

*The Stages of the Path Teachings*

*A Selection of Texts*

*Jason Espada, editor*

## The Stages of the Path Teachings - A Selection of Texts

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## An Introduction to the Stages of the Path Teachings

A little over a thousand years ago, a king in Tibet saw the decline of Buddhism in his homeland, and decided to invite a great scholar from India, by the name of Atisha, to his country. When Atisha arrived in Tibet, he saw that people were practicing advanced teachings without a foundation in ethics; that different schools of thought were critical of each other, each believing that they alone had the truth; he saw how tantra was being misunderstood and misused, and how some teachings that were popular at the time were not in line with what the Buddha and the realized sages that followed him had taught.

Out of his compassion and wisdom Atisha met the Tibetans right where they were. He taught them fundamental practice of taking refuge so often that he came to be called by some 'the refuge lama', and when asked for a simple teaching that people could easily understand, Atisha composed a text he called 'A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment'. This was the prototype of what has come to be known as *the Lam Rim*, or *the Stages of the Path* teachings.

This genre shows us the entire path at once, from beginning to end. It's like having a map for the entire journey. It starts from where we are, saying up front that we all have Buddha Nature, which is the potential for enlightenment; and that we now have this precious human life, which is subject to birth and death, and difficult emotions, such as loneliness, fear and depression; it introduces the Three Jewels, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, refuge and ethics, and a basic practice of meditation, and then proceeds to teachings on liberation, great compassion, and enlightenment.

*It shows the function of all the different Buddhist teachings, how they reinforce each other, and how they are without contradiction.*

I think we are in a similar situation here as Atisha found when he went to Tibet. There is such an array of teachings in the 21st century, and people

often pick and choose from whatever is at hand. Sometimes the practices work for them, and often not. As in Atisha's time, there are made up teachings being sold, that have no basis in Buddhism; there is sectarian arrogance, close mindedness, and what are only partial paths being taught - and all this at a time when there is so much suffering, and when our world and our people are in crisis.

Just as in Atisha's time, I see that people are practicing sitting meditation, but without much guidance; I hear about ideals of universal love and compassion, without the steps laid out; we hear about basic ethics disregarded, even by teachers, let alone their students; and the Buddhist wisdom teachings pushed to the side, or else not understood. The Lam Rim is a remedy for all that.

It's said in this tradition, that in each generation, the children will be richer than their parents- meaning that the main points of the teachings have become easier to see. We now have the light, energy and inspiration of teachers such as Gampopa and Je Tsong Khapa to guide us. Realized practitioners such as the Dalai Lama and Lama Zopa Rinpoche have given commentaries on their teachings, and these are widely available.

What are called 'root texts' are summaries of teachings, that traditionally have been celebrated, memorized and commented on by teachers. Back before there were many books, this was the easiest way to store and transmit ideas. In successive generations, even commentaries were put to memory, debated, added to and passed down, and we are heirs to all these teachings. Root texts and commentaries, as well as our own reflections and insights complement each other. We read and study, listen to teachings, and practice whatever we need, the step that is right in front of us. Then when we return to the original outline, the meaning is all there for us.

One of the basic ideas in the Stages of the Path is that everything rises from causes- including the decision to take up a spiritual path, to follow a teacher, to keep good ethics, to seek liberation, or enlightenment as the best

way to help others. This idea- of watering the roots of the kind of life we want for ourselves proves itself again and again.

The Stages of the Path teachings help us to begin our spiritual practice; and once we've started, they help us to continue, with clarity and vigor; and they lead to the fulfillment of accomplishing the teachings for ourselves and all others.

Whenever I'm lacking motivation, or when I'm unsure of what to practice, I rely on these teachings. They are greatly empowering, and they clarify what is most important for me at any time. I also try to remember that people study the Lam Rim their whole lives, and are enriched by it, and so I take the long view.

Now, personally, I don't think it's important whether people ally themselves with one Buddhist tradition or lineage or another. What matters to me is that they have an understanding of teachings that can help them throughout their lives, free them from confusion and suffering, and enable them to benefit others in every needful way. We learn so many useless things over the course of our lives, that at least this much should be known.

*May we all find a complete path that works for us,  
and leads us to freedom from samsara,  
the endless round*

*May we then share the benefits of our practice  
with all of our precious children,  
with our family and friends,  
with animals, and with all beings*

## The Foundation of All Good Qualities, by Tsong Khapa

The foundation of all good qualities is the kind and venerable guru. Correctly devoting to him is the root of the path. By clearly seeing this and applying great effort, May I rely upon him with great respect.

By understanding that the precious freedom of this rebirth is found only once, is greatly meaningful and difficult to find again, May I generate the mind that unceasingly, day and night, takes hold of its essence.

This life is as impermanent as a water bubble - how quickly it decays and death comes! And after death, just like a shadow follows the body, the results of black and white karma follow.

Finding firm and definite conviction in this, May I always be careful to abandon even the slightest negativities and accomplish all virtuous deeds.

Seeking samsaric pleasures is the door to all suffering. They are uncertain and cannot be relied on. Recognizing these shortcomings, May I generate the strong wish for the bliss of liberation.

Led by this pure thought, mindfulness, alertness and great caution arise. The root of the teachings is keeping the pratimoksha (individual liberation) vows. May I accomplish this essential practice.

Just as I have fallen into the sea of samsara, so too have all mother migratory beings. May I see this, train in supreme bodhicitta, and bear the responsibility of freeing migratory beings.

By clearly recognizing that developing bodhicitta, without practicing the

three types of morality<sup>1</sup>, I will not achieve enlightenment, May I practice the bodhisattva vows with great energy.

By pacifying distractions to wrong objects, and correctly analyzing the meaning of reality, May I generate quickly within my mindstream the unified path of calm abiding and special insight.

Having become a pure vessel by training in the general path, May I enter the holy gateway of the fortunate ones, the supreme vajra vehicle.

At that time, the basis of accomplishing the two attainments is keeping pure vows and samaya. Having become firmly convinced of this, May I protect these vows and pledges like my life.

Then, having realized the importance of the two stages, which are the essence of the vajrayana, by practicing with great energy, never giving up the four sessions, May I realize the teachings of the holy guru.

Like that, may the virtuous teachers who show the noble path, and the spiritual friends who practice it have long lives. May I pacify completely all outer and inner hindrances.

In all my rebirths, never separated from perfect gurus, May I enjoy the magnificent Dharma. By completing the qualities of the stages and paths, May I quickly attain the state of Vajradhara.

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<sup>1</sup> Three aspects of the perfection of morality: the morality of restraining from wrong-doing, the morality of accumulating merit and the morality of benefiting sentient beings.



## The Three Principal Aspects of the Path, by Lama Je Tsongkhapa

My own version

Homage to the precious, noble masters

1.

Here I shall explain as well as I can  
the essence of the Buddha's teachings,  
the path praised by the bodhisattvas,  
the gateway for fortunate ones seeking liberation

2.

Those of you who are unattached to saṃsāra's pleasures,  
and who strive to make full use of this life's freedoms and advantages,  
You who follow the path delighting all the buddhas,  
Fortunate ones, listen well, with a clear mind.

3.

Without the definite intention to gain liberation,  
there is no way to pacify the attraction to the pleasures of samsara.  
By craving, beings are continuously bound.  
Therefore, from the very beginning, seek liberation  
{the happiness beyond samsara}

4.

Freedom and endowments are hard to find  
This life is fleeting, its length is uncertain, and there is no time to waste  
Gaining familiarity with this counters the attachment to this life's  
pleasures;

And thinking again and again  
 about the nature of karma,  
 and about the sufferings of unenlightened existence,  
 counters the attachment to all future samsaric lives

5.

When, by having trained in that way,  
 there is no arising, even for a moment,  
 any attraction to worldly pleasures,  
 and, day and night, continuously,  
 the intuitive desire to seek liberation arises,  
 then you have truly generated the mind of renunciation,  
 the wish to be free

6.

If this wish for freedom is not accompanied, however,  
 by the pure motivation of bodhicitta -  
 the aim to become a buddha in order to fully benefit all sentient beings -  
 then it does not become the cause of supreme enlightenment  
 Therefore the wise generate this great intention,  
 the excellent awakening mind

7.

Beings are swept along by powerful currents of suffering,  
 They are tightly bound by the chains of their karma,  
 so difficult to escape from,  
 Caught in the mesh of self grasping,  
 and completely enveloped in the darkness of ignorance

8.

They take births without end in deluded and afflicted states,  
and are constantly tormented -  
Seeing that all these infinitely precious ones  
are now in such a condition,  
generate the supreme mind that is intent on enlightenment

8a.

