to find and follow a Lama. If the cornerstone of a house—the walls of its foundation—are solid, then the house itself is solid. If the roots of a tree are planted firmly in the soil, then the branches and fruit and all the rest grow strong.

What we hope to grow is the path, in its entirety: all the Steps from recognizing the importance of the spiritual leisure and fortune of our present circumstances, on up to the attainment of secret Union itself. We must find sure and solid knowledge, we must see, that taking ourselves to our Lama properly will bring all of this about, without any difficulty at all.

The entire subject of how to follow your Lama in your thoughts is revealed in the words "first to see." Thus you must come to see your spiritual Friend as a real Buddha; and this brings us to how you should follow him in your actions.

How can we please our Lama? Relative to the path which is shared, you should use the instructions found in the discussions on how to find and follow a Lama in general. Relative to the way of the secret Word, use the instructions in the *Fifty Verses on Lamas*.<sup>36</sup> Both of these describe how you should, to the very best of your ability, "with all your strength," gladly take up any difficult task in any of the three doors of expression—of body, speech, or mind—in order to please him or her.

There are different levels of how we pay homage to our Lama: to offer him or her gifts, material things; to give ourselves up to his service, his honor; and to take what he has taught us and put it into actual practice, accomplishing our spiritual goals. Each of these is higher than the one before it, and the last one is supreme.

The root text here then is saying that we must take ourselves to our Lama in a whole different number of ways, in keeping with our personal mental capacity.

And as you serve your Lama, remember. When a farmer goes to plant his seeds, whatever work he does in the field, he does for his own sake. It's not as if he is doing the field a favor. Here I am the same. It's me who hopes to reach freedom from pain, and the state of knowing all things. To do so, I must take up certain things and give up others; but I am like a man who is blind—I am totally ignorant of which of these things are which.

My spiritual Friend is here to lead the blind; and in my service of him or her I am obliged to do anything required of me, no matter how exhausting, no matter how distasteful—so long as nothing morally wrong is involved.

And I am not to view this service as if I were laboring for someone else; on the contrary, I should not even see it as a burden, but rather as a reward: it is my great good fortune to have the opportunity. And so I must succeed in serving him or her in both my thoughts and actions, with the deepest feelings of reverence.

If our service of our Lama is good, then in all our future lives we will find ourselves taken under the care of Lamas. Then too we can count the life we have found now as the first in a long and unbroken series of lives in which we enjoy each of the eight spiritual pleasures, and the ten fortunes. And there will never again be any mistake in this particular arithmetic: we will always enjoy the exact number of circumstances needed to follow our practice of the Dharma, and so finally reach the state of perfect enlightenment.

The words "bless me" here mean "embellish me"; which is to say, "transform the condition of my mind." A minute ago my mind was twisted wrong, and joined with every kind of bad thought. Now, in the very next moment, may I be blessed with the good fortune of being able to find and follow my Lama properly, with every reverence; may my mind be straightened, and become filled with each and every Step of the path. This is the thing I ask, my Lama. The explanation of the words "bless me" here applies as well to each of the other verses in which they appear.

## Notes to Reading Eight

\*The presence of an asterisk after a translated proper name indicates that the equivalent Asian-language form or forms may be found in a special appendix.

<sup>1</sup> *Opening Your Eyes*: The edition used for this translation is a woodblock print of 27 folios on handmade Tibetan paper held in the private collection of the venerable Geshe Lobsang Thardo, from the Gyalrong College of Sera Mey Tibetan Monastic University, South India. The copy was presented to him personally by the Third Pabongka Rinpoche, the Ven. Geshe Lobsang Tupten Trinley Kunkyab. Another copy is listed in the catalog to the library of His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche, the late tutor of the present Dalai Lama. The text is somewhat rare, and was not included in the standard edition of Pabongka Rinpoche's collected works.

<sup>2</sup> *the Good and Glorious Pabongka*: Refers to the first Pabongka Rinpoche (1878- 1941), whose full monk's name was Jampa Tenzin Trinley Gyatso. He was the foremost Buddhist teacher of his era, and renowned for his ability to convey the deepest concepts of Buddhism to the common man in popular

public teachings. For a full biography in English, refer to the introduction of *The Principal Teachings of Buddhism*.

<sup>3</sup> *Source of All My Good*: Written by Tsongkapa the Great (1357-1419), perhaps the greatest commentator of Buddhism who ever lived, author of some 10,000 pages in explanation of the early classics of Buddhism, and teacher of many eminent disciples, including the First Dalai Lama. This brief work covers all the necessary stages of the entire path to Buddhahood and is often recited at the beginning of important teachings and high secret rituals. It also forms the final section of *Necklace for the Fortunate*, a popular text used in readying oneself for a Buddhist meditation session. As will be explained in more detail further on, the text of the *Source of All My Good* is found within a longer work, entitled *Open Door to the Highest Path*. This piece is a supplication to the Lamas of the great lineages of Buddhism: the masters through whom concepts such as the Wish for enlightenment, and the vision of emptiness, have been passed down to us. The importance of the *Door* is indicated by the fact that it appears first in a compendium of 135 briefer titles within the Master's collected works. The name and role of the work have evolved over the centuries. Je Tsongkapa composed the *Door* in 1402, and by the time of the famous *Path of Ease*, a presentation on the Steps of the path by His Holiness the First Panchen Lama (1567?-1662), it is recommended under its original name for a petition and visualization of the lineage Lamas. By the middle part of the 18th century the *Door's* central section, itself a concise yet complete presentation of the Steps, has become the subject of a number of philosophical commentaries, under the name of the *Source of All My Good* (a phrase taken from the first line of the text). By this time too, the work is being referred to by the name of *Begging for a Mountain of Blessings*. It is also recommended throughout this period as a component in the six standard practices used to prepare for a meditation session.

Other commentaries or works based on the *Source* include those of the following authors: Akuching Drungchen Sherab Gyatso (b. 1803) Gelong Yeshe Gyeltsen Gushri Kachupa Mergen Kenpo Lobsang Tsepel (b. about 1760) Gyal Kenpo Drakpa Gyeltsen (1762-1837) His Holiness the Sixth Panchen Lama, Lobsang Tupten Chukyi Nyima (1883-1937) Je Lodro Gyatso (1851-1930), ed. by Gyal Kentrul Kelsang Drakpa Gyatso (b. 1880) Jikme Samten (19th century) Kalka Damtsik Dorje (18th century) Kirti Lobsang Trinley (1849-1905) Lumbum Sherab Gyatso (1884-1968) Ngawang Yeshe Tupten Rabjampa (19th century) Shangton Tenpa Gyatso Pel Sangpo (n.d.) Shasana Dipam (n.d.), probably Tsechokling Yeshe Gyeltsen (1713-1793) Explanations of the six preliminary practices are also a rich source of commentary upon the *Source*. Pabongka Rinpoche himself gives a profound interpretation of the text in two such works. He includes all the original verses in a recitation text based on the Fifth Dalai Lama's text on the Steps. He also mentions using them as the basis of a review meditation in his masterpiece on the Steps to Buddhahood entitled *A Gift of Liberation, Placed into Our Hands*. And it was his own precious teacher, Dakpo Lama Jampel Hlundrup, who attached the work to the *Necklace* mentioned above. Other commentaries on the six practices which include explanations of the *Source* have been written by the following masters: Akya Yangchen Gaway Lodru (c. 1760) Keutsang Lobsang Jamyang Monlam (b. 1689) Tsechok Ling Yeshe Gyeltsen (1713-1793) The Second Jamyang Shepa, Konchok Jikme Wangpo (1728-1791) One very interesting additional work is another *Open Door to the Highest Path*, written by Tsechok Ling Yeshe Gyeltsen (1713-1793). The title is the same as that of Je Tsongkapa's original piece because the author undertakes to extend Tsongkapa's supplication to the lineage Lamas, in order to include the great teachers beginning from Je Tsongkapa himself. Incidentally, the very expression "source of all my good" (in the Tibetan form of *yon-tan gyi gzhi-rten*) is used very early on in Buddhist literature. The phrase in Sanskrit appears in the *Letter to a Friend*, written by the realized being Nagarjuna some seventeen centuries ago. Here it refers to the practice of morality which, like proper reliance upon a Lama, acts to provide us with all good things.

<sup>4</sup> *Three doors*: The three ways in which one can express himself—in action, speech, or thought. A typical presentation of the three appears in the works on Higher Knowledge (*Abhidharma*); see for example Chone Lama Drakpa Shedrup (1675-1748).

<sup>5</sup> *The person who is the Essence of Great Bliss*: Another name for Pabongka Rinpoche, describing his

mastery of the secret teachings of Buddhism. The additional names that follow indicate that the Rinpoche embodies Je Tsongkapa, Shakyamuni Buddha, and the form that Lord Buddha takes to deliver the secret Word.

<sup>6</sup>*Mountain of Blessings*: The concept of a blessing in Buddhism refers to a specific process through which a disciple's ability to achieve spiritual goals is altered, enhanced, through a true request to a Lama for his or her blessing. Pabongka Rinpoche himself describes this in his famed *Gift of Liberation*. <sup>7</sup> "Language of pleasure beings..." These and the other lines belong to selected verses which recited by tradition at the start of a major teaching, in order for both teacher and listener to begin with the proper motivation; to formally request the teaching; to prevent obstacles that might disrupt the teaching; and so on. The verses can be found in standard prayer books for Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. Their locations here are as follows: *Essence of Wisdom* (the famous *Heart Sutra*, for preventing obstacles); *Angel with the Face of a Lion* (also for preventing obstacles); "Virtues perfected" (opening lines of Je Tsongkapa's brief *Stages of the Path* and an obeisance to Lord Buddha); "Loving One" (these and following common verses of obeisance and the offering of bathing to the lineage Lamas); "Gentle Voice,"; "The one of great compassion,"; "Teaching what to learn, to reach,"; "Founder from the Land of Snows,"; "All three places" (these last two also common graces); "The constellations,"; "In all my lives" (also attached to the *Mountain of Blessings*); "The great Earth" (the shorter offering of the mandala); "Atop a lion throne" (from a prayer of devotion to Je Tsongkapa); "Sponges of the sky" (a request for teaching from the famous *Offering to Lamas*); "Idam guru" (final words of the mandala offering); "To the Buddha" (the well-known formula for taking refuge and developing the wish for enlightenment); "Pleasure beings" (an obeisance to Tara, the Angel of Liberation); and "Language of pleasure beings" (a prayer to teach in all the world's languages.)

<sup>8</sup>*This life of spiritual leisure*: Found in the Master's *Songs of My Spiritual Life*.

<sup>9</sup>*Four forces*: Buddhism teaches that there are four antidote forces, which together can remove the power or karma of any bad deed. The "basis" force consists of thinking who it is that was offended by your deed, and who it is you will rely on to clear yourself of it. The "destruction" force is an intense feeling of shame and regret for the deed, which will certainly return to hurt you. The "reverse" force is to turn yourself away from doing that kind of deed again. The "counteragent" force is to undertake some spiritual practice—confession, meditation, or any good deed—to offset the power of the wrong.

<sup>10</sup>*Three extraordinary trainings*: That is, extraordinary morality, extraordinary concentration, and extraordinary wisdom. Each one acts as a support for the next. A thorough discussion of the three is found in the monastic textbooks on the perfection of wisdom; see for example the "Overview of the Perfection of Wisdom" by Kedrup Tenpa Dargye (1493-1568).

<sup>11</sup>*Even a cow knows how*: The quotation is from the *Letter to a Student*, written in the tenth century. It appears as well in Je Tsongkapa's greater *Steps to the Path* and the first Panchen Lama's *Path of Ease*.

<sup>12</sup>*The sea is not my problem*: The quotation is found in a teaching of the Buddha, where he recounts the story of a serpentine king, as an admonition to his monks for quarreling. The popular lines are also found in the *Greater Steps* of Je Tsongkapa; the *Path of Ease* by the First Panchen Lama (1567?-1662); the *Word of Gentle Voice* by the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682); and the *Steps of the Teaching*, a massive prototype for the *Greater Steps* composed by Geshe Drolungpa (c. 1100).

<sup>13</sup>*A kindness returned*: This appears to be a proverb rather than a scriptural reference; the *Steps of the Teaching* expresses a very similar sentiment.

<sup>14</sup>*Both of the ultimate goals*: Refers to the final culmination of one's own goals and the ability to help others achieve theirs—two qualities possessed only by a Buddha. Several important discussions of the ultimate goals are found in treatises on Master Dharmakirti's *Commentary on Valid Perception*, composed in the 7th century. The first is included in the explanation of the opening lines of this work itself, where the Buddha's qualities are extolled. The second comes in the second chapter, as Master Dharmakirti explains the praise of the Buddha in Master Dignaga's original treatise. <sup>15</sup> *one of those foe destroyers*: "Foe destroyer" is a term used to refer to those who have achieved nirvana, since—as Geshe Drolungpa notes in his *Steps of the Teaching*—they have permanently destroyed the foe of the mental afflictions. "Listeners"

and "self-made Buddhas" here refer to persons who have achieved nirvana but have not yet entered the higher way, the way of the bodhisattvas, where they work to become fully enlightened Buddhas in order to liberate all living beings. "Listeners" are so called because they can listen to the teachings of the higher way, and even relate them to others, but do not actually put them into practice themselves. "Self-made buddhas" are not real Buddhas, but have only achieved nirvana, and are "self-made" only insofar as they have reached this state without relying on a spiritual teacher in the present life, although they have had countless such teachers in their past lives.

<sup>16</sup>*The great monastery of Radreng*: The chain of events surrounding the composition of the *Mountain of Blessings* are extraordinary; they show how this brief supplication played a pivotal role in Je Tsongkapa's spiritual life, and in the history of Buddhist literature. Much of what Je Tsongkapa wrote is said to have been dictated to him by Manjushri, Gentle Voice, who is the wisdom of all enlightened beings combined in the form of a single angel. Je Tsongkapa began to enjoy communication with Gentle Voice in his early thirties. At this point he was still incapable of seeing the angel directly himself, but was able to pose questions to him through a mediator, a lama named Umapa. Je Tsongkapa's *Secret Biography*, a work by his close disciple Kedrup Je (1385-1438), describes important events of the Master's inner life. Here we read the details of an early exchange between Je Tsongkapa and Gentle Voice, with Lama Umapa acting as go-between. Je Rinpoche poses questions, and the angel begins his answer by clarifying a whole range of thorny issues concerning the subject of emptiness. Next he moves on to illuminate a number of difficult points in the secret teachings. Then he pauses, and Je Rinpoche says: "But wait, there are still more questions I must ask, more points I cannot grasp." And Gentle Voice replies, Do not forget the answers I have already given you today. Go now and write a record of them. There are three practices then you must undertake, all three together, and you must devote yourself to them with an unquenchable passion. First you must come to see that your Lama and your high secret Angel are one and the same. You must make supplication to them, and try to reach them. Secondly you must make constant and perfect efforts in the two-fold practice of collecting the energy of good deeds, and purifying yourself of the force of evil deeds. Thirdly you must use the power of your intellect to investigate the true meaning of the great books of Buddhism, and then you must contemplate this meaning deeply. Follow these three practices, keep them up over a long period of time. There will come a day, it is not far off, when the seed I have planted within you in this hour will flower. And then you will understand all, perfectly. Throughout his life Je Tsongkapa followed all three practices, but the particular attention he paid to supplication, to prayers for the blessings of perfected beings, Buddhas and Lamas, is strikingly evident in records of his writings, and throughout his various biographies. It is one such supplication which leads to our present work, the *Mountain of Blessings*. The time is the summer of 1402, in the forty-sixth year of the Master's life. Having spent a fruitful summer at the Temple of Ar with his close teacher and disciple, the Sakya sage Jetsun Rendawa, Je Tsongkapa then travels to Radreng ("to the north" of Lhasa). He has been there once before, attracted to the great monastery so full of the history of two of Tibetan Buddhism's founding fathers: Atisha, the Lord, and his spiritual son Dromton Je (the "Victor" mentioned in the text). This connection is described by Kedrup Je in his longer biography. At Radreng, Je Tsongkapa goes into solitude at the foot of the lion crag. Above his quarters is a statue of the Lord himself, Atisha. One day the Master kneels before the image, in keeping with the words of Gentle Voice himself, and makes a supplication to the Lamas of the past. The prayer that Je Tsongkapa made that day is still extant, and can be found in his collected works under the name of *Door to the Highest Path*. The petition is directed to the Lamas of the instructions on the Steps to Buddhahood, and divides broadly into three parts.

