

The Asian Classics Institute

Practice I: The Mandala of the Steps to Enlightenment (Lam Rim)

Syllabus

The readings are taken from Preparing for Tantra: The Mountain of Blessings. The root text was written by Je Tsongkapa Lobsang Drakpa (1357-1419), and the commentary is by Pabonka Rinpoche (1878-1941).

Reading One

Subject: The Source of All My Good

Reading Two

Subject: Getting the Essence of Life

Reading Three

Subject: Steps for Those of Medium and Greater Capacity

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Reading One

The following reading is 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 Pabonka 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.

FORWARD

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

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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.

KHEN RINPOCHE, GESHE LOBSANG THARCHIN (1921-2004) was born in Lhasa, and as a boy also entered the Gyalrong House of Sera Mey. He studied under both Pabongka Rinpoche and Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche, and after a rigorous 25 year course in the Buddhist classics was awarded the highest rank of the geshe degree. He graduated from the Gyumey Tantric College of Lhasa in 1958 with the position of administrator.

Since 1959 Khen Rinpoche has taught Buddhist philosophy at various institutions in Asia and the United States, and in 1975 completed studies in English at Georgetown University. For more than twenty years he has served as the abbot of Rashi Gempil Ling, a Kalmuk Mongolian temple in New Jersey. He is also the founder of the Mahayana Sutra and Tantra Centers of New Jersey and Washington D.C., and author of numerous translations of major Buddhist texts.

In 1977 Khen Rinpoche directed the development of the first computerized Tibetan word processor, and currently serves as chief editor of the Asian Classics Input Project (ACIP), an international effort to preserve the important literature of Asia in digital form. He has played a leading role in the re-establishment of Sera Mey Monastic College, one of the largest Buddhist monasteries in the world, where he holds the positions of abbot emeritus and lifetime director.

MICHAEL PHILLIP ROACH (b. 1952) received the Presidential Scholar medallion from Richard Nixon at the White House in 1970, and graduated with honors from Princeton University in 1975. He studied at the library of the Government of Tibet under the auspices of the Woodrow Wilson School of International Affairs, and then for over fifteen years under Geshe Tharchin at Rashi Gempil Ling, also earning the geshe degree at Sera Mey Monastic College. He has been employed in the New York diamond industry and has been active in the restoration of Sera Mey, where he was ordained a Buddhist monk in 1983. Geshe Roach is spiritual director of ACIP, Godstow Retreat Center, Diamond Mountain, and the Asian Classics Institute, a training school for translators and teachers located in Manhattan.

Herein contained is a book named *Opening Your Eyes to What You Should Keep, and What You Should Give Up*. 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. The teaching was a profound explanation of the text known as the *Source of All My Good*, a work which is the distilled essence of the Steps of the path to Buddhahood.

In deepest reverence, expressed through all three doors,
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.

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*.*

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 idamguru.

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.

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." 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 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, 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.

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 Serpentine, 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.

So too say the lines,
 A kindness returned is goodness,
 And evil is kindness unreturned.

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, 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," 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. 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...

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.

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.

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.

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. 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, they are the one single way by which each and every victorious Buddha has traveled, 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.

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, 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.

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.

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.

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.

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 unrivaled 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.

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. 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.

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.

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. 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.

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*.

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*. 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.

The Asian Classics Institute

Practice I: The Mandala of the Steps to Enlightenment (Lam Rim)

Reading Two: 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, 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.

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.

The place from here 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. 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.

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, 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, 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 pleasures; 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.

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.

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. 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
Wrongs 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.

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. 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.

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.

And then he states:

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

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.

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.

Master Bodongwa quotes these same lines from sutra and says,

People like you and I may have blurry eyes but we must to 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

The Asian Classics Institute

Practice I: The Mandala of the Steps to Enlightenment (Lam Rim)

Reading Three: 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.

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.

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. 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.

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 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. 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?

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. 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.

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, 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.

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. As the great Panchen Lama, Lobsang Chukyi Gyaltsen 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 those 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.

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 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 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. 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.

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.

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.

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. 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. 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. 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. This takes so long that it's almost as if you were walking on foot, rather than traveling 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.

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. 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.

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.

The Book of the Five Pledges concurs:
As long as there is no downfall,
The goal is reached in sixteen lives.

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.

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." 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. 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 under doing 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.

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.

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 fulfil
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*. 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.

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..."

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..."

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."

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.

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.

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.

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. 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.

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.

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.

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 traveled by each and every Victor;
It is a treasure of cherished jewels, high words from the One of the Sugarcane.
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.

It descended in a perfect stream from the Father, Nagarjuna, and his Son;
From Asanga, the Brother, and others too, unprecedented from great innovators.
Because of the kindness of one great God along with the Lord named Dromton Je,
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 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, 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,
May this teaching spread in a glorious spring bringing help and happiness far as space.

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.

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.

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, 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].

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 YangdzomTsering 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!