In short, when your reflection on the suffering of sentient beings  
has made it impossible for you to not act on their behalf,  
and the aspiration for enlightenment for their sake arises without effort,  
then you have realized the supreme precious awakening mind

9.

Even though you have this wish to be free, and the bodhimind,  
if you do not have the wisdom that knows the ultimate nature,  
then you cannot cut the root cause of samsaric suffering,  
so endeavor to realize causality - dependent arising

10.

One who sees that all experiences of cyclic existence and beyond,  
arise due to causes and conditions,  
and who has ceased grasping at a self,  
has at that time entered the path pleasing the Buddhas.

11.

As long as these two -  
appearance as dependent origination,  
and the emptiness free of assertions of inherent existence and non existence

are separate,  
then you have not yet realized the Buddha's wisdom

12.

If however these two arise simultaneously,  
and with the mere appearance of dependent arising  
there is the insight that destroys taking hold of objects as self-existent,  
at that time the analysis of the view is complete.

13.

Clearly seeing the nature of appearances  
eliminates the extreme of existence;

(and)

correctly understanding the meaning of emptiness  
eliminates the extreme of non-existence

If you realize that,  
due to having this dependently-arisen-and-without-separate-self nature,  
what we experience manifests through cause and effect,  
then you are no longer caught by extreme views.

14.

When you have understood these key points,  
of the three principle aspects of the path,  
then resort to solitude, generate joyful effort,  
and quickly accomplish your goal.

\* \* \*

This is my own version, based on the translations of Lama Zopa Rinpoche and Jonathan Landau, Ruth Sonam, Rosemary Patton, Adam Percy, and Thubten Jinpa.

Jason Espada,  
San Francisco,  
January 12th, 2020

## Lines of Experience

by Lama Je Tsongkhapa (1357–1419)

1.

I bow to you,  
Lord Buddha, head of the Shakya clan.

Your enlightened body is born  
of tens of millions of virtues  
and perfect accomplishments;

Your enlightened speech grants the wishes of limitless beings,  
and your enlightened mind sees all things as they are.

2.

I bow to you Maitreya and Manjushri,  
supreme spiritual children of this peerless teacher.  
Assuming responsibility to further all of the Buddha's enlightened deeds,  
you manifest emanations to countless worlds.

3.

I bow to you, Nagarjuna and Asanga,  
ornaments of our Southern Continent.  
Highly famed throughout the three realms,  
you have commented on the most difficult to fathom  
Mother of the Buddhas,  
The Perfection of Wisdom Sutras,  
exactly according to what was intended.

4.

I bow to you, Dipamkara Shrijhana, Lord Atisha,  
holder of a treasure of instructions,  
as seen in your Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment.  
All the complete, unmistakable points  
concerning the paths of profound view and vast action,  
transmitted intact from these two great forerunners,  
are included within it.

5.

Respectfully, I bow to my spiritual masters.  
You are the eyes allowing us to behold  
all the infinite scriptural pronouncements,  
and the best way for those of good fortune to cross to liberation.  
You make everything clear through your skillful deeds,  
which are moved by intense loving concern.

6.

The stages of the path to enlightenment  
have been communicated perfectly by those who have followed  
from Nagarjuna and Asanga,  
those crown jewels of all erudite masters  
of our Southern Continent,  
the banner of whose fame stands out above the masses.

As following these stages can fulfill every desired aim  
of all kinds of beings,  
they are a wish-granting king of precious instruction.

Because they collect the streams of thousands of excellent classics,  
they are indeed an ocean of illustrious, correct explanation.

7.

These teachings make it easy to understand how there is nothing contradictory in all of the Buddha's teachings and make every scriptural pronouncement, without exception dawn on your mind as a personal instruction.

They make it easy to discover what the Buddha intended and they protect you as well from the abyss of the great error, of denigrating any part of the Teachings.

Because of these benefits, what discriminating person would not have his or her mind be completely enraptured by these stages of the path arranged according to the three levels of motivation, the supreme instruction to which many fortunate ones have devoted themselves?

8.

Although there is much merit to be gained from reciting or hearing even once this manner of text, that includes the essential points of all scriptural pronouncements, you are certain to amass even greater benefit from actually studying and practicing the sacred Dharma contained therein.

Therefore, you should consider the points for doing this properly.

9.

Having taken refuge, you should see that the root cause of good fortune,



for this and future lives,  
 is proper devotion in thought and action  
 to your sublime teacher who shows you the path to enlightenment.

Thus you should please your teacher  
 by offering your practice of exactly what he or she says,  
 which you would not forsake even at the cost of your life.

I, the yogi, have practiced just that.  
 You who also seek liberation,  
 please cultivate yourself in the same way.

10.

This human existence with its freedoms and opportunities  
 is more precious than a wish-granting jewel.  
 Obtained just this once, it is difficult to acquire and is easily lost;

Considering how one's own death can happen at any time,  
 and realizing that all worldly activities are as chaff,  
 you must try to extract its essence at all times, day and night.

I, the yogi, have practiced just that.  
 You who also seek liberation,  
 please cultivate yourself in the same way.

11.

After death,  
 there is no guarantee that you will not be reborn  
 in one of the three unfortunate realms,  
 but it is certain that the Three Jewels of Refuge  
 have the power to protect you from them.

For this reason,  
 your taking of refuge should be extremely solid,  
 and you should completely follow what this entails,  
 without ever letting your commitments weaken.

Moreover,  
 your success in Taking Refuge  
 depends on your considering thoroughly  
 which are the positive or the negative karmic actions  
 together with their results  
 and then living according to the guidelines  
 of what is to be adopted or rejected.

I, the yogi, have practiced just that.  
 You who also seek liberation,  
 please cultivate yourself in the same way.

12.

The fullest strides of progress in actualizing the supreme paths  
 will not come about unless you have attained the working basis  
 of an ideal human body that is complete with qualities.

Therefore, you must cultivate the virtuous actions  
 that are the causes of a human birth.

Furthermore,  
 since it is essential to purify negative karma  
 and to remove your obstacles,  
 you should cherish continually devoting yourself  
 to applying the complete set of four opponent powers  
 that can accomplish this.

I, the yogi, have practiced just that.  
 You who also seek liberation,  
 please cultivate yourself in the same way.

13.

If you do not make an effort  
 to think about the nature of suffering,  
 you will not develop a keen interest to work for liberation.

If you do not consider its evolution,  
 you will not know the means  
 for cutting the root of this vicious circle.

Therefore,  
 you should cherish the renunciation of samsaric existence,  
 by knowing which factors bind you to its wheel.

I, the yogi, have practiced just that.  
 You who also seek liberation,  
 please cultivate yourself in the same way.

14.

Ever-enhancing your enlightened motivation of bodhicitta  
 is central to the Mahayana path.

It is the basis and foundation  
 for great waves of beneficial conduct.

Like a gold-making elixir,  
 it turns everything you do into the two collections,  
 building up a treasure of merit  
 gathered from infinitely collected virtues.

Knowing this,  
 bodhisattvas hold this supreme precious mind  
 as their innermost practice.

I, the yogi, have practiced just that.  
 You who also seek liberation,  
 please cultivate yourself in the same way.

15.

Generosity is the wish-granting jewel  
 with which you can fulfill the hopes of sentient beings.

It is the best weapon for cutting the knot of miserliness.

It is the altruistic conduct  
 that enhances your self-confidence and undaunted courage.

It is the basis for your good reputation  
 to be proclaimed in the ten directions.

Knowing this,  
 the wise have devoted themselves  
 to the excellent path of completely giving away their body,  
 belongings and merit.

I, the yogi, have practiced just that.  
 You who also seek liberation,  
 please cultivate yourself in the same way.

16.

Ethical discipline is the water  
that washes away the stains of faulty actions.

It is the ray of moonlight  
that cools the scorching heat of the defilements.

It makes you radiant like Mount Meru  
in the midst of sentient beings.

By its power,  
you are able to positively influence all beings.

Knowing this,  
the holy ones have safeguarded,  
as they would their very eyes,  
the precepts they have accepted to keep purely.

I, the yogi, have practiced just that.  
You who also seek liberation,  
please cultivate yourself in the same way.

17.

Patience is the best adornment  
for those with power,

and the perfect ascetic practice  
for those tormented by delusions.

It is the high-soaring eagle,  
that is the enemy of the snake of anger,

and the strongest shield  
against the weapons of abusive language.

Knowing this,  
the wise have accustomed themselves  
in various ways and forms  
to the armor of supreme patience.

I, the yogi, have practiced just that.  
You who also seek liberation,  
please cultivate yourself in the same way.

18.

Once you have resolute and irreversible joyous effort,  
your expertise in the scriptures and your insights  
will increase like the waxing moon.