The first part is a request to the teachers of the lineage of the Wish for enlightenment, beginning with the Buddha himself, and continuing on through Loving One, the Indian master Asanga, and then on down to the great Tibetan lamas of Je Rinpoche's own time. The third part is a similar prayer, to the teachers of the lineage of the Realization of emptiness, again starting with Lord Buddha, and passing down through Gentle Voice, the incomparable Nagarjuna, and later generations. The second part, between these two, is none other than the *Mountain of Blessings*, the *Source of All My Good*. Je Tsongkapa ends his prayer, and



suddenly goes into a vision, one which, according to the *Great Biography* of Gyalwang Lobsang Trinley Namgyal (about 1830), continues on and off for an entire month. He sees all the lineage Lamas face-to-face, and receives a momentous boon from one in particular. The scene is recorded in a standard set of fifteen scroll paintings of the Master's life known as *The Tsongkapa Eighty*. We find the following description of the event on the scroll in the works of the great Jamyang Shepay Dorje (1648-1721): And the Lord Atisha came to the Master, and placed his hand on his head, and said to him, "Do mighty deeds on behalf of the Teachings, and then I myself will assist you in reaching the goal of Enlightenment, and filling the needs of every sentient being." Immediately after the vision, Je Tsongkapa is approached by scores of learned disciples, who entreat him to write a detailed account of how to reach perfection. Flush with Lord Atisha's promise, the Master goes into retreat, and there at Radreng completes his masterwork—the *Lam Rim Chenmo*, or *Greater Steps of the Path to Buddhahood*—the most famous book in all of Tibetan Buddhism.

His understanding is now complete, and the seed planted by Gentle Voice has flowered as foretold, for Je Tsongkapa has heeded the angel's advice by composing this perfect supplication: the *Mountain of Blessings*. This power of the prayer has been recognized throughout generations of lamas since, and explains why it is used as a preparation for the secret practices. As the final lines of the present explanation of the work reveal, it too has been imparted by Pabongka Rinpoche as a preliminary to a tantric initiation.

<sup>17</sup> *Both the highest paths*: Refers to the paths of the open and the secret teachings of Buddhism. The path which is "shared" by the two consists of the realizations of the Steps to Buddhahood, since these are necessary for success in both the open and the secret ways. The quotation is from Je Rinpoche's *Briefer Steps of the Path*.

<sup>18</sup> *You will only lose yourself*: Original source of quotation not found. The Fifth Dalai Lama, His Holiness Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso (1617-1682), was an extraordinary scholar and organizer of Buddhism, so much so that he is referred to in Tibet simply as the "Great Fifth." He is known for bringing the famous Potala Palace to its present form; for his writings on a broad range of philosophical and secular subjects; and for his special visions and mastery of the secret teachings.

<sup>19</sup> *Nothing is not a teaching*: The line is found in a work entitled *Selections from Dromton Je*, which at this point is quoting single lines by Dromton Je that appear in the *Greater Steps* of Je Tsongkapa. Here and in the *Gift* of Pabongka Rinpoche the quotation is used to emphasize how practitioners at an advanced level see all the Buddhist teachings as being totally consistent internally. None of these three occurrences of the line includes the part beginning with "for the Father," nor is it found in the quotation as found in the text on the Steps by the Great Fifth Dalai Lama. The sense though matches the context of the *Selections* and the standard use of the reference. The words translated here as "wrapping the totality of the teachings into one" can be read in a number of different ways, as noted by Pabongka Rinpoche himself in the *Gift*,<sup>20</sup> at the folios listed above. Literally the text speaks of "carrying all the teachings as a square," which the Rinpoche interprets finally as referring to how a square Tibetan carpet automatically comes with four corners. That is, any teaching on the Steps of the path automatically contains in it all the teachings of the Buddha, providing an abbreviated presentation that any one of us can use to achieve total enlightenment. The great Drom Tonpa (1005-1064), full name Dromton Gyalway Jungne, was the most famed disciple of Lord Atisha (982-1052), himself the illustrious progenitor of the teaching on the Steps in Tibet. Drom Tonpa also founded the great monastery of Radreng, which is where Je Tsongkapa wrote the *Mountain of Blessings*.

<sup>20</sup> *A gold and jewel rosary*: Original source of quotation not found; it also occurs in Pabongka Rinpoche's commentary to the *Three Principal Paths*. The "three scopes" refer to three levels of motivation for practicing the Steps of the path: to escape the three lower rebirths, to escape all suffering, and to achieve total enlightenment in order to help all living beings. The "three collections" are the three sections of the Buddha's word: the "collection of vowed morality," dedicated chiefly to the training of morality; the "collection of sutra," concerned primarily with the training of concentration; and the "collection of higher knowledge," devoted to the training of wisdom. See Pabongka Rinpoche's *Gift of Liberation*, and Kedrup

Tenpa Dargye's *Overview of the Perfection of Wisdom*. The "Keepers" are explained below at note 29.

<sup>21</sup> *These Steps are far superior*: Pabongka Rinpoche himself, in *A Gift of Liberation*, describes the "three extraordinary qualities" as follows. The works on the Steps to the path are (1) totally complete, with nothing left out, for they present in a concise way the entire contents of the teachings of the Buddha, both open and secret. They are (2) easily put into practice, for their main point is to explain the various steps for taming the mind. Finally, they are (3) vastly superior to other teachings, since they consist of the systems of the two great founders—Arya Nagarjuna and Master Asanga—enhanced by the instructions of Lama Vidyakokila and Lama Serlingpa, respectively. Arya Nagarjuna (200 AD) is known as the founder of the teachings on emptiness, and Master Asanga (350 AD) as that of the teachings on bodhisattva activities. The lineages come down respectively to Lama Vidyakokila and Lama Serlingpa, and then combine in their illustrious student, Lord Atisha (982-1054). The Lord's full name is Dipamkara Shri Jnyana; it was he who brought the teachings of the Steps of the path to Tibet, and who authored the *Lamp for the Path*, a prototype text of this genre.

The "four kinds of greatness" also appear in Pabongka Rinpoche's *Gift*. The teachings on the Steps of the path are great in that (1) they allow a person to realize that every single teaching of Buddhism is consistent with every other one. They bring a person to a level where (2) he or she sees everything the Buddha taught as something that can be put into personal practice. They (3) help a person to discern with ease the true intention of the Buddha in each of his teachings, and thereby (4) automatically protect you from making the Great Mistake; that is, the error of thinking that some of the Buddha's instructions are better, and some worse.

<sup>22</sup> *Massive stores of the Dharma*: By tradition the Buddha taught 84,000 huge collections of scripture, one collection for each of the different variants of our mental afflictions and harmful habits. There are a number of different positions on the exact quantity of the teachings contained in each of these collections; the view of the greater way is that each such collection consists of the number of pages one could write with the amount of ink that the great mythical elephant named Rabten could carry on his back. See the First Dalai Lama's commentary to the *Treasure House of Knowledge*.

<sup>23</sup> *It is this perfection*: The verse is found in the *Shorter Sutra on the Perfection of Wisdom*. It is generally considered the ultimate origin of the expression "Steps of the path", and is quoted by Je Tsongkapa in his *Greater Steps*, as well as in Pabongka Rinpoche's own masterpiece on the Steps, and commentary to the *Three Principal Paths*.

<sup>24</sup> *The five great classics*: These are the five great books of early Indian Buddhism studied and debated in major Tibetan monasteries even in Je Tsongkapa's time. As mentioned throughout his *Great Biography*, they are the *Jewel of Realizations* brought from Loving One by Master Asanga (335 AD); *Entering the Middle Way*, by Master Chandrakirti (650 AD); *Treasure House of Knowledge*, by Master Vasubandhu (335 AD); *Abbreviation of Vowed Morality*, by Master Gunaprabha (500 AD?); and *Commentary on Valid Perception*, by Master Dharmakirti (630 AD).

<sup>25</sup> *Swept away on the wind*: Original source of quotation not found. The "Great Fifth", as mentioned above in note 18, refers to His Holiness the Fifth Dalai Lama.

<sup>26</sup> *Especially the magic body*: The Master Translator of Taktsang, Sherab Rinchen (b. 1405), was one of the foremost scholars of the Sakya tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. The lines appear as well in Pabongka Rinpoche's *Gift of Liberation*, and in the famed *Survey of the Schools of Philosophy* by Tuken Lobsang Chukyi Nyima (1737-1802). The lines beginning from "diamond way" refer to the secret teachings of Buddhism.

<sup>27</sup> *Ever faultlessly*: Mikyu Dorje (1507-1554) was the Eighth Karmapa, spiritual head of the Karma Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, and wrote on a wide range of topics.

<sup>28</sup> *It is a pure tradition*: Gyalwang Kelsang Gyatso (1708-1757) was the Seventh of the Dalai Lamas. The lines quoted here appear among a group of mental trainings found in his collected works.

<sup>29</sup> *The older Keepers of the Word*: Refers to the Kadampas, an inspired group of scholars and meditators from the early days of Buddhism in Tibet, dating from the eleventh century. Their name literally means "those for whom every single letter of the teachings (*ka*) turns to instructions (*dampa*) immediately

relevant to personal practice." The followers of the tradition of Tsongkapa—the *Gelukpa* or Way of Virtue, lineage of the Heaven of Bliss—are sometimes called the "later Keepers of the Word."

<sup>30</sup> *The great completion*: This and some of the other practices mentioned are all details of the secret teachings of Buddhism.

<sup>31</sup> *Perfect yourself*: Original quotation not found; neither does it appear to be in the secret teachings of *Samputa*, despite the similarity of the title.

<sup>32</sup> *Ask Him, for all your goals*: The lines are found in a letter of advice from Je Tsongkapa to one Yonten Gyatso of the district of Tulung, Tibet.

<sup>33</sup> *All three of the trainings*: These are the exceptional trainings of morality, concentration, and wisdom. The original quotation is from the *Jewel of Maitreya*. The importance of the qualifications of the Lama is indicated by the fact that the same words are quoted in works like the *Greater Steps* of Je Tsongkapa; the First Panchen Lama's *Path of Ease*; Pabongka Rinpoche's own *Gift of Liberation*, and his commentary to the *Three Principal Paths*.

<sup>34</sup> *The good begins to flower*: The lines are found in an extraordinary letter of advice written by Je Tsongkapa to himself, where he poses numbered questions, and then answers them in the form of profound instruction. It is interesting to note that this is the final work in a large collection of shorter pieces by the Master; the first title is the *Mountain of Blessings* itself, which brings us full circle.

<sup>35</sup> *The nine attitudes*: The nine are mentioned in Je Tsongkapa's *Greater Steps*, and are listed fully in the First Panchen Lama's *Path of Ease*. The original sutra subsumes two volumes of the canon and includes repeated, exquisite descriptions of these and similar attitudes to develop towards one's Lama. The nine attitudes taught in the sutra are as follows:

- 1) Like an obedient child, give up your own will and submit yourself to your Lama.
- 2) Like a diamond, be solid in your devotion to Him or Her, and let no relative or friend come between you.
- 3) Like the earth itself, accept any task your Lama may load upon you.
- 4) Like the great mountains at the edge of the world, stay unshakable in your service, regardless of any troubles that come.
- 5) Like a handservant, carry out any task He or She gives you, never seeking to avoid it, no matter how distasteful it may seem.
- 6) Like the dust of the earth, seek the lowest position, giving up all pride, all pretension, all conceit.
- 7) Like a sturdy vehicle, undertake any burden your Lama may give you, however heavy.
- 8) Like a loyal dog, stay without anger, regardless of how your Lama might berate or scold you.
- 9) No matter how much you have to go here and there in the service of your Lama, be willing to go, like a boat that never complains.

<sup>36</sup> *Fifty Verses on Lamas*: A classic description of Lama devotion written by the Indian Buddhist master Ashvagosa, circa 100 AD.

**The Asian Classics Institute**  
**Course III: Applied Meditation**  
**Reading Nine: Getting the Essence of Life**

**III. Advice to Take the Essence of Life**

This brings us to the second major part of the text itself, which describes how to train the mind, once you have properly taken a Lama. This part comes in two Steps: urgent advice to take the essence of the present life, with its spiritual leisure and fortune; and a description of just how to take this essence. The first step is contained in the single verse that follows next:

(2)

**Bless me first to realize that the excellent life of leisure I've found just this once is ever so hard to find and ever so valuable; Grant me then to wish, and never stop to wish, that I could take its essence night and day.**

The phrase about finding a life like this "just this once" is meant to indicate that we would never be able to find this kind of life on a regular basis in the future.

You may wonder too why, at a point where the concepts of spiritual leisure and fortune are being presented, the verse says only "life of leisure," and not "life of leisure and fortune." The point is that we actually do possess the entire set of eight spiritual leisures, which consist of being free of the eight ways that a person can lack opportunity. These lacks of opportunity are birth in the three lower realms,<sup>37</sup> or as a long-life being of pleasure; as a barbarian; as a person with a mistaken worldview; as someone who is handicapped; or in a period of history when the victorious Buddha has yet to appear in the world.

We do have all five of the spiritual fortunes that relate to one's self, as described in the following verse:

Born as a human, in a central land, and having one's faculties all complete;  
Not lost to the last of karma, and feeling faith for the place.<sup>38</sup>

Here "born in a central land" refers to a land where there exists the "core of the Dharma," meaning that there are people in the country who keep the vows of the "four attendants to the Buddha." This refers to the full ordinations for a man and a woman, along with the novice ordinations for the same. The main component of the core is the fully ordained monk.

"Not lost to the last of karma" means not having collected, and then failed to clear from oneself, the karma that comes from committing one of the "immediate," heinous bad deeds.<sup>39</sup>

The *place* from where each and every white and good thing grows is the teaching on discipline; here the word "discipline" can by extension be applied to the entire contents of the canon—the three collections of scripture—since they all function to discipline one's mind.<sup>40</sup> We do then possess the fortune of having faith in the holy books.

Let us examine though whether we have the five fortunes that relate to what is outside ourselves. The classic reference here is:

The Buddha is come, and taught the holy Dharma. The teaching remains, as do the ones who follow.  
There is compassion for the sake of others.<sup>41</sup>

Here the Buddha must have come and still be present in the world. He or his direct disciples must be teaching the Dharma. The resulting teachings must also remain, and this during the period before his final passing beyond all sorrow. Certain of his disciples must observe other disciples actually achieve the four

results,<sup>42</sup> after he has taught them; and these disciples must undertake to follow the same practices too.

All four of the fortunes just explained have been possessed even by the likes of the monk Udayi,<sup>43</sup> whereas the same cannot be said even for the Savior Nagarjuna, who lacked them in their literal form. We too have met our Lamas, who are no different from a Buddha, and they have spoken the Dharma and so on; these are a full substitute yes, but we cannot say that we have all those fortunes in their literal form. We do however enjoy all eight of the spiritual leisures; these then are our primary advantage, and it's with this fact in mind that the verse reads "life of leisure."

What does it mean when the reference says, "There is compassion for the sake of others?" The "others" here refers to ourselves; our sponsors and Lamas and other such persons who act for our sake, motivated by compassion, to see that we are provided with all the conditions that will facilitate our practice of the Dharma: they give us food, or clothes, and other necessities; They teach us the Dharma; and so on. Therefore this phrase should be understood as describing the good fortune to have around us those who give us the things we need to practice.

So you and I are free of the eight ways in which a person can lack spiritual opportunity; and yet we fail to work here now, in the days when we do have a Dharma to practice. We find ourselves locked in the handcuffs of the present life; we throw ourselves into all sorts of meaningless activities aimed at gaining material things, or other people's approval, or a taste of fame; we want to fit into the world's way of life, and so on. These make us so busy that it's almost as if we have taken special care to invent a ninth way of lacking spiritual opportunity.

We have here a wonderful life and body of exactly the same kind that holy persons in the past have used to achieve enlightenment itself; we though use these things as a big pot in which to stock up our bad deeds. We have turned our spiritual leisure and fortune into a rich opportunity to suffer.