You will make all your actions meaningful  
for attaining enlightenment

and you will bring whatever you undertake  
to its intended conclusion.

Knowing this,  
the bodhisattvas have exerted great waves of joyous effort,  
washing away all laziness.

I, the yogi, have practiced just that.  
You who also seek liberation,  
please cultivate yourself in the same way.

19.

Meditative concentration  
is the king wielding power over the mind.

If you fix your mind on one point, it remains there,  
immovable like a majestic mountain.

If you apply your mind,  
it can engage fully with any virtuous object.

It leads to the great exhilarating bliss  
of your body and mind being made serviceable.

Knowing this,  
yogis who are proficient  
have devoted themselves continuously  
to cultivating single-pointed concentration,  
which overcomes the enemy of mental wandering.

I, the yogi, have practiced just that.  
You who also seek liberation,  
please cultivate yourself in the same way.

20.

Wisdom is the eye  
that beholds profound emptiness

It is the path that uproots wrong view,  
the source of cyclic existence.

It is the treasure of genius  
praised in all the scriptural pronouncements

and is renowned as the supreme lamp  
that eliminates the darkness of ignorance.

Knowing this,  
the wise who have wished for liberation  
have advanced themselves along this very path with every effort.

I, the yogi, have practiced just that.  
You who also seek liberation,  
please cultivate yourself in the same way.

21.

In a state of merely single-pointed meditative concentration,  
you do not have the insight  
that gives you the ability to cut the root of cyclic existence.

Moreover, without the factor of calm abiding,  
wisdom by itself cannot turn back the delusions,  
no matter how much you analyze them.

Therefore,  
together with unwavering calm abiding,  
masters have the special insight  
that is totally decisive about how things exist,  
penetrating the depths of the ultimate mode of being.

With the sharp weapon of Middle Path reasoning,  
devoid of extremes,  
they have used wide-ranging discriminating wisdom  
to analyze properly  
and to destroy all grasping.



In this way,  
they have expanded their intelligence  
and understanding.

I, the yogi, have practiced just that.  
You who also seek liberation,  
please cultivate yourself in the same way.

22.

Once you have accustomed yourself to single-pointed concentration,  
your examination then of individual phenomena  
with the proper analysis  
should itself enhance your single-minded concentration  
settled extremely firmly,  
without any wavering,  
on the actual way in which all things exist.

Seeing this,  
the zealous have marveled  
at the attainment of the union of calm abiding and penetrative insight.  
Is there need to mention that you should pray to attain this as well?

I, the yogi, have practiced just that.  
You who also seek liberation,  
please cultivate yourself in the same way.

23.

Having achieved such a union  
you should meditate both on space-like emptiness  
{which here is the complete absence, in truth, of what is grasped at  
as a self-}  
while completely absorbed in your meditation sessions,

and on illusion-like emptiness when you subsequently arise.

By doing this,  
 you will,  
 through your union of method and awareness,  
 become praised as someone perfecting the bodhisattva's conduct.

Realizing this,  
 those with great good fortune  
 have made it their custom  
 never to be content with merely partial paths.

I, the yogi, have practiced just that.  
 You who also seek liberation,  
 please cultivate yourself in the same way.

24.

Renunciation, an enlightened motive,  
 and the correct view,  
 are necessary in common for achieving supreme paths  
 through either of the two Mahayana vehicles

Once you have properly developed  
 these three principal paths,  
 you should rely on a fully qualified tantric master  
 as your protector,  
 and set out on the speedier vehicle,  
 across the vast ocean of the tantras.

Those who have done so  
 and devoted themselves to his or her instructions  
 have made their attainment of a human body  
 with all its liberties and endowments

fully meaningful,  
by attaining enlightenment in their lifetime.

I, the yogi, have practiced just that.  
You who also seek liberation,  
please cultivate yourself in the same way.

25.

In order to accustom this to my own mind  
and also to benefit others as well  
who have the good fortune to meet a true guru  
and to be able to practice what he or she teaches,  
I have explained here in easily understandable words  
the complete path that pleases the buddhas.

I pray that the merit from this  
may cause all sentient beings  
never to be parted from these pure and excellent paths.

I, the yogi, have practiced just that.  
You who also seek liberation,  
please cultivate yourself in the same way.

Colophon

This concludes the Abbreviated Points  
of the Graded Path to Enlightenment,  
compiled in brief so that they might not be forgotten.

It has been written at Ganden Nampar Gyelwa'i Monastery,  
on Drog Riwoche Mountain, Tibet,  
by the Buddhist monk Losang Dragpa,  
a meditator who has heard many teachings.

Translated by Sherpa Tulku, Khamlung Tulku, Alexander Berzin and Jonathan Landaw, in 1973;

Revised, and set in verse format by Jason Espada, in the evenings of March 17th to April 26th, 2019.

## The Essence of a Human Life - Words of Advice for the Lay Practitioner

by Lama Tsongkhapa

Homage to my guru, the youthful Manjushri!

To those within her refuge, every happiness and joy,  
for those beset by suffering, every assistance.  
Noble Tara, I bow before you.

“Those adrift on great seas of suffering I will save”–  
a powerful vow made good.  
To your lotus feet, compassionate goddess,  
I offer this bowed head.

You of fine features, you have gained  
This opportune and leisured human form.  
If you follow me who speaks to help others,  
listen well, I have something to say.

Death will definitely come and will quickly come.  
Should you neglect to train your thoughts  
again and again on such certainties  
you will grow no virtuous mind,  
and even if you do, it will be spent  
on enjoyment of the glories of this life.

Think, therefore, upon seeing and hearing of others' deaths,  
“I am no different, death will soon come,  
its certainty in no doubt, but no certainty as to when.  
I must say farewell to my body, wealth, and friends,  
but good and bad deeds will follow like shadows.

“From bad will come the long and unbearable pain  
of the three lower realms;  
from good, the higher, happier realms  
from which to swiftly enter the echelons of enlightenment.”  
Know this and think upon it day after day.

With such thoughts make efforts in refuge,  
live as best you can in the five lifelong vows,  
praised by Buddha as the basis of lay life.  
Take sometimes the eight daylong vows  
and guard them dearly.

Drunkenness, particularly, is the ruin of the world,  
held in contempt by the wise.  
Therefore, my fine-featured ones,  
it is good to turn from such despised behavior.

If what you do brings on suffering eventually,  
though it may appear in the moment as happiness,  
then do not do it.  
After all, food beautifully cooked but mixed with poison  
is left untouched, is it not?

To the Three Jewels make prayers and offerings each day,  
work hard to be wholesome, confess previous wrongs,  
strengthen your vows again and again,  
dedicating all merit for awakening.

To conclude: you are born alone, die alone,  
friends and relations are therefore unreliable,  
Dharma alone is the supreme reliance.

This short life is over, gone in a flash.  
Realize that, come what may, now is the time

to find happiness everlasting.  
Do not leave this precious human life empty-handed.

By the virtue of this advice,  
may living beings turn from the bustle of this life,  
whose happiness is never enough,  
whose suffering never runs out,  
to live instead by the great joy of Dharma.

Translation by Gavin Kilty, from *The Splendor of an Autumn Moon: The  
Devotional Verse of Tsongkhapa*

## A Verse in Praise of Je Tsong Khapa

Avalokiteshvara, great treasure of compassion not aimed at true existence;  
 Manjushri, Lord of Stainless Wisdom,  
 as well as Vajrapani, destroyer of hoards of demons without exception,  
 Je Tsong Khapa, crown jewel of the sages of the Land of Snows,  
 to you I bow

{This prayer is included following The Foundation of All Good Qualities in the collection called The Blaze of Non Dual Bodhicitta, and I thought to add my own phrasing of it here. This is the colophon they have in that text}

Note: The Migtsema Mantra was originally composed by Lama Tsongkhapa as a praise to his teacher, Venerable Jetsun Rendawa Shonu Lodoe, by seeing his teacher in the light of the three Bodhisattvas - Arya Avalokiteshvara (the Buddha of compassion), Arya Manjushri (the Buddha of wisdom) and Arya Vajrapani (the Buddha of power). Upon reading it, his teacher replaced his own name with the name of Lama Tsongkhapa and gave it back to him saying that the praise suited Lama Tsongkhapa more. Since then, this praise is commonly recited across Tibet.



Adapted from A Direct Meditation on the Graduated Path Containing  
All the Important Meanings, by Dorje Chang Lozang Jinpa

Essence of all the buddhas,  
Source of all the holy Dharma of teachings and realization,  
Principal of all the Noble Ones intending virtue:  
In the glorious holy gurus, I take refuge.