In order not to lose the good qualities of this life in our future lives, we must manage to take some special essence of the circumstances we have found, just this once; we must use this life-time where everything has come together, where there is not a single piece of the whole incomplete. If we fail in this endeavor, then it will be extremely difficult for us to find a life of spiritual leisure and fortune ever again.

Whether you will be able to gain such a life again or not you must judge from looking within yourself, to see if all the causes of winning the various leisures and fortunes are there, or not. It's no use to look outside, to see whether or not there are a lot of human beings around. Humans are one of the six forms of suffering life, and until all six disappear you will see no end to humans. There will always be some good number around, but if they lack this complement of leisure and fortune, a big population will only mean an even more tremendous amassing of sins. You should take no comfort, said our Lama, in the fact that there is such an abundant supply of raw material for the circle of suffering life.

"Well then," you may ask, "just what is it that causes the leisures and fortunes to come about?" Attaining the good life, one of spiritual leisure, begins with morals kept very good. This morality must be joined with giving and the other five perfections; and the glue that holds it all together is to make the very purest of prayers. Therefore finding a life like ours is first of all something difficult because of the causes needed to bring it about.

People like you and I are forever committing non-virtuous deeds, and this is the single greatest obstacle to our reaching the state of spiritual leisure and fortune ever again. Beyond this are statements from the *Foundation Word on Vowed Morality*, and other texts, which describe how those born as animals are fewer than those born in one of the other births of misery; those born as humans are fewer than the animals; and even among humans those born in a country where the Buddha's teachings have spread are

fewer still.<sup>44</sup>

To be born in such a land, and then go on to actually encounter the Dharma with a mind and body so very special as the one which we now possess, is an occurrence which borders on the impossible. This shows how a life like ours is difficult to find by its very nature as well.

There is yet a third way to show how difficult it is to find a life so opportune as our own. This involves using a metaphor, such as the following from the *Letter to a Friend*:

Suppose a turtle in the sea were to rise and poke his head right through the hole of a wooden ring as it drifted around the surface of the great salt sea. The odds of being born a human as opposed to birth as an animal are even more remote; make it come, Lord of Men, by living holy Dharma.<sup>45</sup>

Right now we have the time to practice religion. We possess the outer condition we need to succeed, for we have come into contact with a Lama, a spiritual Friend who is just like Lord Buddha himself. We also enjoy the inner condition, since our minds are not defective in any way, and we are endowed with the intelligence required to advance through the stages of learning, contemplation, and meditation.

If I truly undertake to do so, it is certain that I can achieve everything from temporal goals, such as achieving a good and useful kind of birth in the higher forms of life—among humans or the beings of pleasure—on up to the ultimate goal of becoming the Keeper of the Diamond himself.<sup>46</sup>

All this can be achieved because of the extraordinary kind of life I have now gained; seek to understand this fact, try to truly recognize how significant the one chance is.

Certain signs will come if you succeed in making yourself aware of your spiritual leisure and fortune. Think of a man who is completely engrossed, either in some great good luck, or in some great misfortune. Every time he wakes up at night these thoughts of happiness or unhappiness well up in him, vivid and automatic.

What we are requesting from our Lama here is that he bless us to achieve this same level of obsession: *bless me first to realize that the excellent life I've found*, complete with every spiritual leisure, is hard to find and—once found—is *ever so valuable*. Now, in the one and only time I have ever managed to win this diamond body and life, let me think of how the circle of suffering has absolutely no beginning; how one must normally practice for many millions of years to reach the state of a Buddha; and other such truths. And *grant me then to wish, and never stop to wish, that I could take this life's essence night and day*: that I could at every given moment keep this precious time from being lost to actions which are pointless, devoid of any meaning.

## **STEPS SHARED WITH THOSE OF LESSER CAPACITY**

### **IV. Steps Shared with Those of Lesser Capacity**

This brings us to our description of how actually to take the essence of this life. This part itself has three; the first is how to train one's mind in the Steps of the path which are shared with persons of lesser spiritual capacity, and is covered in the next two verses of the root text:

**(3,4)**

**My body and the life in it are fleeting as the bubbles in the sea froth of a wave. Bless me first thus to recall the death that will destroy me soon; And help me find sure knowledge that after I have died the things I've done, the white or black, and what these deeds will bring to me, follow always close behind, as certain as my shadow. Grant me then ever to be careful, to stop the slightest wrong of many wrongs we do, and try to carry out instead each and every good of the many that we may.**

And so we have attained this very special kind of life, with its spiritual leisure and fortune. But *my body and the life in it are fleeting*, forever changing, and every passing moment they move inexorably closer to my death.

But that's not all—there are conditions all around me that can strike and kill me in an instant: things like illness and harmful spirits, sudden disasters, attacks upon me by the very four elements that make up my own body. They stand around me ready to snatch away my life, like a pack of dogs circling around a piece of fresh meat, lusting after it.<sup>47</sup>

Still more, my body is like a *bubble in the sea froth of a wave*; it has no power to resist even some very minor harm: we can see with our own two eyes that even the prick of a thorn can lead to a person's death.

In sum, my body and life are fragile; so *death will destroy me soon*. Here you should use the instructions on your coming death that we find in works like the longer and briefer presentations of the Steps of the path by our Lord, Tsongkapa. These sections cover the three principles of death and the nine reasons for them, along with the three resolutions to be made.<sup>48</sup> They show how our death is certain, and how uncertain we are of when it will come. When it does, none of the people close to us, nor any of the things we own, nor anything else of the kind can help us. In the end, not even our body can be of any assistance.

Think on these points, *recall* them, again and again. The object here is not to reach a point where you sit in some confused terror over the death that's coming to you. Rather you must come to see that, at the moment of death and as you take your future life, only the Dharma can help you: everything else turns useless. Remember the words of the omniscient Buton, who has spoken:

You are not long in this life death comes quick; You step ever nearer to it with every moment that passes, moving on like an animal dragged to the slaughterhouse.

Your plans for today your plans for tomorrow will never all be filled; Let go all your thousand plans, Devote yourself to one. You will be summoned into the awesome presence of Lord Death;

The end is lying on your bed, the breathing stops, the life is gone. And on this day, my Rinchen Drup, nothing but the Dharma is any help to you.<sup>49</sup>

Pa Dampa Sangye too has said:

The results of deeds you've done, the cause and consequence, are finally true and fixed.

People of Dingri listen: Avoid then any bad deed, any wrong at all.<sup>50</sup>

And then he states:

In the land beyond us friends and relatives are few; People of Dingri listen: Turn your thoughts to Dharma.<sup>51</sup>

The master teacher of Bodong, whose name was Jikdrel Chokle Namgyal, has also said:

The existence of past and future lives can be understood as well through logical reasoning. If the human body could occur without any proper cause, then every existing object might just as well be stuffed full of human bodies. If the human body could occur without any involvement of previous consciousness if it could come from physical matter alone then every bit of dirt, every rock, every mountain and stream might just as well be stuffed full of human bodies.

For those who deny that life goes on, hearing these lines is like being struck by a bolt of lightning. There are moreover quite numerous accounts of many wise and accomplished practitioners who have used clairvoyance to perceive the past and future lives, as well as the state between death and rebirth, which they and others have passed through. There are also cases like those of the non-Buddhist adepts who attain clairvoyance that allows them to recall eighty of their different lives.<sup>52</sup>

Since nothing else can help then, it is essential that we give up on life and be sure to devote ourselves to

death, by practicing some pure form of the Dharma, as a way to assist our future self. It's not as if, *after* you and *I have died*, the stream of our mind just stops and we turn into nothing. Rather we have no choice but to take another birth. And there are no more than two places where we can take that birth: in the higher realms of happiness, or the lower realms of misery.

We have absolutely no control over which of the two places we go; we must follow where we are sent by the separate causes for each place, and these causes are *the things we've done, the white and black*, respectively.

Our mental streams contain very, very few of the causes that will take us to a higher birth; but we have a vast multitude of the causes that will lead us to one of the births of misery. Right now we are doing both white deeds, and black deeds: the good and the bad. At the moment of death, the power of one or the other will be activated, and force us over to our next birth. The seeds of the deeds which are more plentiful are the kind that are likely to be activated.

And after we cross over to our new birth, the fair or foul consequences of our virtue or our evil will *follow close behind*. These consequences can never go wrong; good must come from the good, and bad from the bad. They will attach themselves to my consciousness and pass on to wherever it goes, *as certain as my shadow*.

This fact, that pleasure and pain are the respective results of good and evil, is spoken in the various collections of the immaculate Word of the victorious Buddhas: in the sutras, in the books of discipline, and so on. They describe things like how karma is certain to produce similar results; how it multiplies; how consequences of a karma not committed can never be experienced; and how the consequences of a karma committed can never just fade away on their own. It is spoken as well that:

The karma of sentient kind never just fades away, even in hundreds of millions of years.

When the causes convene and the time is come, the consequences can do nothing but flower.<sup>53</sup>

Master Bodongwa quotes these same lines from sutra and says,

People like you and I may have blurry eyes but we must look on this Word of the Buddha as perfectly accurate. If you die, then die; if you drop from old age, then drop; but if nothing else keep your trust in the Teacher.<sup>54</sup>

The thinking behind these lines is expressed in a verse by the Master Shantideva:

The way karma works is beyond comprehension;

Only the All-Knowing know it.<sup>55</sup>

Because of these facts you and I must seek a way to *find sure knowledge*, where we recognize the truth of the simply limitless workings of karma and consequences described by the Teacher. Once we have found this knowledge, we then understand that the necessary consequence of all the harmful deeds we have amassed up to now will be for us to pass on to the births of misery in our next life.

And what of these three lower realms? Think fiercely on their sufferings: the heat of the molten steel, the cold; the hunger, the thirst, exhaustion and terror; being unable to talk, living in dark ignorance, eating each other to survive, and all the rest. It will bring you fear, and from the depths of your heart you will go for shelter to the ones who can protect you: to the three Jewels.<sup>56</sup>

If harmful actions provide the causes that push us to these lower realms, then needless to say we must from this point on avoid doing any of *the many wrongs that we do*: those obvious non-virtues that anyone can see are mistaken. We must also though seek to recognize and abandon even *the very slightest* harms we commit; the ones we barely realize that we do.



The most important thing is for us to follow the words of that King of the Dharma, Dromton Je:

We have little time to live, it's sure we'll not long be here. Let the world pass the time working to feed themselves; Even the poorest know how. Those who follow the rules of Dharma need not worry, the knife of hunger can never touch and kill them. Leave this life behind; You can't work for the future life and for this one as well. The next is the more important one; Make effort in the Dharma.<sup>57</sup>

He says as well,

Whether you fill your belly in this life well or not, still you will live on. What's difficult is to meet the Dharma in your future life; For this life then put all your efforts only in the Dharma. If now you cannot do your best to do what's virtuous, be sure that in the life beyond you will feel only pain.<sup>58</sup>

And so we have no other choice, if we hope to pass on to one of the better births in our next life, than to prepare the proper cause; that is, to do the things we should, and not do what we shouldn't. There are quite nearly a limitless number of instructions on how to carry this out—to make it easy for us, the compassionate Teacher provided a guide of what to take up and what to give up: this then is the list of ten good deeds and ten bad deeds, the broadest simplification.<sup>59</sup>

Keeping this morality, of avoiding the ten bad deeds, is just one typical example of *the many* different kinds of *good* that are contained within the broader and the more subtle instructions on how to go for refuge. We must engage in each and every one of these virtues by *being ever careful*—by acting with proper recollection and watchfulness in every moment of the day.

And we must go further: on every occasion that we train ourselves in these thoughts, in the Steps which are shared with persons of lesser and medium capacity, we must do so with the ultimate intent of using them as a foundation for training ourselves in the path for those of great capacity.

In short, said our Lama, we must understand how to employ these Steps as a means for developing the Wish for enlightenment. And in these lines we are requesting our Lama to help us find the ability to do so.

## Notes to Reading Nine

37 *Three lower realms*: According to Buddhism there are six different types of rebirth. These are birth as a hell-being, a craving spirit, an animal, a human, one who is nearly a full pleasure being, and a full pleasure being. The first three types of birth are known as the three lower realms. Pleasure beings enjoy extremely long lives in a temporary paradise, and then normally fall to hell after exhausting their good karma. The classic presentation of the six rebirths is found in the third chapter of the *Treasure House of Knowledge*, by the 4th-century Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu; a typical commentary would be that of the First Dalai Lama, Gyalwa Gendun Drup (1391-1474).

38 *Born as a human*: The classic source for the description of spiritual fortunes is the *Levels of Listeners*, one of the major divisions of the *Levels of Practitioners*, written by the Indian Buddhist sage Asanga in the fourth century.

39 *Immediate bad deeds*: Buddhism teaches that there are five misdeeds which are so evil that they are sure to lead one to a hellbirth in the very next life. The deeds are, from most serious to least, the following: causing a schism in the community of monks; attempting to kill a Buddha; killing someone who has reached nirvana; killing one's mother, and killing one's father. A full discussion of the five is found in the fourth chapter of Master Vasubandhu's *Treasure House of Wisdom*, and in commentaries such as the one by Jampay Yang of Chim (c. 1280).

40 *Discipline one's mind*: The collection on discipline, or vowed morality, is actually only one of the three sections of the original Buddhist canon; the point is that all the scriptures though teach the absolute importance of moral behavior. For a description of the three collections see note 20.

41 *For the sake of others*: Again the original source in prose is Master Asanga's *Levels of Listeners*.

42 *The four results*: The four fruits of the "way of virtue," which in this case refers to the direct perception of

selflessness. The four are to attain the state of a foe destroyer; of one who need never again take rebirth in this realm of desire; of one who must take one more rebirth in this realm; and of one who has "entered the stream"—one who, due to his realization of selflessness, is clearly headed for freedom. The four are presented for example in the second and sixth chapters of Master Vasubandhu's *Treasure House*, with its commentary by the First Dalai Lama .

43 *Even by the likes of the monk Udayi*: The monk was one of the members of the Buddha's inner circle, but committed a series of misdeeds which actually led to the creation of a number of the rules for monks. See Professor Edgerton's *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, as well as the First Dalai Lama and Jampay Yang of Chim. This same concept of Udayi possessing spiritual fortunes that we lack is found as well in Pabongka Rinpoche's *Gift*.

44 *Fewer still*: The *Foundation Word on Vowed Morality* is one of the four famed explanatory sutras on the subject of vowed morality. An exquisite passage found there begins as follows:

And then Lord Buddha touched the very tip of his precious fingernail to the ground, and raised it up, and showed it to the assembled monks. He said, Monks! Which do you think are more: the atoms of dust here on the tip of my fingernail, or the atoms of dust contained in the entire planet of earth? And the monks replied, Oh Reverend One, Oh Conqueror, the atoms of dust there on the tip of Your precious fingernail are less, they are certainly less, they are most certainly less, they are infinitely less. If one compared them to the number of atoms of dust in this great orb they would not amount to a hundredth, nor even a thousandth, nor a hundred thousandth, nor any fraction at all, nor any part—no countable part, no comparison, no basis for a comparison. The Conqueror spoke again: Monks! Think of the number of atoms of dust in the entire planet: this stands for the number of beings who are in hell now and who, after they die, will migrate back to hell. Now think of the number of atoms of dust on my fingernail: this stands for the number of beings who are in hell now and who, after they die, will migrate to the world of humans. The Buddha continues his description in a similar vein for all the other types of rebirths—including humans who are reborn as hell beings (as many as atoms of dust in the planet), as opposed to humans who are reborn as humans (as many as the atoms of dust on his fingernail). This presentation appears throughout the various books on the Steps to Buddhahood: see those of Je Tsongkapa, Pabongka Rinpoche, and the First Panchen Lama.

45 *A turtle in the sea*: These well known lines are found in a letter from the realized being Nagarjuna (c. 200 AD) to his friend, King Udayibhadra.

46 *Keeper of the Diamond himself*: That is, tantric Buddhahood: enlightenment in one lifetime.