May my mind become Dharma,  
the Dharma become the path,  
And the path be without obstacles.

Until I achieve buddhahood,  
May I correctly follow the virtuous friend,  
accomplishing what is taught.

*[This is how to correctly follow the virtuous friend, [the root of the path  
to full enlightenment].*

May I see that this greatly meaningful body  
with freedoms and these opportunities

Is difficult to find and easily perishes,

That action and result are truly profound,

And that the sufferings of the evil-gone realms  
are so difficult to bear.

Understanding this much,  
May I take refuge from the depths of my heart  
in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha,

abandon negative karma, and accomplish virtue  
according to Dharma.

*This is the graduated path of the lower capable being.*

In dependence upon that, even if I achieve the rebirth of a deva or human,  
I will still have to experience suffering endlessly in samsara  
Because of not having abandoned the disturbing thought obscurations.

Therefore, may I reflect well upon the way of circling in samsara  
And continuously follow, day and night,  
The path of the three types of precious trainings -  
of Sila, Samadhi, and Prajna - the cultivation of liberating wisdom,  
The principal method for becoming free from samsara.

*This is the graduated path of the middle capable being.*

In dependence upon that, even if I myself achieve liberation,  
Since all worldly beings of the six realms are suffering,  
May I think of them with great love and compassion,

generate precious bodhichitta  
By equalizing and exchanging myself with others,  
And to follow the way of the Bodhisattvas.

*This is the common graduated path of the great capable being.*

Having trained my mind in the common path,  
I will not be upset even if I have to experience the sufferings  
of samsara for a long time.

However, looking at sentient beings  
with extraordinary unbearable compassion,  
May I enter the quick path of the Vajrayana teachings,

to protect my vows and samayas purely,  
and to quickly accomplish the unified state of Vajradhara.

*This is the graduated path of the secret mantra vajra vehicle of  
the greatest capable being.*

Dorje Chang Losang Jinpa's Prayer, version two

Translated by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

From the first edition of The Wish-Fulfilling Golden Sun of Mahayana Practice

Revised for personal use

The Teachings of the Direct Meditation Which Includes The Important Points of the Graduated Path

{Refuge}

I take refuge in the Holy Guru,  
 who is the essence of all Buddhas,  
 the originator of granting all Holy Teachings  
 of realizations and holy words,  
 the Lord of all Supreme Beings

{Prayer for Success in Dharma Practice, and Following the Guru Buddha}

Please all you Guru Buddhas,  
 Grant your blessing that no hindrance may occur in receiving this Path  
 That I may be successful in practicing the Dharma,  
 Please bestow upon me the ability to transform my mind  
 in accordance with these teachings

{The initial scope, the foundation}

By recognizing that I have received a perfect human rebirth,  
 which is highly meaningful, and difficult to obtain  
 due to very variable and difficult causes that need to be gathered

and is very perishable,  
 and subject to decay in the shortest second  
 because of its changeable nature

and that my death is very definite,  
 and the actual time of my death is most indefinite;

that karma is very profound,  
 and the sufferings of the lower worlds  
 are unimaginably unbearable,

Please bestow upon me the ability to achieve virtuous actions,  
 to expel and remove negative actions,  
 and to take Refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha  
 with all my heart

{Middle scope aims for practice and accomplishment}

As a consequence of the above, (taking Refuge and practicing virtue)  
 we receive a higher rebirth,  
 but we must still experience limitless samsaric sufferings  
 because of our remaining uncontrolled delusion and karmas,

therefore we must think about, and realize profoundly  
 the evolution of this samsara,  
 from uncontrolled death, to rebirth

Please bestow upon me the ability,  
 day and night,  
 to follow the three higher practices of the Path  
 (Right Conduct, Concentration, and Wisdom)  
 which are the main methods to release me from samsara

{Based on the above then, the higher scope of aspiration and accomplishment is this:}

There is not one samsaric being who has not been my mother,  
 so please grant me blessings for the ability  
 to help bring all sentient beings success,  
 by renouncing even the perfect happiness of the self,  
 and following the six Bodhisattva Deeds (the Six Paramitas)  
 with a Bodhisattva's mind  
 (based on the meditation equalizing self and others, exchanging self for others)

{The prayer to enter Tantric practice}

In this way, by training my mind in the general Mahayana Path,  
 I would have no sorrow in experiencing samsaric sufferings  
 on behalf of sentient beings,  
 no matter how long it takes to help them accomplish their aims,

but because of feeling sentient beings sufferings as my own suffering,  
 and as unimaginable, and unbearable for even the shortest second,  
 please grant me the blessings to follow the quick Vajrayana teachings,  
 and to swiftly attain the realization of Guru Shakyamuni  
 (Dorje Chang),  
 in just this lifetime  
 (RIGHT NOW),  
 by keeping all my vows,  
 and fulfilling the wishes of the holy Guru  
 with the best and highest care throughout all my lifetimes

For all these reasons,  
 I am going to meditate on the Gradual Path

## A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

by Atisha Dipamkara Shrijnana (982–1054)

Homage to the bodhisattva, the youthful Manjushri.

1. I pay homage with great respect  
To the conquerors of the three times,  
To their teaching and to those who aspire to virtue.  
Urged by the good disciple Jangchub Ö  
I shall illuminate the lamp  
For the path to enlightenment.
  
2. Understand that there are three kinds of persons  
Because of their small, middling and supreme capacities.  
I shall write clearly distinguishing  
Their individual characteristics.
  
3. Know that those who by whatever means  
Seek for themselves no more  
Than the pleasures of cyclic existence  
Are persons of the least capacity.
  
4. Those who seek peace for themselves alone,  
Turning away from worldly pleasures  
And avoiding destructive actions  
Are said to be of middling capacity.
  
5. Those who, through their personal suffering,  
Truly want to end completely  
All the suffering of others  
Are persons of supreme capacity.

6. For those excellent living beings,  
Who desire supreme enlightenment,  
I shall explain the perfect methods  
Taught by the spiritual teachers.
  
7. Facing paintings, statues and so forth  
Of the completely enlightened one,  
Reliquaries and the excellent teaching,  
Offer flowers, incense—whatever you have.
  
8. With the seven-part offering  
From the [Prayer of] Noble Conduct,  
With the thought never to turn back  
Till you gain ultimate enlightenment,
  
9. And with strong faith in the Three Jewels,  
Kneeling with one knee on the ground  
And your hands pressed together,  
First of all take refuge three times.
  
10. Next, beginning with an attitude  
Of love for all living creatures,  
Consider beings, excluding none,  
Suffering in the three bad rebirths,  
Suffering birth, death and so forth.
  
11. Then, since you want to free these beings  
From the suffering of pain,  
From suffering and the cause of suffering,  
Arouse immutably the resolve  
To attain enlightenment.



12. The qualities of developing  
Such an aspiration are  
Fully explained by Maitreya  
In the Array of Trunks Sutra.

13. Having learned about the infinite benefits  
Of the intention to gain full enlightenment  
By reading this sutra or listening to a teacher,  
Arouse it repeatedly to make it steadfast.

14. The Sutra Requested by Viradatta  
Fully explains the merit therein.  
At this point, in summary,  
I will cite just three verses.

15. If it possessed physical form,  
The merit of the altruistic intention  
Would completely fill the whole of space  
And exceed even that.

16. If someone were to fill with jewels  
As many buddha fields as there are grains  
Of sand in the Ganges  
To offer to the Protector of the World,

17. This would be surpassed by  
The gift of folding one's hands  
And inclining one's mind to enlightenment,  
For such is limitless.

18. Having developed the aspiration for enlightenment,  
Constantly enhance it through concerted effort.  
To remember it in this and also in other lives,  
Keep the precepts properly as explained.

19. Without the vow of the engaged intention,  
 Perfect aspiration will not grow.  
 Make effort definitely to take it,  
 Since you want the wish for enlightenment to grow.

20. Those who maintain any of the seven kinds  
 Of individual liberation vow  
 Have the ideal [prerequisite] for  
 The bodhisattva vow, not others.

21. The Tathagata spoke of seven kinds  
 Of individual liberation vow.  
 The best of these is glorious pure conduct,  
 Said to be the vow of a fully ordained person.

22. According to the ritual described in  
 The chapter on discipline in the Bodhisattva Stages,  
 Take the vow from a good

And well-qualified spiritual teacher.

23. Understand that a good spiritual teacher  
 Is one skilled in the vow ceremony,  
 Who lives by the vow and has  
 The confidence and compassion to bestow it.

24. However, in case you try but cannot  
 Find such a spiritual teacher,  
 I shall explain another  
 Correct procedure for taking the vow.