47 *Like a pack of dogs circling*: The Tibetan original at this point actually refers to "dogs who circle the talisman." In certain cases of illness brought on by harmful spirits, a Lama will by tradition come to the house of the patient and prepare a small likeness or talisman representing the person. A ritual is held centered around the talisman to help remove the evil influence. The figurine is fashioned from a soft dough and, at the end of the ceremony, is carried outside and placed on the ground—where hungry Tibetan mastiffs are usually waiting to gulp it down. The image here then is of a pack of dogs crowded eagerly around the ritual attendant as he carries out the prize.

48 *The three principles of death*: This presentation of death appears in many of the texts on the Steps to Buddhahood, and is summarized as follows in a note from the English translation of Je Tsongkapa's *Principal Teachings of Buddhism* (the text of his *Three Principal Paths*). In his masterwork *A Gift of Liberation*, Pabongka Rinpoche lists six benefits of keeping your mind on death: your practice becomes really pure; it gains power; the thoughts help you start practice; they help you strive hard during your practice; they help bring your practice to a successful conclusion; and in the hour of death you go with satisfaction, for you know you have spent your life meaningfully.

The Rinpoche also lists six problems that come from not keeping your mind on death: you neglect your religious life, and spend all your days in thoughts of what to eat or wear—this life's distractions; you consider death occasionally but always think it will come later, and delay your practice; or you do practice, but for the wrong reason—with hopes of reputation; you practice but with no enthusiasm, and drop it after a while; you get deeper into this life, your attitude gets worse, and life begins to hurt you; and at death you naturally feel intense regret, for you have wasted all your efforts on this present life. The three principles, for how actually to keep your mind on death, have three reasons each, making a total of nine. First of all, death is certain: no power in the universe can stop death when it arrives; there is no way to add time to your life, you come closer to death every minute; and even while you are alive, the free time available for your practice is extremely

limited before you have to die.

The second principle is that there is absolutely no certainty when you will die. We are in a time and realm where the length of life is uncertain; we can be sure we will never have enough time to defeat all our enemies, raise up all our friends, and still complete our religious practice before we die. The things that can kill us are many; the things that keep us alive are few. And in general the body we have is fragile, weak: a small splinter in the hand can give us an infection that kills us—we are like bubbles, like candles in a windstorm. The third principle is that, at the moment of death, nothing at all can help us but our spiritual practice. None of your money or things can help you. None of your friends or family can help you—they can be holding you tightly by the arms and legs, but still you will slip away alone. And not even your own body can help you—you have to give up your most cherished possession, your beloved body, along with everything else. The three principles call for three resolves on our part. Knowing that we shall have to die, we must resolve to begin our practice. Knowing that we could die any time, we must quit our worldly work immediately and start our practice today. And finally, since nothing else can help us, we must devote ourselves to our practice only. A man who is hiking many miles doesn't fill up his pack with a lot of junk that he won't be needing. The above points are paraphrased from the works on the Steps of the path by Lord Tsongkapa and Pabongka Rinpoche. For the last point mentioned in the text, the meditation on what it's like to die, we quote the Rinpoche directly: They try all different kinds of treatments and holy rituals but your condition gets worse and worse. The doctors start lying to you. Your friends and relatives say all sorts of cheery things to your face, but behind your back they start wrapping up your affairs, because everyone can see you're going to die. Your body starts to lose its familiar warmth. It's hard to breathe. The nostrils collapse. The lips curl back. The color starts to drain from your face. All sorts of repulsive signs begin to show, inside and outside of you. You think of all the wrong things you did in your life, and wish so badly you had never done them. You can't quite be sure if you ever really got rid of them all when you confessed; or that you really did any true good deed. Then comes the final pain, the unspeakable searing pain that comes with death. The basic building blocks of your body begin their domino collapse, you are blinded by catastrophic images, hallucinations of pure terror crowd into your mind, and carry you away, and the whole world you have been living blinks out. People take your corpse and wrap it up in a sheet and lay it in some corner. They hang up a curtain to hide it. Somebody lights up a smudgy little candle and leaves it there. If you're one of those reincarnated lamas, they dress you up in your fancy ritual robes and try to make you look good. Right now we are all running around trying to arrange ourselves a nice house, soft clothes, cozy chairs. But you know the custom here in Tibet—when you die they'll tie your arms and legs up against your chest with a leather strap, carry the body far from town, and throw it naked out on the rocks. Right now we all go home and try to cook ourselves up some delectable dish—but there will come a day when you stand there praying for a little taste of those cakes they offer the spirits of the dead. Right now we have the big name—they call us Doctor Professor, or Respected Sir, or Your Reverence. But there will come a day when they look at your body and call you nothing but "that stinking corpse." There will come a day when the title they put in front of your name is "the late," or "that guy they used to call..." So now when you respected lamas out there in the audience look at your ritual robes, let it come into your thoughts that these are the robes they will dress your remains in after you have expired. And all the rest of us, when we look at our bedsheets before we go to sleep, should try to remember that these are what they will wrap our stinking corpse in when we die. As Milarepa said, That frightful corpse they talk about Is the very body you wear, meditator. He means look at your own body now, and always see the future corpse.

49 *Nothing but the Dharma*: Original source of quotation not found. The advice is to himself, for Master Buton's full name was Rinchen Drup (1290-1364). He was a consummate scholar of both the secret and open teachings, and Je Tsongkapa was much influenced by his writings and by his direct disciples. Buton Rinpoche also played a major role in the organization of the Buddhist canon in its Tibetan translation.

50 *Avoid then any bad deed*: Pa Dampa Sangye (d. 1117?) was an Indian Buddhist master who helped bring the teachings to Tibet, and in particular began the lineage of a practice called the "Termination of Suffering." The lines here are found in a collection of advices to the Tibetans of an area called Dingri.

51 *Turn your thoughts to the Dharma*: This passage is from the same work as the preceding.

52 *Eighty of their different lives*: Original source of quotation not found. Bodong Rinpoche, full name Bodong Panchen Chokle Namgyal (1375-1450), was one of the most prolific writers in the history of Buddhism—his collected works subsume no less than 137 volumes.

53 *Never just fades away*: These lines are some of the most famous in all of Buddhist literature. They were

spoken by Lord Buddha himself and occur throughout the sutras on vowed morality as a sort of refrain—for example in the *Divisions of Vowed Morality*, and the *Foundation Word*. Their contents are alluded to also in the famed *Sutra of Cosmic Play*. The importance of the concept that the power of an act cannot just fade away after we commit it is indicated by the fact that many of the earlier Indian masters include the lines in their philosophical commentaries. Master Nagarjuna (200 AD), for example, alludes to them in his *Root Text on Wisdom*, and *Beyond All Fear*. Master Bhavya (490-570 AD) speaks of them in his famous *Blaze of Reasoning*, as does Master Avalokitavratā in his *Extensive Commentary to the Lamp of Wisdom*. The renowned Chandrakīrti (650 AD) refers to the quotation in his *Clarification of the Words*, his *Commentary to the 400 Verses*, and his *Commentary to the Seventy Verses on Emptiness*. It appears as well in Master Parahita's explanation of the same work. In Tibet as well the verse and the idea behind it have been considered indispensable, and it is referred to in a great number of works on the Steps of the Path. See for example the treatises of Geshe Drolungpa, Je Tsongkapa, the First Panchen Lama, and Pabongka Rinpoche himself.

54 *If nothing else keep your trust*: Original source of quotation not found; it is in a very old local dialect, but the meaning seems correct. For information about the author, see note 52.

55 *Only the All-Knowing know it*: The lines are found in the fourth chapter of *The Bodhisattva's Life*, a famed manual for aspiring saints dating from the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

56 *The ones who can protect you*: The three lower realms described here are—respectively—the worlds of hellbeings, craving spirits, and animals. The Three Jewels that can protect us from them are the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. The Buddha Jewel is defined as "That ultimate source of protection: the One who has reached the final end of his own goals, and the ability to achieve others' as well." The Dharma Jewel is "The pure side of existence, either in the form of the end of all suffering, or the path to that end." The Sangha Jewel, finally, consists of "All those who are realized"—that is, the Community of all people who have realized emptiness directly. For these and an illuminating discussion on the act of taking refuge, see Kedrup Tenpa Dargye, *Analysis of the Perfection of Wisdom*.

57 *We have little time to live*: The lines by Lord Atisha's renowned disciple are found in a short exquisite work entitled *Second Epistle to Shangrang Kaberchung*, itself a part of the famed *Collected Treasure of Beloved Jewels* from the teachings of the Kadampa Lamas. The quotation here appears to consist of two parts from different places in the text, but the intent is certainly the same.

58 *You will feel only pain*: Quotation from the same source as the last.

59 *The broadest simplification*: The list of ten bad deeds (their avoidance being the ten good deeds) are a very gross abbreviation of the multitude of harmful actions which we are capable of performing. They include three which we perform with our bodies: killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. The next four are verbal: lying, divisive talk, harsh words, and idle speech. The final three are mental: coveting, ill will towards others, and wrong views. The classic presentation of the ten is found in the "Chapter on Deeds" from the *Treasure House of Knowledge*, composed by the 4th-century Indian sage Vasubandhu.

**The Asian Classics Institute**  
**Course III: Applied Meditation**  
**Reading Ten: Steps for Those of Medium and Greater Capacity**

**STEPS SHARED WITH THOSE OF MEDIUM CAPACITY**

**V. Learning How to Want Freedom**

With this we have reached the second part in the advices on how to take the essence of this life; that is, how to train one's mind in the Steps of the path which are shared with persons of medium spiritual capacity. Here there are two divisions. The first is learning how to want freedom, and is presented in the single verse of the root text which follows:

**(5)**

**Bless me to perceive all that's wrong with the seemingly good things of this life.**

**I can never get enough of them. They cannot be trusted. They are the door to every pain I have.**

**Grant me then to strive instead for the happiness of freedom.**

Suppose we are able to follow all the instructions above: we contemplate how death works, and think on the sufferings of the lower realms. Then we make all the effort we are supposed to in going for refuge, and in observing the laws of deeds and their consequences. Admittedly then we could manage, once or twice, to reach one of the better forms of life—as a pleasure being or human—and also acquire some incredible amount of wealth; at least for the time being.

But the nature of all pleasant things in the circle of life is that, no matter how much we get, and no matter how much we enjoy what we get, we never feel as though we've had enough. It only makes us want more, it only increases our desire. And this then delivers to us a whole variety of unbearable pain. The pleasant things turn around, and become *the door to every pain I have*.

That highest of Victors, the Great Fifth of the Dalai Lamas, has said as well,

What happened before? Someone has been in my mind for time with no beginning.

When was that? There's never been a moment when they were gone.

Who are they? I live, and live again, the mental afflictions.

And in the end? They will leave me to rot in the ocean of suffering life, without an end in sight.

And the karma? It comes like the wind, with all the things I never wanted.

How far? It whips around me everywhere, and stirs great waves, the three forms of suffering.

How long? I could wander around this sea forever; the torch would spin, and the circle of light would blaze.

What should I see? Think on this, and see that the afflictions of the mind are the one true enemy.

What must be done? The enemy of living for this life must die.

Who shall do it? You will have to pretend that you are warrior enough to be the one.

When will it come? Your foes, the afflictions in your mind, have always been there waiting, ready for the battle.

Now then? The time has surely come: go forth now and defeat them.<sup>60</sup>

As the lines point out, there is one thing which acts as the very root of all our sufferings here in the circle of life. This is none other than the enemy of the mental afflictions, so dearly cherished by us, so close to our hearts.

From time with no beginning up to the present moment, this enemy has led us by the hand to all kinds of

unbearable pain. And if still we find ourselves unable to discard these bad thoughts once and for all, they will force us to collect karma. Then the karma will force us to take yet another birth in this house, in the circle of suffering life. And there once again the afflictions will start, and then we'll collect the karma anew. And so it is decided: this karma again will force us into the impure parts of a suffering being, in one of the six forms of life. We'll be born, and then again, and over again and again, wandering through these six.<sup>61</sup>

Once we have taken a birth in the cycle, we'll find ourselves tormented by the three different kinds of suffering, without the slightest break.<sup>62</sup> It doesn't matter at all whether we take a higher birth or a lower one; there exists no such thing as a pleasant moment here. Whatever place we go is a place that brings us pain. Whatever friend we go with is a friend who brings us pain. Whatever possession we have is a possession which brings us pain. They cannot and will not ever be anything else.

"What way then," you may ask, "must I follow to escape this pain?" You must find a way to stop the stream of births, the circle of life that has karma and the mental afflictions as its very nature. Until you manage to do so, you will never find a place that is free of this suffering.

The key to stopping the stream of suffering births is found in the root text of the *Three Principal Paths*, where the Lord of Lamas says, Think over and over how deeds and their fruits never fail, And the cycle's suffering: stop desire for the future.

Suppose at first we are able to find the very highest of the supposed good things of this life: we attain the celestial form or fantastic wealth of a god-like being such as Pure One, or Hundred Gift, or one of those emperors who rules the world with a disk of power. None of these forms can be trusted though, for the inevitable end of each is that we meet the karmic *fruits of bad deeds* we collected before. These deeds throw us into births like those of the lower realms, where we are forced to go through the unlimited variety of pain here in the *cycle of suffering life*.

We must understand this process, and think over and over about all the problems brought to us by the great source of all pain: ignorant deeds and the mental afflictions. We must *stop desire for any future lives*.

Before we can do this we need something else:

Leisure and fortune are hard to find, life's not long; Think it constantly, stop desire for this life.<sup>63</sup>

As the verse says, we must *stop desire for this life first*. To do so, think how *hard it is to find this leisure and fortune*. And think too on the following: while you may have managed just this once to find a perfect body and life, still you must die. You cannot stay here long—there is no way to tack on any extra years to your life, and the years you do have leak away constantly, never pausing.

Whatever you and I hope to accomplish—whether it be keeping ourselves out of the three lower realms, or attaining freedom and the state of All-Knowing—we must learn to stop this habit of hoping for the "good" things of this life. This is absolutely essential all through our Dharma career: from the very beginning, on through the middle, and up to the final end.

These last few points are covered especially well in the works of the new and older schools of the Keepers of the Word, as well as in the texts of the original masters in the Lineage of the Word.<sup>64</sup> If you use these books for training your mind in these Steps, you will have powerful results.

Listen to these descriptions of suffering life, first from the lips of the Victor, Yang Gonpa:

You can't be sure you will live, nor fix the time you die;

This monster, the Lord of Death, has no interest to come at your convenience.  
The four elements of your physical body and your mind could go today their separate ways;  
Think about it: can you ever feel secure, can you ever feel at peace?<sup>65</sup>

He adds other lines including:

This devil, greed, collected money ignoring all comfort and hardship to do so; but we have no power to carry even a bit with us that day. What's the use of money, that's never there when you need it? Our friends and family stayed with us through thick and thin; we won and kept them by fitting in, and maintaining our reputation. But there's not one who can take one step along with us that day. What's the use of family, friends, who are never there when you need them? With toil and sweat we built a great and wonderful house for ourselves; To do it we obliterated every rule of what to do, or say, or think. But what happens when Lord Death decides he'll not sleep in one morning? What's the use of a house that's never there when you need it?

And then he says,

In the summer great clouds crowd the sky, and lightning comes, and lightning goes the suffering called impermanence drags our life downhill; Dispense with the sense of permanence, of feeling prepared.

The rain brings it on, the fortuitous moment, when everything is just right, and a rainbow comes, And a rainbow goes the suffering called impermanence drags our happiness downhill; Dispense with looking your best, and strutting around.

A sudden sound brings it on, and an echo comes, and an echo goes the suffering called impermanence drags our fame downhill; Dispense with the hope for greatness, the hope for a name.

They travel to the big city to sell their wares, and stop in some hotel, the guest comes in the morning, The guest leaves in the eve the suffering called impermanence drags our friends downhill; dispense with hoping to fit in with your friends and family.

In the summertime the bees labor and build up their hives, but anyone can see how they are wiped out in an instant the suffering called impermanence drags our food and money down the hill. Dispense with trying to gather together all this money and food.

Contemplate on these quotations, and on works like the verses by Drom Gyalway Jungne, where he urges himself to perfect his practice.<sup>66</sup> Think them over constantly, and try your hardest to follow the instructions on how to give up living for this life.

This in itself though is not enough, as expressed in the following words of Kelsang Gyatso, the highest of all the Victors:

This thing they call the three realms of cyclic life is a house of red-hot steel; Wherever you go in any of the ten directions, the suffering will burn you.

You wish so badly that it weren't happening, but this is its very nature. How pitiful our life, to wander aimlessly in such a house of horrors.<sup>67</sup>

This cycle of life, with its three different realms, is absolutely nothing but suffering, by its very nature. It doesn't matter at all whether you take a higher birth within it, or a lower—it's all the same. Consider carefully the truth of these words, then go and seek some way of finding freedom from the cycle, and a way to smash your enemy: the afflictions of the mind.

You and I might have some delusions about getting it all together in this world; a good body, lots of

things, power, fame. Regardless of how far we progress in these things though, let's be honest. If we judge ourselves properly, we can see that we aren't really much more advanced in our intellect or strength than common animals, than bugs or birds or whatever.

These things are hardly something worth getting attached to, nothing you would want to hang on to until your dying breath, nothing you could trust at all. Much less; for you can even attain the ultimate pleasures and possessions of all cyclic life—you could become the mighty being called Pure One, or Hundred Gifts, or else enjoy all the many riches in the kingdom of a world emperor. In the end though it always turns out the way that the *Letter to a Friend* and other such works describe it: wandering aimlessly around in a house of horrors, the three lower realms of life.

It really doesn't matter what kind of so-called "good" thing you can get here in the world of suffering, eventually all it can do is deceive you. You must by yourself expose the lie; you must learn to think clearly about all the problems these things always bring to you. In time you will see, you will know, that every inch of this suffering cycle is in its essence pain.

By then you will have renunciation, the kind that wants to reach the joy of the nirvana beyond both extremes,<sup>68</sup> freedom in the short run from the sufferings of the three lower births, and ultimately from each and every pain in the cycle of life. And it will be the extraordinary form of renunciation, not the rough kind that you get just from following whatever someone else tells you, not the one that stays in the mouth and not the heart, in words and not in truth.

What we are requesting then here, said our Lama, is that our Lama grant us the strength to develop a very fierce desire, a strong and genuine wish to reach the happiness of freedom.

## **VI. Finding the Right Path to Freedom**

This brings us to the second division of how to train one's mind in the Steps of the path which are shared with persons of medium spiritual capacity; that is, defining just what kind of path can take us to this freedom. This point is covered in a single verse from the root text:

(6)

**Grant that these pure thoughts may lead me to be watchful and to recall what I should be doing,  
Grant me to give the greatest care to make the vows of morality the essence of my practice;  
They are the root of the Buddha's teaching.**

Up to now we have explained how to truly see that even the supposed good things of the circle of life have no essence at all. When that happens, we begin to feel a total disgust for every corner of the cycle of life. These fierce feelings of renunciation, *these pure thoughts* where we wish to reach the happiness of freedom, will *lead us* on to something else, as described by the Omniscient One himself:

The entire extent of the highest of spoken words, the teaching of the Buddhas, is contained in the three collections. This then is why the three different trainings are the essence of the teachings. These three start with the training of morality, and it's spoken that it resides in the collection on discipline.

This explains why so much of the holy Dharma, spoken so very well, was set down in the form of the works on discipline. Could it ever happen then that those wise men who understand the proper order of the teachings would not take joy in these?

Nowhere does it say anything else but this: If you hope to develop insight, the training of wisdom well, You must find quietude, that of concentration. It says as well that if you wish to develop pure single-pointed mind, You must have the training of morality; And this is fine



advice.

Some brave souls claim they'll keep a lot of different vows, but it's oh so common to see them smash whatever pledges they've made. The way of the holy is to strive to maintain their morality pure, exactly as they have agreed to do so.

Once you see the truth in this, then use your watchfulness, constantly check your thoughts, words and deeds to stop any wrong to come. Recollect yourself, take the greatest care, have a sense of shame, and consideration; Use them on the horse of the senses when he mistakes the way. Use your strength to rein him in, for this is the state of mind that you can bring to focus and stay on any virtuous object solidly, whatever you want, however you wish it to be; and this is why they sing the praises of morality as the way to reach one-pointedness of mind.<sup>69</sup>

The process that Je Tsongkapa is describing goes like this. *Recollection* comes at the beginning, and keeps you from forgetting *what you should be doing*, and what you shouldn't be doing. *Watchfulness* then stops by from time to time to check whether or not the activities of your body, speech, and mind are tending towards right or wrong. One's ability to take *great care* in his life functions throughout; it prevents every sort of improper thought or action, and keeps one within the bounds of what is appropriate to undertake.

The essential points of the entire *teaching of the victorious Buddha*, the meaning of the contents of the three collections of the Word, all this is included within three precious, extraordinary forms of training: the trainings of morality, of meditative concentration, and wisdom. The crux on which the latter two trainings turn, their basis, *their root* and the ground they stand upon, is in the main a single item: morality, in the form of the various vows of freedom.<sup>70</sup> As the great Panchen Lama, Lobsang Chukyi Gyaltzen has said,

It all begins when you think to yourself "It won't hurt much if I break a few of these minor vows in a minor way"; Before too long you have gone against a great many of your vows. If you really think about it, this kind of attitude is like a butcher who comes to rip out the life of your future higher birth.<sup>71</sup>

The point here is that, if something so small as breaking a single minor vow can escalate so far, then needless to say when we amass a collection of even greater transgressions it's only proper that it would eventually lead us precisely to one of the three lower realms—to a kind of pain which is totally beyond our ability to withstand it.

For this reason we must be sure never to think lightly of any transgression we might commit, even down to the minor vows; we must absolutely keep all our vows just so. And so you must become masters in understanding all the various vows and advices related to whichever one of the eight sets of the vows of freedom you have assented to follow. And once you have learned them perfectly, well then you must *make them the essence of your practice*.

This is what you are requesting, said our Lama, from your Lama in this verse. You are asking that he or she help you gain the strength to keep your vows perfectly; that you learn to think of the vows contained within your being as the true representative of the Buddha himself, inside you; that you love and cherish your vows, and always hope to defend them. You are asking, he said, to be *granted* the ability to follow the way of this and the other extraordinary trainings, exactly as they were meant to be.

## **OPEN STEPS FOR THOSE OF GREATER CAPACITY**

### **VII. Developing the Wish for Enlightenment**

This brings us to the third and final part of the advices on how to take the essence of this life: how lastly

to train one's mind in the Steps of the path for persons of greater spiritual capacity. Here too there are two divisions. The first is how to develop the Wish for enlightenment, and is presented in the single verse of the root text which follows.

(7)

**I have slipped and fallen into the sea of this suffering life; Bless me to see that every living being, every one my own mother, has fallen in too. Grant me then to practice this highest wish for enlightenment, to take on myself the task of freeing them all.**

Now the *Sutra that Viradatta Requested* says,

Were the merit of the Wish for enlightenment to take on some kind of physical form it would fill the reaches of space itself and then spill over farther still.<sup>72</sup>

The book called *The Bodhisattva's Life* too has lines like the following:

All the other kinds of virtue are like a bamboo tree; They give their fruits and then they always die and go away. But the Wish For Buddhahood is an evergreen that always gives forth its fruits, and instead of fading flourishes even more.<sup>73</sup>

The Great Lord has also spoken:

Those great beings who meditate on the method, and so upon the various kinds of wisdom, achieve then Enlightenment with speed. It cannot be done by meditating on no-self-nature alone.<sup>74</sup>

Our Lord Lama himself says finally,

The Wish for enlightenment is the central beam that holds up every path of the way which is supreme.<sup>75</sup>

We can see from these and other works that the fine qualities of the Wish for enlightenment are limitless. From the first moment that you and I decide we are going to try to reach the state of a Buddha, this Wish for enlightenment is something we can never do without.

The minute we reach this state of mind, even if we have no other admirable qualities at all, we win the title of "Son (or Daughter) of the Buddha." We also then enter the ranks of people who live the greater way.

If though we lack this great Wish, then it doesn't matter how many great virtues we might possess—abilities like being able to meditate on the ultimate view, where we see that things have no nature of their own. We still won't be able to join the ranks of these on the greater way, much less reach enlightenment. And so the Wish is vital.

In the sections where we trained ourselves in the steps that are shared with practitioners of lesser and medium capacity, we meditated on the sufferings of the lower realms, and of the entire circle of life, but relative only to ourselves. In this way we developed the virtue of a healthy disgust for the kind of life we live.

Here you take the same thoughts and transfer them—you try to feel them relative to the condition that others are in. Then compassion and the other attitudes will start to grow within you; train your mind thus in the proper progression, using either the "seven-part, cause-and-effect instruction," or else the practice called "exchanging self and others," following these methods as the books on the Steps of the path to Buddhahood describe them.<sup>76</sup>

You must train yourself in all the relevant details; an example would be committing yourself through formal rituals to the Wish as a prayer and to the Wish as actual action, once you had reached a point such

as finding your first strong feelings of familiarity with the Wish.

The meaning of the root text here then is as follows. *I myself have slipped and fallen into the sea of the pain of this suffering life*; that is, I have dropped into the ocean of the circle of births. I cannot even guess how deep it is, nor how far its edges lie. The great sea-waves of my deeds and the afflictions of my mind, of birth and getting old and death, rage around me.

A great host of ruthless creatures living in the water rise up and attack me constantly; these are the three sufferings—the suffering of outright pain, the suffering of pleasure that changes, and the suffering of simply being alive. They rip at me, they torture me, relentlessly, unceasingly.

And the same thing is happening to *every other living being*. *Every one* of them has in the past been *my own mother*; in the beginningless string of lives I have lived through, they cared for me and sheltered me, with incredible kindness.

I must learn *to see* how all these fellow beings *have fallen in too*, how they have been thrown down into misery by this mass of suffering. And then I must resolve *to take upon myself the task of freeing them all* from every pain, and from every cause of pain. I must assure they reach every form of happiness. I will do it myself, alone, without waiting or depending on anyone else. Beyond everything, I myself will see to it that every one of them climbs to the state of a Buddha.

In short, said our Lama, we are asking our Lama for the ability to find fierce feelings of love and compassion, states of mind where we can bear not a moment longer to watch our fellow, mother beings live so bereft of happiness, and so plagued by suffering. We are asking that these feelings inspire in us the *highest* aspiration, the true and uncontrived *Wish for enlightenment*. And we are asking our Lama for the ability to meditate upon this Wish, and *practice* it, and make it totally perfect, right here, on this very seat, before we stand up again.

### **VIII. General Training in Bodhisattva Activities**

With this we have reached the second division to the instruction on how to train one's mind in the Steps of the path for persons of greater spiritual capacity. This division covers training yourself in the activities of a bodhisattva, once you have managed to achieve the Wish for enlightenment just described.

Our discussion proceeds in two parts: training in the open half of the bodhisattva activities, and training in the secret half of the bodhisattva activities. The former has two steps as well; the first of these explains how to train oneself in the activities as a whole, and is presented in a single verse of the root text.

(8)

**Bless me to see clearly that the Wish itself is not enough, for if I'm not well trained in the three moralities, I cannot become a Buddha. Grant me then a fierce resolve to master the vows for the children of the Victors.**

Suppose you are able, as described above, to reach *the Wish* for enlightenment, where you truly hope to achieve the state of a Buddha in order to help every living being. This *itself is not enough*. Once you do reach the Wish, you must still take on the vows of these bodhisattva princes and princesses, these sons and daughters of the victorious Buddhas. And then you must train yourself in giving and the other five perfections. Otherwise there is no way you could ever come to enlightenment.

This fact explains why it is so very important when holy beings have said that all six perfections<sup>77</sup> are covered in the three types of morality.

The first type is called the "morality of keeping oneself from committing wrong." Here you begin by being extremely careful to keep the morality of avoiding the ten bad deeds.<sup>78</sup> This type of good behavior is common to everyone, whether they wear the robes or not, and must absolutely be maintained.

More specifically, with this first type of morality, you must in addition exert yourself to the fullest, so to assure that your life is never sullied in the least by overstepping the bounds of any of the vows you have agreed to keep. Here we refer to vows that belong to any of the three traditional sets: the freedom vows, the bodhisattva vows, and the secret vows.<sup>79</sup>

The second type of morality is known as the "morality of collecting goodness." This is where you use a great variety of means to gather or collect extremely potent stores of virtue into your being; these are the virtues of amassing merit and wisdom.<sup>80</sup>

The third type of morality is the "morality that acts for every sentient being." Here you take care to keep the different varieties of morality mentioned above that involve restraining yourself from wrong; but instead of doing so with a motivation which is infected with any self-interest, you act only out of an intention to reach total Buddhahood for the sake of all living kind.

You must find a sure kind of knowledge where you *see clearly* how—if you lack a total fluency in *these three types of morality*, if you are *not well trained* and completely accustomed to following them—then you *cannot become* one of those who has reached the fully enlightened state of a *Buddha*.

Once you have found this knowledge, you must take on *the vows for the "children of the Victors"* (that is, the bodhisattva vows), and then with a *resolve* of *fierce* intensity you must learn and *master* the three types of morality. What we are requesting of our Lama here, said our Lama, is that he or she *grant us* the ability to do so.

## **IX. Training in the Final Two Perfections**

Having presented the bodhisattva activities in general, we will now turn to the more particular description of how to train oneself in the final two perfections. This point is covered in the single verse of the root text which follows.

(9)

**Grant that I may quickly gain the path where quietude and insight join together; one which quiets my mind from being distracted to wrong objects, the other which analyzes the perfect meaning in the correct way.**

The verse here speaks of objects which are "wrong"; this should be understood as referring to objects which are mistaken, in a particular sense. One example would be trying to develop meditative concentration by fixing the mind on a short stick of wood, as some non-Buddhists advocate. We must seek to "*quiet*" *the mind*—that is, stop the mind—*from being distracted* to these types of *wrong*, external objects.

There are Tibetan schools of the past too which have taught that meditative quietude consisted of not thinking about anything at all, just keeping the mind in some dark state of dullness. The high state of perfect insight then they explain as moving in this stupor to a realization of the pure and simple emptiness of the deceptive nature of the mind—except they describe this emptiness as what you come to when you analyze whether or not what we call the "mind" consists of any shape or color, and then fail to find that it's any such thing.

But none of these ideas is correct; rather, we must follow texts such as the briefer and more expanded

explanations of the Steps to the path composed by the Lord himself, where he presents the instructions given by the Great Regent, Loving One, in his own work entitled *Separating the Middle and the Extremes*.

These treatises describe how one progresses in steps by eliminating the five problems to meditation, taking the eight corrective actions, and achieving the nine mental states, complete with their four different modes.<sup>81</sup>

One thus attains a kind of bliss, a total pliancy of body and mind, which comes from staying in one-pointed meditation on any virtuous object one chooses. This then leads to what we call meditative *quietude*.

The phrase "*perfect meaning*" here in the verse refers to a particular object: the fact that nothing has any nature of its own.<sup>82</sup> A kind of wisdom used for examining the nature of something *analyzes* this object *in a certain correct way*, and by the end of its analysis comes to a definite conclusion. The mind stays in meditation upon this truth, such that the analysis and a fixation on this object *join* and work *together*. This brings on a feeling of bliss that fills the mind completely—and one has thus achieved what we call "*perfect insight*."

We seek to practice this process, where quietude and insight are no longer separated one from the other. When we recite the verse we are asking our Lama to *grant that*, as a result, *we may quickly gain* within our minds that exceptional form of realization where meditative quietude and perfect insight join together.

## SECRET STEPS FOR THOSE OF GREATER CAPACITY

### X. Entering the Way of the Diamond

This brings us to the second part of our discussion about the activities of a bodhisattva: training oneself in the secret half of these endeavors. Here there are three different Steps: how to enter into the Way of the Diamond by making oneself a worthy vessel and then receiving a pure form of the four empowerments; how to keep pure the pledges and vows that one took on when he received the empowerments; and how to meditate upon the two stages of this path, as one continues to maintain his pledges and vows. The first of these three is presented in the single verse of the root text which follows.