25. I shall write here very clearly, as explained  
 In the Ornament of Manjushri's Buddha Land Sutra,  
 How, long ago, when Manjushri was Ambaraja,  
 He aroused the intention to become enlightened.

26. "In the presence of the protectors,  
I arouse the intention to gain full enlightenment.  
I invite all beings as my guests  
And shall free them from cyclic existence.

27. "From this moment onwards  
Until I attain enlightenment,  
I shall not harbor harmful thoughts,  
Anger, avarice or envy.

28. "I shall cultivate pure conduct,  
Give up wrong-doing and desire  
And with joy in the vow of discipline  
Train myself to follow the buddhas.

29. "I shall not be eager to reach  
Enlightenment in the quickest way,  
But shall stay behind till the very end,  
For the sake of a single being.

30. "I shall purify limitless  
Inconceivable lands  
And remain in the ten directions  
For all those who call my name.

31. "I shall purify all my bodily  
And verbal forms of activity.  
My mental activities, too, I shall purify  
And do nothing that is non-virtuous."

32. When those observing the vow  
Of the active altruistic intention have trained well  
In the three forms of discipline, their respect  
For these three forms of discipline grows,

Which causes purity of body, speech and mind.

33. Therefore, through effort in the vow made by  
Bodhisattvas for pure, full enlightenment,  
The collections for complete enlightenment  
Will be thoroughly accomplished.

34. All buddhas say the cause for the completion  
Of the collections, whose nature is  
Merit and exalted wisdom,  
Is the development of higher perception.

35. Just as a bird with undeveloped  
Wings cannot fly in the sky,  
Those without the power of higher perception  
Cannot work for the good of living beings.

36. The merit gained in a single day  
By one who possesses higher perception  
Cannot be gained even in a hundred lifetimes  
By one without such higher perception.

37. Those who want swiftly to complete  
The collections for full enlightenment  
Will accomplish higher perception  
Through effort, not through laziness.

38. Without the attainment of calm abiding,  
Higher perception will not occur.  
Therefore make repeated effort  
To accomplish calm abiding.

39. While the conditions for calm abiding  
 Are incomplete, meditative stabilization  
 Will not be accomplished, even if one meditates  
 Strenuously for thousands of years.

40. Thus maintaining well the conditions mentioned  
 In the Collection for Meditative Stabilization Chapter,  
 Place the mind on any one  
 Virtuous focal object.

41. When the practitioner has gained calm abiding,  
 Higher perception will also be gained,  
 But without practice of the perfection of wisdom,  
 The obstructions will not come to an end.

42. Thus, to eliminate all obstructions  
 To liberation and omniscience,  
 The practitioner should continually cultivate  
 The perfection of wisdom with skillful means.

43. Wisdom without skillful means  
 And skillful means, too, without wisdom  
 Are referred to as bondage.  
 Therefore do not give up either.

44. To eliminate doubts concerning  
 What is called wisdom and what skillful means,  
 I shall make clear the difference  
 Between skillful means and wisdom.

45. Apart from the perfection of wisdom,  
 All virtuous practices such as  
 The perfection of giving are described  
 As skillful means by the Victorious Ones.

46. Whoever, under the influence of familiarity  
 With skillful means, cultivates wisdom  
 Will quickly attain enlightenment—  
 Not just by meditating on selflessness.
47. Understanding emptiness of inherent existence  
 Through realizing that the aggregates, constituents  
 And sources are not produced  
 Is described as wisdom.
48. Something existent cannot be produced,  
 Nor something non-existent, like a sky flower.  
 These errors are both absurd and thus  
 Both of the two will not occur either.
49. A thing is not produced from itself,  
 Nor from another, also not from both,  
 Nor causelessly either, thus it does not  
 Exist inherently by way of its own entity.
50. Moreover, when all phenomena are examined  
 As to whether they are one or many,  
 They are not seen to exist by way of their own entity,  
 And thus are ascertained as not inherently existent.
51. The reasoning of the Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness,  
 The Treatise on the Middle Way and so forth  
 Explain that the nature of all things  
 Is established as emptiness.
52. Since there are a great many passages,  
 I have not cited them here,  
 But have explained just their conclusions  
 For the purpose of meditation.

53. Thus, whatever is meditation  
 On selflessness, in that it does not observe  
 An inherent nature in phenomena,  
 Is the cultivation of wisdom.

54. Just as wisdom does not see  
 An inherent nature in phenomena,  
 Having analyzed wisdom itself by reasoning,  
 Non-conceptually meditate on that.

55. The nature of this worldly existence,  
 Which has come from conceptualization,  
 Is conceptuality. Thus the elimination of  
 Conceptuality is the highest state of nirvana.

56. The great ignorance of conceptuality  
 Makes us fall into the ocean of cyclic existence.  
 Resting in non-conceptual stabilization,  
 Space-like non-conceptuality manifests clearly.

57. When bodhisattvas non-conceptually contemplate  
 This excellent teaching, they will transcend  
 Conceptuality, so hard to overcome,  
 And eventually reach the non-conceptual state.

58. Having ascertained through scripture  
 And through reasoning that phenomena  
 Are not produced nor inherently existent,  
 Meditate without conceptuality.

59. Having thus meditated on suchness,  
 Eventually, after reaching "heat" and so forth,  
 The "very joyful" and the others are attained  
 And, before long, the enlightened state of buddhahood.

60. If you wish to create with ease  
 The collections for enlightenment  
 Through activities of pacification,  
 Increase and so forth, gained by the power of mantra,

61. And also through the force of the eight  
 And other great attainments like the “good pot”—  
 If you want to practice secret mantra,  
 As explained in the action and performance tantras,

62. Then, to receive the preceptor initiation,  
 You must please an excellent spiritual teacher  
 Through service, valuable gifts and the like  
 As well as through obedience.

63. Through the full bestowing of the preceptor initiation,  
 By a spiritual teacher who is pleased,  
 You are purified of all wrong-doing  
 And become fit to gain powerful attainments.

64. Because the Great Tantra of the Primordial Buddha  
 Forbids it emphatically,  
 Those observing pure conduct should not  
 Take the secret and wisdom initiations.

65. If those observing the austere practice of pure conduct  
 Were to hold these initiations,  
 Their vow of austerity would be impaired  
 Through doing that which is proscribed.

66. This creates transgressions that are a defeat  
 For those observing discipline.  
 Since they are certain to fall to a bad rebirth,  
 They will never gain accomplishments.



67. There is no fault if one who has received  
 The preceptor initiation and has knowledge  
 Of suchness listens to or explains the tantras  
 And performs burnt offering rituals,  
 Or makes offering of gifts and so forth.

68. I, the Elder Dipamkarashri, having seen it  
 Explained in sutra and in other teachings,  
 Have made this concise explanation  
 At the request of Jangchub Ö.

### Colophon

This concludes *A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, by the Acharya Dipamkara Shrijnana. It was translated, revised and finalized by the eminent Indian abbot himself and by the great reviser, translator and fully ordained monk Geway Lodrö. This teaching was written in the temple of Thöling in Zhang Zhung.

Translated by Ruth Sonam, Dharamsala, January 1997.

From The Essential Nectar, by Yeshe Tsondru

Now I have a good means, this opportune rebirth,  
and have met the Master and the Excellent Doctrine;  
but since to drive back the beginningless habits of the defilements is hard,  
up until now, I've had no hope of making this a permanent stronghold

There is no assurance I will not die today,  
and where I will be reborn is not in my control,  
and so I should think,  
if I were to fall again into the abyss of the realms of deprivation  
could I bear their sufferings even for a moment?

And, though I may win the rare, high state of a human or god,  
still, hundreds of sufferings,  
like birth, aging, sickness and death will torment me endlessly -  
since I shall fall again to an ill destiny,  
why should I place my trust in even a high status?

Having gained this favored, opportune birth, this time,  
and been received by an excellent Path-showing Guru,  
now, at last seeing samsara's faults and Nirvana's virtues,  
I must quickly free myself completely from this dreadful samsara

But liberating myself alone is not enough  
Since all these migrating beings, are also helplessly lost in samsara,  
I must free them all from samsara too

Seeing that apart from the Three Exalted Ones  
there is no refuge and helper who can free all sentient beings,  
myself and others,  
from this vast, endless ocean of suffering, therefore:

from this time forward, until the Perfection of Enlightenment is reached,  
I and all migrators, boundless like space,  
go for Refuge to the direct and lineage Gurus,  
We go for refuge to the Buddhas, the Revealers (of the Doctrine)  
We go for Refuge to the Dharma, of both scripture and insight  
and we go for Refuge to the Noble Sangha,  
the Great Assembly of Saints and Bodhisattvas

Verses 11-17, lightly edited

Alas, up until now in this samsara,  
I've circled like a bucket-wheel,  
mostly born in terrible states,  
without leisure or opportunity,  
not meeting with this excellent Path

Now that I've gained this fortunate rebirth,  
and been received by a holy Guru,  
after having met this supreme Path,  
to waste this chance would be a great loss

Therefore I'll cast aside activities that are for this life alone,  
as a snake sheds its skin,  
and, striving in this most excellent Path,  
day and night,  
I will realize its purpose

Through the virtue thus produced,  
from here on, in all my lives,  
may I not separate from the Dharma,  
and may all beings be freed by this Path!

From The Eighth Dalai Lama's Prayer

This precious human body is an ornament with every beauty.  
 May I live in awareness of its precious nature -  
 How it is hard to obtain and is easily lost -  
 And, never distracted by the superficial things of this life,  
 Always strive to realize its purpose.

Body, possessions, and even cherished friends and dear ones  
 Are illusory, like the objects of a dream.  
 May I maintain awareness of how they are impermanent and illusory,  
 And always live as though at the threshold of death.

May I arouse the mind that is apprehensive of the sufferings  
 Of the three lower realms of rebirth most difficult to bear,  
 {and with faith in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha,  
 Take Refuge}  
 May I then be inspired to train in the ways of karmic law,  
 thus gaining freedom from lower rebirth forever.

No matter where one wanders in the three worlds -  
 From the highest heaven to the lowest of hells -  
 One finds only all-pervading dissatisfaction.  
 Therefore, may I transcend it all and find  
 That firm ground of liberation and spiritual joy.

All living beings throughout the six realms  
 who are not freed, are subject to suffering  
 Therefore may I cultivate the ways of the great bodhisattvas  
 And place each one of them on the path of liberation and enlightenment.

## From The Life of Milarepa

Having begun in this manner with the Song of the Sevenfold Devotions, I, your humble follower, wish to express my feeble understanding, made possible by the perfect action and power of spiritual influence arising from the boundless compassion of the lama (who is inseparable from the Buddha Vajradhara) together with the mother and son, and the deep gratitude I owe them.

Please listen to me out of the unchanging state of your mind. I have understood that this material body, made of flesh and blood along with mental consciousness, is gathered together by the twelve links of cause and effect- one of which is volition- originating from ignorance. This body is the blessed vessel for those fortunate beings who wish for freedom, but it also leads sinners into the lower realms.

I understand that in this body lies the vital choice between enormous profit and loss, relating to eternal happiness or misery on the border between good and evil. Relying upon your power of compassion as the venerable guide of sentient beings, I am hopefully endeavoring to achieve liberation from the ocean of existential bondage, from which escape is very difficult.

Having first sought refuge in the Three Jewels and having scrupulously observed the precepts, I understand that the source of all happiness is the lama, and therefore the first principle is to fulfill all his instructions and maintain, unblemished, a spiritual bond with him.

Furthermore, a fortunate human existence is a state difficult to acquire. By rousing the mind with great intensity regarding impermanence and death, the consequences of action, and the pain of samsara, one develops a longing for liberation and must pursue it through the observance of moral precepts. Such is the foundation upon which one must build.

From this point, progressively ascending the Path, it is necessary to observe one's vows as carefully as one guards one's eyes. Even in failure, remedies must be employed.

By not seeking one's own liberation on the path of the Lesser Vehicle, one develops Bodhicitta (enlightened mind), which seeks to work toward the liberation of all sentient beings. It is my understanding that the development of an enlightened attitude leads one to rededicate, for the good of all, the fruit of one's action, born of love and compassion.

'In order to embrace the path of the Greater Vehicle, one abandons the path of the Lesser Vehicle. Based upon the foundation of perfect seeing, he enters the supreme path of Vajrayana.

'In order to achieve perfect seeing one needs a perfect master who knows how to transmit fully and unerringly the four aspects of initiation and skillfully explain the hidden meaning with compassion. Initiation awakens one to ultimate reality and from then onwards one meditates through all the various stages of the Path.

Having endeavored to discover the non-selfhood of personality, which is common to all exoteric traditions, one examines the self by means of logic, the teaching, and analogies and, not finding the self, one understands selflessness. One must then bring the mind into a quiet state. When the mind is calmed by means of such reasoning, discriminating thought ceases and mind reaches a non-conceptual state. If one continues in this state for days, months, and years, so oblivious to the passing of time that one needs to be reminded of it by others, one has achieved tranquility of mind.

'This state of tranquility is maintained by means of continued attention and awareness, not allowing it to become distracted or to sink into passivity. Intensified by the force of awareness, one experiences pure consciousness without differentiation- naked, vivid, and crisp. These are the characteristics of tranquility of mind.

Pure consciousness may be regarded as a flash of perfect insight; individuals do not actually experience it until they reach the first stage of Enlightenment. At this stage, one meditates, visualizing the forms of the yidam. In doing so one may experience visions and forms, but these are devoid of substance and are merely products of meditation.

To sum up: First, a vivid state of mental tranquility and a sustaining energy together with a discerning intellect are indispensable requirements for attaining perfect insight. They are like the first steps of a staircase.

Second, all meditation, with or without form, must begin from deeply aroused compassion and love. Whatever one does must emerge from a loving attitude for the benefit of others.

Third, through perfect seeing, all discrimination is dissolved into a non-conceptual state.

Finally, with an awareness of the void, one sincerely dedicates the results for the benefits of others. I have understood this to be the best of all ways.

Just as a starving man cannot be fed by the knowledge of food but needs to eat, so too one needs to experience in meditation the meaning of emptiness. I understand more particularly that in order to arrive at perfect insight, it is necessary to practice meritorious deeds and self-purification, without respite, in the intervals between meditations.

In short, I saw that this meditator's understanding of the emptiness of things, of their unity, of their indefinability, and of their non-differentiation corresponds to the four aspects of initiation according to Vajrayana.

In order to make this knowledge manifest in myself, I subdued by body, deprived it of food, harnessed my mind, and achieved equanimity in the face of all circumstances including the danger of death.



I have not come before the lama and the mistress, my father and mother of unsurpassable goodness, to repay them with services and riches. But I offer the best I shall be capable of attaining in my practice of meditation as long as I shall live, and I ask them to accept the ultimate understanding that I shall attain in the palace of Ogmin.

## The Prayer of the Graduated Path

A Guru Yoga Prayer from *The Inseparability of the Spiritual Master and Avalokiteshvara*, by His Holiness The Dalai Lama

*Bestow on me your blessings to be devoted to my master  
With the purest thoughts and actions, gaining confidence that you,  
O compassionate holy master, are the basis of temporary  
and everlasting bliss,  
For you elucidate the true path free from all deception  
And embody the totality of refuges past number.*

*Bestow on me your blessings to live a life of Dharma  
Undistracted by the illusory preoccupations of this life,  
For well I know that these pleasures and endowments  
Can never be surpassed by countless treasures of vast wealth,  
And that this precious form once attained cannot endure,  
For at any moment of time it may easily be destroyed.*

*Bestow on me your blessings to cease actions of non-virtue  
And accomplish wholesome deeds, by being always mindful  
Of the causes and effects from kind and harmful acts,  
While revering the Three Precious Jewels as the ultimate source  
of refuge  
And most trustworthy protection from the unendurable fears  
of unfortunate rebirth states.*

*Bestow on me your blessings to practice the three  
higher trainings (23)  
Motivated by firm renunciation gained from the clear  
comprehension  
That even the prosperity of the lord of the devas (24)  
Is merely a deception, like a siren's alluring spell.*

*Bestow on me your blessings to master the oceans of practice,  
Cultivating immediately the supreme enlightened motivation,  
By reflecting on the predicament of all mother sentient beings,  
Who have nourished me with kindness from beginningless time  
And now are tortured while ensnared within one extreme or other,  
Either on the wheel of suffering or in tranquil liberation.*

*Bestow on me your blessings to generate the yoga  
Combining mental quiescence with penetrative insight  
In which the hundred-thousand-fold splendor of voidness,  
forever free from both extremes (25)  
Reflects without obstruction in the clear mirror  
of the immutable meditation.*

*Bestow on me your blessings to observe in strict accordance  
All the vows and words of honor that form the root  
of powerful attainments,  
Having entered through the gate of the extremely profound tantra  
By the kindness of my all-proficient master.*

*Bestow on me your blessings to attain within this lifetime  
The blissful mahamudra of the union of body and wisdom (26)  
Through severing completely my all-creating karmic energy  
With wisdom's sharp sword of the non-duality of bliss  
and emptiness (27)*

\* \* \*

23. The three higher trainings are ethics (shila), meditative concentration (samadhi), and discriminating wisdom (prajna).