(10)

**Grant that once I've practiced well the paths shared and become a vessel that is worthy, I enter with perfect ease the Way of the Diamond, highest of all ways, holiest door to come inside for the fortunate and the good.**

You must first have *practiced well* the general Steps of *the path* which are "*shared*" by both the open and the secret teachings; that is, which are so important for both that you could never succeed without them. More specifically, you must have trained your mind well in the three principal paths: renunciation, the Wish for enlightenment, and the correct view of reality.<sup>83</sup> On top of this you must have as your motivation a very fierce desire to reach enlightenment for the sake of every living being. These then make you a *vessel that is worthy to enter* the Way of the Secret Word.

When this time has come you must surely enter the "*Way of the Diamond*"; which is to say, this Way of the Secret Word. It is the *highest of all* the "*different ways*"—the ways of the listeners, the self-made Buddhas, and the bodhisattvas.<sup>84</sup> What makes the Diamond Way higher is that it has certain unique features, such as using the goal of practice as a path to the goal.

The Tibetan word for "diamond" here is *dorje*. This is a translation of the Sanskrit word *vajra*—a term that has the basic meaning of "inseparable." The "diamond" here is the actual diamond of the holy mind of the Buddha; that deep state of meditation which can only be compared to a diamond. You can also say it

refers to that one type of wisdom which is the inseparable combination of what we call "method" (great bliss) and "wisdom" (emptiness).

The word for "way" here has a meaning of "conveyance"—something you get on and ride to reach a destination. The "diamond way" mentioned here is thus a kind of "diamond conveyance" as well. In the way of the perfections, one must carry on his practice for three "countless" eons in order to reach Buddhahood.<sup>85</sup> This takes so long that it's almost as if you were walking on foot, rather than travelling on any sort of conveyance.

If though you use the Diamond Way, the Way of the Secret Word, no such length of time is needed: you can attain the state of secret Buddhahood, Union, in the length of but one lifetime—even in one of the very short kinds of life that we have here now, in the age of degeneration. In fact it's possible to reach Buddhahood in no more than three years and three months. This way then is a method which is incredibly deep and quick; more like riding a fine racehorse.

The kinds of practitioners that we call "listeners" and "self-made Buddhas" aspire only to reach a state of blissful peace, and this too only for themselves. They are deficient therefore in that fortunate kind of good virtue that makes one want to take on the burden of helping others. Bodhisattvas, on the other hand, disregard completely their own comfort and work only for the good of others. They are full of the wonderful fortune and goodness that enables them to reach the state of a perfect Buddha, and the ability to fulfil, totally, the ultimate needs of both others and themselves.

What is the "*holiest*" (meaning highest) *door*, or gateway, for bodhisattvas; for these people who are so *fortunate and good—to come inside* this path? It is receiving the four empowerments of the Diamond Way, the Way of the Secret Word, and receiving them perfectly, so that they are sure to plant the seeds for the four bodies of a Buddha.

What we are requesting in this verse then, said our Lama, is that our Lama grant us the ability to enter, *with perfect ease*, the profound path just described: the Way of the Diamond, the unsurpassed form of the Secret Word.

### **XI. Keeping Vows and Pledges Pure**

With this we have reached the second Step to training oneself in the secret half of the bodhisattva activities; that is, how to keep pure the pledges and vows that one took on when he received his secret empowerment. This Step too is presented in a single verse of the root text:

(11)

**Bless me to know with genuine certainty that when I've entered thus, the cause that gives me both the attainments is keeping my pledges and vows most pure. Grant me then to always keep them even if it costs my life.**

Now suppose *you have entered thus*—you have made yourself a vessel which is worthy of the Diamond Way, the Way of the Secret Word; and you have received, in the proper manner, the four different empowerments. If you then follow the correct method you can gain *both the attainments*: the one we call the "ultimate," and the one we describe as "shared."

The ultimate attainment is reaching secret Union, where there is nothing more to be learned. This is the state of the Victorious One, the Keeper of the Diamond.

The shared attainments are those such as the "eight great attainments." These include the special powers known as the sword, the eye ointment, swift feet, the pill, passing underground, disappearing, taking

essence, and sky walking.<sup>86</sup>

What then is it that can *give* you these attainments? Their *cause* or foundation, the very support that holds them all up, is one thing, and only one: to *keep most pure* every one of the root and secondary *pledges and vows* which you took upon yourself when you were granted the empowerments.

We must therefore honor and keep, just as we are required, the various vows and pledges. For the bodhisattva vows, this means never committing any of the eighteen root downfalls, or the forty-six secondary violations. For the secret vows, it involves avoiding perfectly the fourteen root downfalls and the eight serious offenses, while being sure to honor the general and also the individual pledges of the Five Classes.

You will never be able to protect all your pledges and vows unless you manage to slam shut the four doors through which the downfalls make their appearance. These four are ignorance, disrespect, carelessness, and particularly severe mental afflictions.

To keep these doors closed we must, respectively, learn and know when and how a downfall occurs. We must contemplate the laws of actions and their consequences, thereby gaining a deep respect for the various instructions on how to keep these commitments. We must remain in a constant state of recollection and watchfulness. Finally, we must employ the antidote that will work against the particular mental affliction that happens to be our own most serious problem.

As for where to find instructions on the vows and pledges, you can use a number of works by the Lord, Tsongkapa. Some examples would be his treatise called *Highway to Buddhahood* for advice on the bodhisattva vows, or the *Golden Harvest of Attainments* for a complete explanation of the root downfalls in the secret vows.

At the very least you should study the book of advices on the three sets of vows known as the *String of Shining Jewels*, or one of those summaries in verse that teach about the secret and bodhisattva vows.<sup>87</sup> Use any of these presentations, brief or long, according to the time you have available to you; come to a firm understanding of each of the vows and pledges, and then at all costs keep them.

Let's say you are able to keep your vows and pledges as described—you live your life in proper accordance with them all. Certain results will follow then, even if you find yourself unable to make great efforts in practices such as meditation on the stages of creation and completion, and so therefore fail during this life to reach the final end of the various paths and levels.

The immense power of the purity of your pledges and vows will lead you over the string of your future lives to attain a very special kind of life, where you can practice the secret teachings. You will always meet an authentic Diamond Master—one who teaches you the secret way. And you will always find yourself able to put the secret paths into actual practice.

As such you will, without a doubt, be able to reach total enlightenment within seven lifetimes, or in sixteen at the very most. On this our Teacher, the Keeper of the Diamond, has spoken the following in the *Tantra of the Treasure of Secrets*:

If the person is granted a pure empowerment, then life after life will the power be given.

Within seven lives the goal is reached, even if the person does not meditate.

But those who keep the meditation, and further maintain their pledges and vows will reach the goal

Within this life or, past deeds preventing, at least in the next.<sup>88</sup>

Vibhuti Chandra says as well,

Even should he fail to meditate, a person will reach the goal within the length of sixteen lives, so long as a downfall has not occurred.<sup>89</sup>

The *Book of the Five Pledges* concurs:

As long as there is no downfall, the goal is reached in sixteen lives.<sup>90</sup>

You must come to *know* these facts *with genuine certainty*—that is, you must seek a kind of firm belief in them that is deeply rooted within you, so much that no one else could ever change your mind. And because of this knowledge you must then protect your commitments, "*even if it costs your life.*"

What would it be to cost your life? Imagine for example some follower of a non-Buddhist religion, or some kind of barbarian, who was really very cruel, very evil. And suppose he came up to you and said, "If you don't agree not to keep those pledges and vows of yours, then I swear I will kill you, this very instant." Suppose it were completely decided: either you reject this morality, or you die.

At the "cost of your life" then your choice would go like this. If I discard my morality now he will spare me; but the ultimate hope of my infinite lifetimes will be murdered instead. It's really the same as being killed myself. If though I can keep my morality I will reach the happiness that I've lived all these lives to find. So if to keep my morality now I must let him kill me, then let it be so. I will never give up these morals.

In short, if it comes down to choosing between giving up your life, and letting this morality degenerate, you had surely better choose the first. The one thing here in this birth that you cherish above all else is your own life. What you are requesting from your Lama is that he or she *grant you* the power *to always keep* your vows and pledges properly; that you reach a point where you cherish these commitments infinitely more than your own precious life.

## **XII. Meditating on the Two Secret Stages**

This brings us to the third Step to training oneself in the secret half of the bodhisattva activities, which is how to meditate upon the two stages of this path, while one continues to maintain his pledges and vows. This Step too is presented in a single verse of the root text.

(12)

**Bless me next to realize precisely the crucial points of both the stages, the essence of the secret ways. Grant me then to practice as the Holy One has spoken, putting all my effort in and never leaving off the Practice of the Four Times, highest that there is.**

One may wonder, "Suppose I am able to maintain my vows and pledges; what must I do after that?" The highest of Victors, Kelsang Gyatso, has spoken the following:

The point

May be birth or death or the state between them.

The time

Most important for planting their seeds is now.

The way

To transform them is the practice of creation and completion.

The refuge

You must learn is the three final bodies themselves.<sup>91</sup>

What's being said here is that, first of all, you must continue to keep each and every one of the secret vows and pledges, as explained above. Then you must practice the very *essence* of the great sea of *the secret ways*. Here first is the stage of creation, which is exemplified by a number of methods.



We tend to see things in an ordinary way, we take them to be no more than what they seem to us; we tend to grasp this way to the place where we live, to our own body, to the things we own and use, and to things like the parts that make up us, and the world: what we call the "heaps," the "categories," and the "doors of sense."<sup>92</sup> We have also always had to undergo an ordinary birth, ordinary death, and ordinary passage between death and birth.

In the stage of creation we transform all these seemingly ordinary things and events; we turn them into the three bodies of a victorious Buddha.<sup>93</sup> We take whatever presents itself to us: all that appears to our eyes, all that reaches our ears, and all that comes in our thoughts, and we make it show itself as total and absolute purity, as a galaxy of perfection, as great celestial mansions, as holy angels, as a magical dance put on by our Lamas.

As for the stage of completion, some mistakenly equate it with concentrating solely on a meditation that involves the various channels and winds, and which results in achieving a rather ordinary kind of inner heat. Others make the error of thinking it is some high spiritual path when you succeed in nothing more than perceiving how the essence of the mind is that it is aware and knowing.

The real stage of completion though is not like this; rather, you take the various winds which course through the body because of one's ordinary conceptual thinking, and redirect them all into the central channel—in a three-fold process of entrance, residence, and absorption. As a result a primal state of mind arises, the clear light, the wisdom which is simultaneous. And the power of this wisdom makes all of existence appear as the play of bliss and emptiness.

In the path of the stage of completion then we meditate over and over on this and related practices, until finally we are able to bring about the Union of the holy body and holy mind: we reach the state of the Lord of the Secret World, the Keeper of the Diamond.

All this makes it clear why we must study, and study well, the path that includes *both the secret stages*. We will have *to realize* all the crucial points of how to actually carry out these two stages. Our understanding must be unerring; it must conform *precisely* with the true intent of Teacher, as revealed in the secret texts, and the explanations of great and accomplished masters.

Then we must *put forth all our efforts*; that is, we must exert ourselves continually and steadily, to the proper degree—not overdoing it, and not underdoing it. These efforts should go towards following the Practice of the Four Times of the day: daybreak, morning, afternoon and the early night. We must make this practice the single *highest activity that there is* in our lives, and try *never to leave off* doing it.

Now there are false teachings that some persons simply make up on their own, out of an ignorant desire for gain. There are paths that are absolutely backwards, and there are paths that will lead you astray. There are paths that are infected by mistaken concepts from an old local religion, or from some non-Buddhist faiths of ancient India, or anything of the like.

What we are requesting of our Lama here, said our Lama, is that he or she *grant us* the power never to wander onto one of these paths. We are asking for the strength to practice, in exactly the proper way, the instructions found in the highest of *spoken* words. And these are the teachings of the "*Holy One*" mentioned in the verse. These words refer to a person who can never deceive us; a being who is incapable of lying; that ultimate meditator who keeps the practice of the times: they refer to the victorious, transcendent Buddha.

## THE CONCLUSION

### XIII. A Request for Good Circumstances

This brings us to the third major division of the text, which is a request so that we can attain all the favorable conditions for succeeding in the path, and also stop all those circumstances that might keep us from success. This request is contained in the single verse of the root text which follows.

(13)

**Bless me, grant me that the spiritual Guide who shows me this good road, and all my true companions in this quest live long and fruitful lives. Bless and grant me that the rain of obstacles, things within me or outside me that could stop me now, stop and end forever.**

So there are these different sorts of spiritual paths, of widely varying quality: some are totally correct, some are totally wrong, some slide off from right to wrong, and on and on. You and I have access to a path which is pure, and unmistakable, and free of any error. We can either enter it now or go off on some wrong road that goes astray. If this second is our choice then we can try to follow such a way for a thousand years, but it is an absolute impossibility that we will derive from it any good or certain result.

The Great Fifth Dalai Lama has said,

It's quite nice when you consider a teaching to be of your school when the Lama who teaches it wears a silk cap with the saffron stain. But remember many are robbed by the thief of wandering thoughts, left empty-handed of riches, the unique word and the realizations passed down the Family line.<sup>94</sup>

These lines describe people in our school whose knowledge is so little that the only difference they can see between followers of traditions such as the Lineage of the Word or the Ancient Ones, and the tradition of the Virtuous Way, is that some wear lama hats which are red and others wear caps of yellow. People like this are unable to cite a single one of the unique, profound features that distinguish the physical word and the mental realizations of our teachings from those of the other traditions. These people are a disgrace to our school.

Don't let yourself be one of these. For once in your many lifetimes you have met up with a truly pure system, a school like purified gold. The beliefs that it teaches have been perfectly refined and assayed, like gold that has been through the fire, the shears, and the file. These tests have been carried out with endless hardships by our Gentle Protector, Tsongkapa the Great, who has delivered to us this precious essence of the teachings of the powerful beings of Enlightenment.

We have met with this system, and we must see that a real meeting takes place. We must find and take ourselves properly to a spiritual Guide, one who is truly qualified, and who follows our tradition perfectly in both his viewpoint and his practice. We should undertake to study the five great classics, the five great volumes of the Word, and bring this study to its final end, thereby coming to a firm and accurate understanding of how the two levels of reality work.<sup>95</sup>

We must examine and resolve every question about how to put into practice within our own lives that path where method and wisdom are ever inseparable. We must, in short, ask for and receive teachings on the immaculate system of the greater way; we must learn the various clarifications of these teachings by our Lord Lama and his spiritual Sons, and by those who have come after them; and we must hear the private advices passed along in the oral tradition. And then finally we should use the traditional method to master these teachings, in the three steps of learning, contemplation, and meditation, each one always combined with the others.

If we do all this we will win a good goal, for we will have found what the verse calls the "*good road*": the path that leads to the land of Enlightenment, the path that never wanders someplace else.

To succeed like this, to actually carry out the path described above—such a good road in the way it combines the open and secret teachings—we will first need to achieve the various conditions that are favorable for us. We'll need to reach the state where our mind is perfectly pliable, and other such qualities. Most of all we will need a *spiritual Guide who can show us this road, and companions in the quest* — genuine friends of a like mind, who are *true* in keeping each and every one of the Teacher's instructions.

The first thing we are asking our Lama to grant us then is that these true friends *live long and fruitful lives*, that their two legs remain planted here on earth with the immutability of a diamond.

Secondly we are requesting our Lama to *bless and grant us, that every last bit of the rain of obstacles* which could ever appear might *stop and end forever*. The first kind of obstacles are those *things outside of us that could stop us now* from reaching our spiritual goals; the main ones would be living in a country where the leaders behave in contradiction to the Dharma—or where they refuse to allow people to enter the Way—by fighting against religion, or the like.

The second type of obstacles are those that are *within*; examples here would be things like illnesses and harmful spirits that attack your body, or a mental inability to direct your thoughts towards virtuous objects any way you want.

Our Lama noted lastly that for this and the preceding sections there were a good number of essential points covered in traditional advices: what visualizations to perform at each point, how to bring down a flow of nectar to purify oneself, and so on. He said that we should learn these by referring to descriptions found in the more detailed, practical presentations of the Steps of the path.