24. Even Indra, the lord of the devas, will one day expend the accumulation of virtuous actions that cause him to hold one of the highest positions within the six realms of cyclic existence, and he too will fall into a lower realm.

25. The two extremes are the beliefs in either true self-existence or nonexistence. The middle way (madhyamaka) shows a path that is neither of these.

26. The Great Seal (mahamudra, chagya chenpo) of the union of body and wisdom is the unity of the clear light and the illusory body. The illusory body is the finest physical body, a combination of energy (vayu, lung) and consciousness. The clear light is the wisdom of the non-duality of bliss and voidness.

27. The non-duality of bliss and voidness is the bliss of the direct understanding of voidness.

These fortunate circumstances  
are so difficult to obtain,  
and are so easily lost

All our unfinished work will have to be continued  
at some time in the future,  
and Lord have mercy,  
we will surely carry these causes with us,  
until they are resolved

But a Supreme Teacher has shown us all the Path to freedom,  
and it that has been followed successfully  
by our incomparably kind, Noble Spiritual Friends

May we all follow the sacred teachings,  
and in this very life  
bring all of our aims,  
for ourselves and all others,  
to completion

## A Summary of the Stages of the Path Teachings, with Notes

### Introduction

I originally set out to write down just a few thoughts on the Tradition of the Lam Rim, or Stages of the Path teachings from Tibetan Buddhism, as I now understand them. My intention was to have just a page or two to refer to as a glance meditation, that touched briefly on the main points. It seems I had a bit more I wanted to say, and so, after a day or two of writing, I had, instead, a longer essay.

Still wanting to have a brief summary of these precious teachings, I went through the longer article, and selected a few passages to set on a page separately. These turned out to be, essentially, what I had sketched in the first place on a piece of paper.

The idea of pairing notes, and a more extensive explanation, such as is found in an entire book, is that these two forms of the same teachings can potentially complement, and reinforce each other. After reading a longer commentary, when a person then looks at a verse summary, he or she can have a better idea of what's being referred to. Both can then be helpful in reflecting and meditating on these themes.

For this reason, I would like to offer both of these writings in the pages that follow. The concise form, called 'A Summary of the Stages of the Path Teachings', is presented here as Part I, and the essay, called 'An Overview of the Stages of the Path', as Part II.

May it be beneficial.

## Part I

### A summary of the Stages of the Path Teachings

'Three sets of causes, with three results'

*Taking Refuge, becoming liberated,  
and enlightened, all arise due to causes,  
and we should know what these are.*

#### I. Entering the Buddhist Path

We all have Buddha Nature, which is the innate potential to have happiness, to become liberated, and enlightened. Our spiritual teachers help us to know this, our true nature. Remembering their wisdom and their great kindness naturally awakens reverence, gratitude, faith, and devotion.

Following their guidance, we then reflect on the subjects of:

the rarity and preciousness of this human life we have now;

the reality of death and continuation;

both the evident and the hidden sufferings of samsara, or unenlightened existence,

cause and effect, including teachings on ethics and purification

and,

the qualities of the Three Jewels.

Seeking safety and having faith comes from this.

Thinking about these, and remembering the dangers of samsara; out of real love and compassion for ourselves and others, wanting to be safe and to have health and happiness, now and in the future, both for our own sake, and for the sake of others,

and having faith in the Buddha as our Teacher, the Dharma as our Path, and Noble Sangha as our Spiritual Companions, *these are the causes, and the result is taking refuge* from our heart. From this follows the inestimable benefits of safety, joy and peace, and well being that are the basis for all subsequent attainments.

## II. Entering the Path to Complete Freedom from Suffering

We can then add to the factors covered so far the knowledge that all of samsara, or ego-centered, unenlightened existence is suffering, and the way that liberation is possible.

Understanding this on an intellectual, or an experiential level, even briefly, believing in the possibility of liberation, and not wanting to suffer any more, *these are the causes* for the motivation to be completely and permanently free of samsara to arise naturally in the mind, and the unified practice of the Three Higher Trainings, of Ethics, Meditation and Wisdom, *and the result, which is liberation.*

## III. Entering the Mahayana directly– the Path of Universal Benefit

In addition to the above realizations, when one adds great love and compassion for all that lives, together with the thought that enlightenment is both possible, and is the highest good for all, so greatly needed in these times, *these are the causes* for the bodhisattva motivation, which is the aim to become a Buddha in order to bring the greatest benefit to all sentient beings, and the practice of the Perfections, *and the result, which is enlightenment.*



## Part II

An Overview of the Stages of the Path Teachings - Notes on 'Three sets of causes, with three results'

*'Let's shift now to the spiritual domain, where the aim is to increase an experiential awareness of different virtuous minds, by repeatedly contemplating the various reasons that will elicit them... What you must do here is contemplate over and over again the most penetrating of scriptural citations and arguments, and in particular those arguments that are the most effective for eliciting a spiritual transformation within your mind.'*

- from How to Meditate on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment, by Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo

A summary of the Stages of the Path Teachings

**'Three sets of causes, with three results'  
Taking Refuge, becoming liberated,  
and enlightened, all arise due to causes,  
and we should know what these are.**

### I. Entering the Buddhist Path

Since there are a number of different presentations of the Stages of the Path Teachings, particularly in the order of the introductory elements, I thought it would be useful for my mind to be as clear as I can about this most important subject, and to write out the way of thinking about it that makes the most practical sense to me. I have called the following outline 'three sets of causes, with three results'.

The different arrangements of the Lam Rim, or Stages of the Path all have the same themes for meditation, with only a change in emphasis, or of sequence setting them apart from each other. All refer, in one way or

another, to what is sometimes called '*the working basis*' – and these I identify as follows:

**We all have Buddha Nature, which is the innate potential to have happiness, to become liberated, and enlightened.**

and

**Our spiritual teachers help us to know this, our true nature. Remembering their wisdom and their great kindness naturally awakens deep reverence, gratitude, faith, and devotion.**

These are ever-present factors throughout the teachings, and they exist and appear throughout the various trainings again and again, sometimes more implicit, and sometimes more vividly, tangibly manifest, and cherished.

I compare the working basis to having good earth. I imagine that a mature farmer, seeing fine earth, in a good climate, would feel real joy, knowing that anything could be planted there, and yield a rich harvest.

In the same way, we have this ground, with the potential for genuine, stable happiness, health and peace. We live in a world at a time when wise and compassionate teachers have lived and taught, and their teachings are available. This is like having good earth, and good seeds.

Books and talks are available, and the living examples of wholeness, balance, serenity and joy of our teachers is evident. See: Lama Yeshe, Thich Nhat Hanh, Bokar Rinpoche, the Karmapa, Tsultrik Rinpoche, Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche, Lama Zopa, Mattieu Ricard, Ani Tenzin Palmo, Ringu Tulku, Tulku Urgyen, The Dali Lama, Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche, Lama Lodro Rinpoche, and others.

But many people do not know what we have by nature, and by virtue of living in these times. On our part, we have to see what we have, so we can

begin to recognize the work-ability of our situation here, have enthusiasm for practice, and confidence that good can come from it.

I imagine a sign outside a storefront where someone is giving a talk – the sign says, ‘this way to happiness’. Many people would walk by, and some others would maybe just poke their head in for a minute or two, with only mild curiosity. Others may stay a while and listen to what is being said, with more or less interest.

For those who are interested, there are different kinds of motivation for listening to teachings on how to find happiness in this life. After touching on the working basis that we each share, all that follows now in the Stages of the Path teachings can be heard by listeners in different ways, depending on what a person brings to it. I thought it might be useful to mention this just briefly here. I will come back to this point, in the section I’ll call ‘cycling through the teachings’.

In this outline, ‘three sets of causes, with three results’ – I’m thinking of themes that a person either reflects on in an ordered way, following a body of teachings, or has come across in their own life, which give rise to a result for that person, in their own mind and heart.

One of the appeals, for me, of the Stages of the Path teachings, has been that it doesn’t seem to be imposing an order on things from the outside, but that, teachers like Atisha, and Lama Tsong Khapa, Gampopa and Patrul Rinpoche are identifying how things work when a person enters any spiritual path, and progresses on it. There is a natural order unfolding here, that I think the authors and teachers of the Lam Rim tradition are referencing. Salutations!

The first set of causes, let us say 4 or 5, are there in the second set, with some added, and then, the first and second set of causes are there in the third as well, again with some added. This will make more sense, hopefully, in a moment.