#### **XIV. A Prayer for Future Care**

We have come now to the fourth and final section in the text of the "Source of All My Good." This is a prayer that, in all our future lives, we may be taken under the care of a Lama, and so gain the strength to reach the end of the various levels and paths. Here again the point is covered in a single verse of the root text:

(14)

**In all my lives may I never live apart from my perfect Lamas, may I bask in the glory of the Dharma.**

**May I fulfill perfectly every good quality of every level and path, and reach then quickly the place where I become myself the Keeper of the Diamond.**

The verse says, *in all my lives*—that is, in this and in all my future lives to come—*may I never live apart from my Lamas*, may I never spend a moment without them. These Lamas are "*perfect*": they are spiritual Guides who have all the right qualifications; they are the great Lama Lobsang, Lord of the Powerful, who is the Keeper of the Diamond.

And in these lives *may I bask in the glory of the Dharma*: may I seek unceasingly to drink of the Dharma either in the sense of the open and secret teachings, or the teachings that are "deep" and "wide"—the instructions on correct view and living the life of a bodhisattva.

*May I* then put into actual practice all the Steps of the path, exactly as these Lamas have taught me to do. If I can do so then I will *fulfil* each and *every good quality of the ten levels and the five paths*.<sup>96</sup> And I will fulfil them just right, which is to say *perfectly*, or to the highest degree which exists.

And may I reach then the place where I become myself the Lama, Lobsang, Lord of the Powerful Buddhas, *the Keeper of the Diamond*. May I do so *quickly*: in this very life, or at least within seven lifetimes, or no more than sixteen.

Make thus a prayer that you can have the virtuous fortune to make all this come true.

This verse, the one that begins with the words "In all my lives," does not appear at the end of the original text of the *Source of All My Good*. Nonetheless, said our Lama, there is a reason why it is added here in conclusion, and why I have given an explanation of it.<sup>97</sup>

Generally speaking, there are three different objects that you and I can pray for: three goals towards which we can dedicate the power of a great good deed such as the practice we have just completed. The first is to dedicate our virtuous act so that it might turn into a cause for us to achieve Enlightenment. An example of this kind of dedication would be the verse which starts with the line, "By this virtue may all beings..."<sup>98</sup>

We can secondly dedicate our good deed to become a cause for the teachings to spread in the world. A typical verse here would be the one that starts with "The prayers of bodhisattva princes, as many as the drops of water in the Ganges..."<sup>99</sup>

The third way to dedicate a great goodness is so that it brings ourselves and others to be taken under the care of a Lama. Here there are verses like the one with the line about the "matchless Word of the Teacher."<sup>100</sup>

Once a Lama has taken us into his or her care, the other two goals come then of their own accord. For this reason, any verse dedicated to the third kind of goal is a brief and powerful combination of both dedication and prayer. And this is why the custom prescribed by a great many wise and accomplished saints of our past lineage has been to attach this verse at the end of the work.

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And so I have finished fully offering up to you all this my explanation of the lines known as the *Begging for a Mountain of Blessings*. It is but a brief explanation, barely enough to avoid losing the basic outline.

This *Mountain of Blessings* contains the cream of the holy thoughts of our gentle protector, the great Tsongkapa. It is an extraordinary instruction; it packs a tremendous amount of meaning into but a very few words. In a sense it rips open and lays bare the innermost heart of all the 84,000 great masses of teachings delivered by the Buddhas.

As I mentioned above, the works called *Open Door to the Highest Path* and the *Source of All My Good* were composed by our Lord Lama and delivered as a supplication above the hermitage of the Victor, near the monastery of Radreng, which stands to the north.<sup>101</sup>

Once he had made his supplication, the precious Tsongkapa found himself face to face with each and every Lama of the lineage of the teachings on the Steps on the path to Buddhahood. At the same moment many auspicious signs occurred which portended how the Lord would elucidate these same teachings, making them as clear to us as the Sun in the sky. These and other great deeds would he perform, deeds both powerful and effective in furthering the teachings and the needs of living beings.

Each and every one of us here, those of great intellect and those of lesser, must all emulate the life of the Lord Lama, whose mighty activities spread as far as space itself does. We must do whatever we can to see that these instructions on the Steps of the path to Buddhahood take root and flourish within the minds of ourselves and others.

To accomplish this we must first carry out certain preliminaries: we must collect the power of great good deeds, clean ourselves of our past bad deeds, and make a request to our Lamas for strength. For this we

will need a practice, something like the text called the *Preliminary Practices*, or else the *Thousand Angels*.<sup>102</sup>

At the very least we should acquaint ourselves thoroughly with the meaning of the verses of this very brief work. We must make great efforts in a wide variety of related practices, beginning with review meditation to plant desirable seeds in the stream of our mind.

Remember here the words of Tuken Chukyi Nyima:

What is the Dharma we should learn? And how are we to learn it? There is one and only one being who sees with perfect accuracy each and every crucial point of what we should take up and what we should abandon; this being is the Buddha.

Therefore the Dharma that we choose to learn should be the *Lamp of the Path* by Lord Atisha, and works like the longer and shorter presentations of the Steps which clarify his true intent. The reason is that these instructions present in their totality the keys which the Buddha himself taught in the open and secret teachings, for actually carrying out the Dharma in one's own life.

It's true that we could choose a different way and devote ourselves in the short term to learning all those weird little scraps of Dharma that somebody supposedly found under the ground, or supposedly fell out of the sky into somebody's lap, or supposedly got handed down by word of mouth from some ancestors of ancient times.

In the long run though all these can only deceive us. This is precisely what happened with great holy beings of the past, authentic masters such as Milarepa and Kyungpo.<sup>103</sup> For a time they deigned to study such works, but later on they were forced to discard them like so much manure, and go on to seek a different Dharma, one that would actually make them enlightened.<sup>104</sup>

This too we learn from the lips of Changkya Rolpay Dorje:

It's true that in the past Buddhas beyond all counting have spoken perfect Dharmas, by the millions, in multitudes. Yet where else is a book like the Steps to Buddhahood, the eloquent instructions of the Lord, Lobsang Drakpa, where he takes all the highest of words, the teachings of Buddhas of Power and combines their intent into one, with nothing left out at all. His is a Dharma that benefits all, people of high intellect or lesser; His is a Dharma that never errs, in its view, meditation, and activities too. Let this then be your practice, those with the goodness to hear it.<sup>105</sup>

And finally, Gungtang Tenpay Dronme has spoken too:

It may seem there are many teachings they call "profound," but the mind settled down in the Dharma sees that when you go to take the essence of leisure and fortune, your savior will be the cream of the thought of Victors of all three times: The supreme tradition of the Lord, the Victor, Lobsang; Where every crucial point is absolutely complete, and without any error the definitions, and divisions, and order, and all other details of the path where open and secret, teaching and practice combine. For the main stage follow review meditation on these, every day that goes by it will plant many seeds in your mind. Follow as well for the stages of starting and ending just what our Lord Lama has taught us to do.<sup>106</sup>

What these Lamas are telling us is that we have at our disposal whatever Dharma we need: we have the longer, and medium, and more brief presentations of the Steps to both the open and secret paths, all set out for us by the Lord, his spiritual Sons, and the various teachers who have followed them.

You have thus in your own two hands a great basket; the lid is wide open, and the basket brims with

precious jewels. So don't let your mouth start watering every time you hear somebody spout some meaningless chatter about some new and very oh-so-very "profound" Dharma they've discovered.

Rather take yourself through the great texts and special advices of the wise and accomplished masters of our own tradition, all in the proper order of learning, contemplation, and meditation. Get to a point where you are totally fluent in all the Steps of the path, first by making a conscious effort, and then later in an effortless flow.

Plant and nurture within your own mind, one by one, the various realizations such as disgust with this suffering life, and the wish to reach enlightenment for every living being, and the ultimate view of reality. Along with these then develop the path of the two secret stages. Work at them until you achieve an extraordinary level of personal experience in each.

Right now you have found a body and life that have every spiritual leisure and fortune you could ever wish for. This is the only time all this could ever come together for you. Don't let it slip away. Don't waste it on things that are meaningless. Don't waste it on things that have only little meaning. Don't wait until you have lost it forever.

As far as space itself reaches, there live sentient beings who have been your mother. They are old and feeble, they live lives of desperation, and over the reaches of time they have lavished every kindness upon you. For their sake then you must now go and attain this precious gem, the state of secret Union, the being of the One who Keeps the Diamond.

Make haste, give it all your strength, follow the path given here, reach your goal. You must go now, said our Lama, go, and take the ultimate essence of this one good life you have.

It is the one immaculate path travelled by each and every Victor; It is a treasure of cherished jewels, high words from the One of the Sugarcane.<sup>107</sup> It is the great book of teachings upon profound view and the far-reaching deeds come down to us from the royal Regent, The Invincible Savior, and Gentle Voice.<sup>108</sup>

It descended in a perfect stream from the Father, Nagarjuna, and his Son; From Asanga, the Brother, and others too, Unprecedented from great innovators.<sup>109</sup> Because of the kindness of one great God along with the Lord named Dromton Je,<sup>110</sup> Those of the Land of Snow had the glorious Fortune to obtain this teaching.

Tibetan translators and Indian masters, a crowd of wise and accomplished saints, undertook thousands of hardships to find millions of scriptures and commentaries in the Land of the Realized; then here in Tibet a noble tradition spread and grew, till many years later some without wisdom began to corrupt it; the sun nearly set.

Then came Tsongkapa, who was in truth the one called Soft and Glorious Voice. He opened the way to a new innovation, the magnificent system of teachings upon the Steps to the path of all the open and secret word of the Able Ones. That day was a powerful blessing bestowed on the fortunate masses who seek for freedom.

Especially when they call this teaching the "essence of the highest of words," their praise has a point, for only it fits the sharpest and middle and dullest of minds. The Steps are too a spiritual Guide Who shows the path that is totally pure, They are eyes that let you see without fail what things you should practice, and what to give up.

This brief abridgement of the keys of the deep and widespread Steps of the path was drawn from a song of experience sung in sixty most glorious tones<sup>111</sup> By a highly accomplished Saint unmatched in propounding the open and secret Word: Pabongka, the Essence of Greatest Bliss, Lord over all of his secret world.

This excellent explanation then Is like the mother of the moon,<sup>112</sup> The treasure trove of a king of kings, that holds in it all the Buddhas' Word. By the strength of a trillion Lords of Serpents, who uphold the way of the Heaven of Bliss,<sup>113</sup> may this teaching spread in a glorious spring bringing help and happiness far as space.

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And so ends this very brief explanation of the *Source of All My Good*. It was compiled primarily from a series of notes taken on the 22nd day of the fourth month according to the Mongol system, in the year of the water monkey [1932], at the retreat house known as Tashi Chuling.<sup>114</sup>

The notes are of a teaching delivered by that God of a Secret World, the Protector of All Around Him, the Lord, the Magnificent Keeper of the Diamond: Pabongka, whose kindness knows no equal. At the time he had consented to confer a secret initiation upon a group of some thirty very fortunate disciples, including among them the good and glorious Lama of Golok, Jampel Rolpay Lodru, as well as Ganggiu Trulku Rinpoche, the son of Sholkang.<sup>115</sup>

A number of empowerments and instructions upon them were given, centered on the Five Angels of the outer secret world, as well as other aspects of the secret practice of Highest Bliss, according to the tradition of Gantapada. The present explication was granted as the required preliminary to the initiation.

There were also a number of other occasions on which we received brief but very profound instructions on this teaching directly from this very Keeper of the Diamond. For my own benefit, so that I would be able to retain these advices, I had taken down some brief notes and kept several sets of them in my possession. It had always been my intention to organize them into a single work at some later point in time.

The notes came to the attention of the esteemed Yangdzom Tsering, a high lady of noble family. She is one of the great religious sponsors of our land; her faith in the teachings of Lobsang, the King of Buddhas,<sup>116</sup> and in the Lamas and disciples who keep these teachings, is totally unbreakable, unequalled, unshakable as the diamond mountain at the center of the universe.

This noble lady insisted vehemently that I should with all haste come out with a manuscript of the notes which would immediately be carved onto woodblocks and printed. This duty I undertook, not daring to drag my feet or delay the project even so long as it would take to offer the text to others for proofing, editing, and other such tasks.

Along with this encouragement came a second motivation, which was my own desire to benefit fellow disciples whose intellect might be as feeble as the one I possess. And so in a great rush I have put together this treatise, combining together all my sets of notes, and the most essential points of whatever I myself was able to grasp with certainty from what he taught.

This labor was accomplished by myself, whose ordination name is Lobsang Dorje, and who hails from the monastery called Den. The writing took place at Ganden Palace, located on the estate of the family of Hlalu. The final pages were completed on the auspicious day of the Meeting of the Angels, during the waning of the moon in the month of wo, in the year of the fire monkey [1956].<sup>117</sup>

I pray that this good deed may act as a cause that will give me the strength to further within my own and

all other beings' minds the immaculate essence of the open and secret Word: the teachings of the Great Tsongkapa, the Buddha himself returned to us.

She is a sponsor of the Dharma whose gifts of faith spread far and wide, And Yangdzom  
Tsering in the deed done here Has given birth to a pure white force. May this power send her  
across the spiritual levels and paths, with the speed of a carriage, and bring her quickly to the  
capital city of secret Union, before and beyond all time.

Let goodness grow forever!

## Notes to Reading Ten

60 *Go forth now and defeat them:* These lines are found in the Great Fifth's famous presentation on the Steps of the path, entitled "Word of the Gentle One." They occur as a poetic interlude between sections of the work's prose philosophical presentation, a device favored as well by His Holiness the First Dalai Lama. "Mental afflictions" are essentially bad thoughts, and constitute a basic source of all our suffering. Their primary characteristic is to disturb our peace of mind, and linguistically as well their name in Sanskrit, *klesha*, comes from a verbal root meaning "to distress." Although the mental afflictions are nearly countless, the six primary ones are desire, anger, pride, ignorance, harmful doubt, and wrong views. See Prof. Whitney's *Roots of the Sanskrit Language*, and Kedrup Tenpa Dargye's "Overview of the Perfection of Wisdom."

61 *Six forms of life:* That is, the six different possible types of rebirth: as a hellbeing, a craving spirit, an animal, a human, someone nearly a pleasure being, or a full pleasure being. See also note 37.

62 *Three different kinds of suffering:* The illustrious Kedrup Tenpa Dargye explains them as follows in his *Overview of the Perfection of Wisdom:* What we call "pervasive" suffering is the subtle condition of change, the fact that the physical, mental, and other parts of ourselves which we have taken on cannot remain, but begin to change from the moment after they come into existence. The suffering of change is typified by the pleasant sensation of the taste of a fine meal. The suffering of suffering, outright suffering, would be something like the painful sensation of a backache. There is, by the way, a good reason for calling the first of these "pervasive" suffering: this is a kind of pain which pervades each and every thing produced by karma and mental afflictions, and pervades too all three realms of cyclic existence. Moreover, this particular suffering pervades each of the other two kinds.

63 *Stop desire for this life:* Also found in the Master's *Three Principal Paths*.

64 *Lineage of the Word:* The new and older schools of the Keepers of the Word, the Kadampas, are explained at note 29. "Lineage of the Word" is a translation of the word *Kagyü*, the name of one of the four great traditions of Tibetan Buddhism.

65 *You can't be sure you will live:* The Victor Yang Gonpa (1213-1258) was a famed early writer and practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism, and is known for a group of works called the "Hermit Cycle." He is one of the founding fathers of the "Drukpa" or "Dragon" lineage of the tradition of the Kagyu: the "Lineage of the Word." For a full account of his life, see Prof. George N. Roerich's translation of the *Blue Annals*, a history of Buddhism by Shunnu Pel, the Master Translator of Gu.

66 *Urges himself to perfect his practice:* A catalog from the Kokonor region of Tibet contains two references to a book entitled *The Tree of Faith Aplenty: Urging Myself to Perfect My Practice*, and states that it was composed by Drom Gyalway Jungne, otherwise known as Dromton Je—Lord Atisha's foremost disciple.

67 *Such a house of horrors:* The lines are found in a beautiful short piece entitled *A Song of Deep Despair*, from a collection of mental trainings by this seventh of the Dalai Lamas. The quotation is also found in Pabongka Rinpoche's *Gift of Liberation*.

68 *Nirvana beyond both extremes:* Refers to the nirvana attained by a fully enlightened Buddha, who eliminates every form of spiritual obstacle, and is thus free of both the extreme of living in the cycle of suffering life, and the extreme of staying in a lower, personal nirvana. See the great Kedrup Tenpa Dargye's *Analysis of the Perfection of Wisdom*.

69 *They sing the praises of morality:* The circumstances of the composition of these lines in praise of morality were especially joyful. Je Tsongkapa had sent one of his favorite disciples, Tsako Ngawang Drakpa, to eastern Tibet in order to teach and establish new monasteries. Upon the ordination of the first monks in the area of



Gyalmo Rong, the disciple wrote a letter to the Master informing him of the event. These words are from an exquisite epistle which Je Tsongkapa sent in reply.

70 *The various vows of freedom*: Refers to the eight sets of vows found in the Buddhist scriptures; three are for laymen, and five for the ordained. Generally speaking they are called "vows of freedom" because, by observing them carefully, one can reach the freedom of nirvana. Perhaps the clearest and most concise presentation of the eight is found in Je Tsongkapa's own *Essence of the Ocean of Discipline*.

71 *Comes to rip out the life*: Lobsang Chukyi Gyaltsen (1567?-1662) was the first of the great Panchen Lamas and a renowned philosopher, historian, and statesman—as well as teacher of the great Fifth Dalai Lama. The lines are found in a short piece entitled *Divine Nectar for Exposing the Harmful Things I Have Done in the Past, and for Restoring Myself to Spiritual Health, by Relying on the Antidotes to Bad Deeds, from the Present Moment On*.

72 *Fill the reaches of space itself*: This quotation can be found in Pabongka Rinpoche's commentary to the *Three Principal Paths*, and in numerous other works on the Steps to the path.

73 *Flourishes even more*: The lines are found in Master Shantideva's classic manual for bodhisattvas.

74 *Those great beings who meditate*: The verses are from the *Lamp on the Path*, Lord Atisha's famed prototype for Tibetan texts on the Steps to Buddhahood. They are also quoted in the early *Steps of the Teaching* by Geshe Drolungpa.

75 *The Wish for enlightenment is the central beam*: The verse appears in Je Tsongkapa's *Songs of My Spiritual Life*.

76 *Train your mind in the proper progression*: The texts on the Steps to Buddhahood state that the great Wish for enlightenment can equally be developed by using either of the methods mentioned. The "seven-part, cause-and-effect instruction" comes down to us from Lord Buddha through masters such as Chandrakirti, Chandragomi, and Shantarakshita. It involves a preliminary step, developing neutrality towards all other beings, and then seven parts, the last being a result of the first six. The seven are:

(1) Recognize that all beings have, in past lives, been your own mother. (2) Contemplate the kindness they showed you. (3) Develop a desire to repay them. (4) Find a kind of love where every other living being looks as lovely to you as a mother's only son. (5) Feel a strong compassion for them, a wish that they could escape every kind of pain. (6) Resolve to help them escape, through your own personal effort, by any means necessary. (7) This then brings you to the Wish to achieve enlightenment for the sake of every living being. The practice of "exchanging self and others" comes down to us from the Buddha through Master Shantideva, and means to replace one's concern for his own welfare with a concern for the welfare of others. Both methods combine in the teachings of Lord Atisha, Je Tsongkapa, and the Lamas of their lineage. See Pabongka Rinpoche's *Gift of Liberation*.

77 *All six perfections*: The six Buddhist perfections are giving, morality, controlling anger, enjoying good deeds, meditative concentration, and wisdom. One important source for the six is Master Chandrakirti's *Entering the Middle Way*, with chapters devoted to each.

78 *Avoiding the ten bad deeds*: See note 59 for the ten.

79 *Three sets of vows*: The freedom vows have been discussed above; see note 70. The bodhisattva vows consist of 18 root vows and 46 secondary vows by which one commits him or herself to the service of other beings. The secret vows are undertaken for the purpose of attaining enlightenment in this life, in order to benefit all sentient kind. See Pabongka Rinpoche's *Gift of Liberation*.

80 *Amassing merit and wisdom*: These two huge collections of good deeds and knowledge within one's mind stream act as the causes for the physical form and the omniscient state of a Buddha, respectively. See Pabongka Rinpoche's commentary to Je Tsongkapa's *Three Principal Paths*.

81 *Five problems to meditation*: The texts on the Steps to Buddhahood describe in detail the concept of five problems which occur as a person attempts to develop the perfect concentration known as meditative quietude. These five are countered by eight corrective measures, and lead the meditator through nine different states, with four modes. *Separating the Middle and the Extremes* is one of the works granted to Master Asanga in the 4th century by Maitreya, the future Buddha. It outlines these components of meditation in a very brief way and is used as the basis for later presentations. The first of the five problems is called "laziness," a lack of motivation even to sit down and start trying to develop perfect concentration. It is countered by the first four of the corrective measures. Here one begins by developing (1) "faith," which means a clear understanding of the benefits of concentration. Once they are aware of these benefits, the meditator begins to (2) "aspire" to



length of an "eon" is variously described in Buddhist scripture, and is tied to cycles in the lifespans of beings; suffice to say it entails millions of years.

86 *Eight great attainments*: These are to gain "the sword," which allows one to travel anywhere; "the pill," which enables you to become invisible or assume any outer form; "the eye ointment," which helps you see minute or very distant objects; "swift feet," the ability to travel at high speeds; "taking essence," an ability to live off nothing but tiny bits of sustenance; "sky walk," the ability to fly; "disappearing," or invisibility; and "underground," the power to pass through solid ground like a fish through water. The *Great Dictionary* describes each of the eight in a separate entry. An expanded presentation of these attainments is found in Lord Atisha's autocommentary to "Light on the Path."

87 *The secret and bodhisattva vows*: Summaries of these higher vows are found in many of the texts for daily recitation, such as the *Practice for Six Times a Day*. The book of advice mentioned above, the *String of Shining Jewels*, is a concise, exquisite piece by Geshe Tsewang Samdrup of Drepung Monastery, probably from the 18th century.

88 *Within seven lives this person will reach*: Je Tsongkapa, in the *Golden Harvest of Attainments* just mentioned, also uses this quotation. He mentions his source as a reference to the *Treasure* within Master Saraha's *Difficult Points on the Secret Teaching of the Skull*.

89 *Within the length of sixteen lives*: The quotation is from the *String of Light for the Three Kinds of Vows*, a short piece by Master Vibhuti Chandra found in the Tengyur collection of early Indian commentaries. The lines just preceding those here, by the way, state that: If he also does his meditation A person will reach enlightenment Here in the very same life. Je Tsongkapa cites the lines on the sixteen lives in both his *Golden Harvest* and in an epistle sent to a disciple named Kashi Dzinpa, Sherab Pel Sangpo. The great scholar of the secret teachings, Shaluwa Rinchen Lobsang Kyenrab (late 19th century), also speaks of the maximum of sixteen lifetimes.

90 *The goal is reached*: Je Tsongkapa again these lines on p. 471 of his *Golden Harvest*—the following words are included in the original: By force of meditation and the like, A person achieves the goal in this same life.

91 *Birth or death or the state between*: The lines by His Holiness the Seventh Dalai Lama are found in a letter of advice to one Rabjampa Gendun Drakpa.

92 *The "heaps," the "categories," and the "doors of sense"*: These are three ways of dividing the parts to ourselves and our world; the classic presentation of them is found throughout the first chapter of Master Vasubandhu's *Treasure House of Knowledge*. The five "heaps" consist of our physical form, our feelings, our ability to discriminate, parts of us not covered in the other four heaps, and our consciousness. They are called "heaps" because each one consists of a large group of different things. The eighteen "categories" are our five physical senses and our mental sense, along with the corresponding six objects and six consciousnesses. (For example, the physical sense of the eye, visual objects, and consciousness of what we see.) They are called "categories" in the sense of "types." The twelve "doors of sense" are the six senses and their six objects. They are "doors of sense" in that they provide a cause or doorway through which the six types of consciousness arise. These three different presentations of the divisions to us and our world are made to fit varying types of students.

93 *Three bodies of a victorious Buddha*: The three bodies or parts of a Buddha are known as the Dharma Body, the Body of Enjoyment, and the Body of Emanation. The Dharma Body consists of the Buddha's omniscience, his state of having ended all impure qualities, and his or her emptiness. The Body of Enjoyment is the physical body of the Buddha in his paradise, and the Body of Emanation is the form which he projects to this and other planets to help living beings.

94 *But remember many are robbed*: The lines are found in His famed work on the Steps to Buddhahood entitled *Word of the Gentle One*.

95 *How the two levels of reality work*: The five great books have been described above at note 24. The "two levels of reality" refer to what are usually called "deceptive truth" and "ultimate truth." Both are valid, and all objects have both. The dependence of objects (especially in the sense of depending upon the names and concepts we apply to them) is their conventional or deceptive truth. Their appearance is "deceptive" because to the minds of normal people they appear to be something other than what they actually are. The "ultimate" truth of objects is their lack of non-dependence, and is first seen directly in the all-important meditative state known as the "path of seeing." Seeing this truth directly acts immediately to stop the process through which we suffer.

96 *Ten levels and five paths*: The ten levels here refer to ten stages at which a bodhisattva attains an exceptional ability to perform the various perfections; they begin with the first direct perception of emptiness. The five paths represent progressive stages towards the goal of nirvana and omniscience. The first, called the "path of accumulation," begins when a practitioner develops true renunciation for the suffering of life. For a person of the greater way this is accompanied by a full-fledged version of the Wish to gain enlightenment for the sake of others. The second path is called the "path of preparation," and is marked by increasingly refined intellectual understandings of emptiness. The third path is the "path of seeing," named after the all-important initial direct perception of emptiness. During the subsequent stages of this path one also perceives directly what are called the Four Noble Truths of suffering, the cause of suffering, the end of suffering, and the way to the end of suffering. The fourth path is the "path of habituation," where one familiarizes himself repeatedly with the realizations of the previous path, in order to permanently remove all mental afflictions and their propensities. This state itself is known as the "path of no more learning," the fifth path. For a practitioner of the lower way this is nirvana, and for one of the greater way it represents the full enlightenment of a Buddha. The subject of the ten levels and five paths is treated in detail in a standard type of textbook known as the "Presentation of the Levels and Paths."

97 *Added here in conclusion*: In general the verse is attached to many prayers and rituals as a fitting conclusion. As for dating its first appearance, the verse is not found in the *Mountain* commentary of Tsechokling Yeshe Gyeltsen (1713- 1793), nor in that of Akya Yangchen Gaway Lodru (c. 1760). It does though appear in the explanations of the Second Jamyang Shepa, Konchok Jikme Wangpo (1728-1791), and Keutsang Lobsang Jamyang Monlam (b. 1689).

98 *By this virtue may all beings...* These are actually the final lines of Master Nagarjuna's *Sixty Verses of Reasoning*, and are often used nowadays as a prayer of dedication after the good deed of listening to a teaching. The entire verse reads:

By this virtue may all beings

Gather the masses of merit and wisdom.

May they achieve the ultimate two [bodies of a Buddha]

That the merit and the wisdom produce.

99 *The prayers of bodhisattva princes*: The original lines are from the third part of a verse description of his spiritual life by Je Tsongkapa entitled *Noble Hopes*. This section is called the "Dedication of All that I Had Done, that the Word should Flourish in the World," and the entire verse reads as follows: The prayers of bodhisattva princes, As many as the drops of water in the Ganges, Are all—it is spoken—included within A prayer that the Dharma be preserved. Thus I take the core of virtue Created by the good I have done And dedicate it to the spread Of the Buddha's teaching in the world. I think of all I've done, My hopes in life were noble; Oh you have been kind to me, Holy Treasure House of knowledge. The *Treasure House* here, by the way, refers to Gentle Voice—Je Tsongkapa's tutor.

100 *The teacher unsurpassed*: The lines are often appended to prayers and recitation texts; see for example the version of Je Tsongkapa's *Songs of My Spiritual Life*. The entire verse reads: The fact that in my life I've been able to meet with the matchless Word of the Teacher is my Lama's kindness, so this good I've done I dedicate to the cause that every Living being might find himself under a holy Lama's care.

101 *The hermitage of the Victor*: The "Victor" here is Dromton Je, founder of Radreng Monastery—which is located to the north of Lhasa city. See note 16 for details.

102 *The Thousand Angels*: The *Thousand Angels of the Heaven of Bliss* is an extremely important devotional work and meditation centered on Je Tsongkapa. The preliminary practices are a method to prepare oneself properly for a meditation session; a typical version would be that of Pabongka Rinpoche's root Lama, Jampel Hlundrup.

103 *Milarepa and Kyungpo*: The great Milarepa (1040-1123) is perhaps the most famed meditator and writer of spiritual poetry in Tibet. In his early years he practiced black magic and used it to harm a great many people. Later he regretted this wrong path and became one of the greatest Buddhist masters of his time, spending a full nine years in intense meditation to achieve the ultimate goal. The sage Kedrup Kyungpo Neljor (b. 978) was originally a practitioner of the shamanistic Bon religion prevalent in Tibet prior to the arrival of Buddhism. Not reaching the goals he sought, Kedrup Kyungpo travelled to Nepal and India, mastering the Buddhist teachings. He founded numerous monasteries in Tibet and started the Shangpa school of the tradition known as the Kagyu: the Lineage of the Word. For thumbnail biographies see the *Great Dictionary*.

104 *Actually make them enlightened*: Original source of quotation not found. Tuken Chukyi Nyima (1737-1802) was the third incarnation of the Tuken lineage. His studies were influenced by such eminent Lamas as the Seventh Dalai Lama, the Third Panchen Lama, the great historian and grammarian Sumpa Kenpo Yeshe Peljor, the philosopher Changkya Rolpay Dorje, and most importantly Purbuchok Ngawang Jampa, known for his writings on history and the secret teachings. Perhaps the most famous of Tuken's lucid treatises is his *Survey of the Schools of Philosophy*.

105 *Those with the goodness to hear it*: Original source of quotation not found. Changkya Rolpay Dorje (1717-1786) was the second incarnation of the Line of the Changkya Lamas, and is said in fact to have been a former life of Pabongka Rinpoche himself. He was Lama to the Emperor of China and instrumental in the publication of the entire Buddhist canon in Mongolian.

106 *Just what our Lord Lama has taught*: The lines are found in a short piece which describes how to meditate on the impermanence of life. Gungtang Tenpay Dronme (1762-1823) spent his early years at the monastery of Labrang Tashi Kyil in east Tibet, and then studied under leading masters of his day at the great Drepung Monastery in Lhasa. He displayed extraordinary talent and received the highest scholastic degree at the age of twenty-two. His collected works span a wide range of subjects including the open and secret teachings of Buddhism, the fine arts, medicine and astrology, and classical grammar.

107 *One of the Sugarcane*: An epithet of the historical Buddha, who was born into a group of people called "Those of the Sugarcane."

108 *The royal Regent, the Invincible Savior, and Gentle Voice*: The Regent and Savior mentioned here refer to Loving One, Maitreya, the future Buddha who has been put as regent of the Heaven of Bliss by the present Buddha, Shakyamuni. The lineage of far-reaching deeds motivated by the Wish for enlightenment has come down from Lord Buddha through him, and the lineage of the profound view of emptiness has been passed down to us through Gentle Voice, Manjushri.

109 *Descended in a perfect stream*: The lines here are describing exactly the same lineages to which Je Tsongkapa made his original supplication when he wrote the text of the *Mountain of Blessings*. The third-century Indian masters Nagarjuna and Aryadeva are sometimes referred to as the "Father and Son," teacher and disciple for the philosophy of emptiness. Master Asanga is also known as the "Brother" since he and the illustrious Vasubandhu had the same mother. Both Nagarjuna and Asanga are spoken of us as "innovators" in the sense that they were able to elucidate the scriptures without relying on a previous innovator, and were prophesied as such by the Buddha himself. This subject is treated at length in monastic presentations on the perfection of wisdom such as the *Analysis of Kedrup Tenpa Dargye*.

110 *The kindness of one great God*: The "God" here refers to Atisha, who with his principal disciple Dromton Je was chiefly responsible for introducing the teachings on the Steps into Tibet. See also note 19.