So, back to my imagined example. A person, let's say, can be hearing the following introductory themes for reflection, in a talk titled from the outside, 'this way to happiness' for the first time. After the working ground we all share is referenced by the teacher, either briefly, or more thoroughly

**Following their guidance, we then reflect on the subjects of:  
the rarity and preciousness of this human life we have now;  
the reality of death and continuation;  
both the evident and the hidden sufferings of samsara,  
or unenlightened existence,  
cause and effect, including teachings on ethics and purification,  
and,  
the qualities of the Three Jewels.**

Fundamental ethics here can include the Five Precepts: not to kill, not to steal, not to engage in sexual conduct that brings harm, not to lie, and not to take intoxicants.

They can also be framed as the Ten Wholesome ways of acting: three of body: not to kill, but to protect life; not to steal, but to respect the rights and property of others, and to give generously; and not to cause harm in the area of our sexual relationships, but to respect the relationships and dignity of others;

four of speech: not to lie, but to speak truthfully, not to engage in harsh speech, but to speak gently, not to gossip or engage in meaningless chatter, but to speak meaningfully, and not to cause division with our words, but to refrain from doing so, and to seek to reconcile differences, wherever possible;

and three of mind: to be without anger, cultivating a mind that is loving and kind, to be without greed or possessiveness, but instead to have a mind that is non-attached, and generous, and to become free of ignorance, that is, to develop wisdom.

The teachings on how either suffering or well being arise due to our actions goes all the way to the root of these processes, as described, for example, in the teachings that's called the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination. Hearing even this much is enough to give rise to any of the different results that can come from interest in, and engagement in a spiritual path.

For clarity's sake however, let's say that a person is really hearing this and having it touch their heart for the first time. The result could be one of both fear – of having an uncontrolled life, and the potentially endless suffering of it, and simultaneously, of faith that the Buddhas and Enlightened Teachers are offering a way out of suffering, are offering a way to far greater peace, health and happiness. Having heard this much, with faith that, as the teaching by Lama Tsong Khapa says,

*'there is no assurance that, after this life,  
the lower realms do not await you,  
but the Three Jewels do have the power  
to protect you from them'*

**Seeking safety and having faith comes from this.**

**Thinking about these, and remembering the dangers of samsara; out of real love and compassion for ourselves and others, wanting to be safe and to have health and happiness, now and in the future, both for our own sake, and for the sake of others,**

**and having faith in the Buddha as our Teacher, the Dharma as our Path, and Noble Sangha as our Spiritual Companions, *these are the causes, and the result is taking refuge* from our heart. From this follows the inestimable benefits of safety, joy and peace, and well being that are the basis for all subsequent attainments.**

When a person takes refuge, it means that they look to the Buddha as their teacher, the collection of teachings known as the Dharma as the path they

aim to follow, and the Noble Sangha as support, guidance and encouragement on the way.

Taking refuge can be done formally, with lines expressing this change of orientation from life-before, as in

*I take refuge in the Buddha  
I take refuge in the Dharma  
and  
I take refuge in the Sangha*

The essential thing, however, whether the words are spoken or a formal commitment is made, is the rising of the motivation in a person, to follow this path to happiness.

With faith and devotion, we receive the teachings deeply, and aim to put them into practice. We receive ever-fresh guidance, and methods that purify, lift up, and stabilize our lives.

The first of the benefits of taking Refuge, with all that entails, is more happiness, now and in the future, or higher rebirth. Higher rebirth here can mean that even just within this lifetime, one goes from happiness to greater and greater happiness health and peace, because the basis is there, and the causes are being cultivated. That is the first set of causes, and the first result on the spiritual path, that of taking Refuge, as taught in the Stages of the Path.

When one is introduced to Buddhist teachings, there is usually also an introduction to basic methods of meditation, for the sake of calming the mind, and for developing such qualities within ourselves as peace, patience, loving kindness and compassion, sympathetic joy and an impartiality of kindness.

These practices support an ethical way life, and our living in harmony with others. Calm meditation and the development of positive states don't, however, put a complete end to our confusion and afflictive emotions. At best, they can only temporarily attenuate these difficulties. To become genuinely free from suffering, the Buddhist teachings tell us, we need to cultivate insight.

## **II. Entering the Path to Complete Freedom from Suffering**

Some presentations of the Stages of the Path teachings divide the description of the sufferings of six realms of samsara into two parts: the three lower realms –the hell, hungry ghost and animal realms, and three upper realms, of human life, the devas, and the gods.

Describing rebirth in the lower realms, or states of being as a possibility, as long as one is under the influence of strong negative karma, people are encouraged to take refuge, take up the path, and protect themselves from this happening.

**We can then add to the factors covered so far, the teaching that points out that all of samsara, or ego-centered, unenlightened existence is suffering, and the way that liberation is possible.**

The range of what's covered here goes from 'the tip of samsara' – the highest happiness possible in what are called the God realms, to the lowest states. It's pointed out that *all* of this is unsatisfactory, in that there is no lasting peace, or comfort, or safety, as long as one is under the influence of karma and the delusions. Fortunately for all of us, there is a way out.

**Understanding these on an intellectual level, or an experiential level, even briefly, when these seem viable to a person, believing in the possibility of liberation, and not wanting to suffer any more, *these are the causes* for the motivation to be completely and permanently free of**

**samsara to arise naturally in the mind, and the unified practice of the Three Higher Trainings, of Ethics, Meditation and Wisdom, and the result which is liberation.**

Because we we all want the greatest happiness for ourselves, this is only natural.

As in the first case, I don't divide the path leading to an end from the result itself. My reason for thinking this way is that I have the conviction that, once a person is set on a goal, taking the steps to that outcome follow naturally. We can even say that, in a way, they are contained in the motivation itself.

Even dividing motivation and result is just to clarify the path that most of us find ourselves on. When we have clear goals, and persistence, we will eventually reach our destination. This much I have confidence in.

### **III. Entering the Mahayana directly– the Path of Universal Benefit**

*Just as I have fallen into the sea of samsara,  
so have all mother migratory beings.  
Bless me to see this, train in supreme bodhicitta,  
and bear the responsibility of freeing migratory beings.*

- from The Foundation of All Good Qualities, by Lama Je Tsong Khapa

*May I always cherish all beings,  
with the determination to accomplish for them the highest good,  
that is more precious  
than a wish-fulfilling jewel*

- from the Eight Verses on Training the Mind



*The moment even one,  
fettered and weak in the prison of cyclic existence,  
engenders this thought  
to become a Buddha,  
he becomes a Son of the Sugatas,  
and will be revered by both men and gods of the world*

- from A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, by Shantideva

**In addition to the above realizations, when one adds great love and compassion for all that lives, together with the thought that enlightenment is both possible, and is the highest good, so greatly needed in these times, *these are the causes* for the bodhisattva motivation, which is the aim to become a Buddha in order to bring the greatest benefit to all living beings, and the practice of the Perfections, *and the result is enlightenment.***

This motivation can, and most often is produced before one has attained states of freedom through calm and insight meditation. For this reason, I refer in this case to 'entering the Mahayana directly'. The elements of great love, great compassion, and the joyful willingness to work on behalf of others, to bring them happiness, can then be there in all a person does, in all their interactions and in all their spiritual practices.

The alternative to entering the Mahayana directly is to first become free oneself, to some extent, more and more, right up to complete liberation itself, and then, at any point, to take up the Mahayana motivation and cultivate also this all inclusive method side of the path.

All people need wisdom in their lives, and not only the kind that is just common sense, or book learning. More specifically, they need insight into their own nature, in order to become free of not only problems and suffering, but the cause of these as well.

Furthermore, the heart cannot be content with just getting oneself free. As human beings, we need to care for one another, and the path that fulfills this aim, to care for each other well, is one of both love for all others, and the knowledge of freedom.

The person who is in the best position to point these things out to others is clearly someone who has realized them him or herself. Hence, out of love and compassion for others, and understanding the path, the bodhisattva vow arises, which is both the aim and the activities undertaken to become awakened in order to be of the most benefit to others. This is expressed both by wish,

*'May I become a Buddha,  
and bring all others to that same state',  
and by the actions producing this result*

and the actions that follow.

The Traditional verse for taking refuge and generating bodhicitta is

*I take refuge in the Buddha,  
the Dharma and the Sangha  
By the merit I have accumulated  
by practicing Generosity and other Virtues,  
May I become a Buddha,  
in order to benefit all sentient beings*

The phrase, Generosity and other Virtues, refer to the Six Perfections - Generosity, Ethics, Patience, Joyful Effort, Meditation, and Wisdom; in an earlier transmission of the Perfections, when they are referred to as the Paramis, those of Renunciation, Loving Kindness, Truthfulness, and Aspiration are added.

For me, this is the most fulfilling, and the most comfortable path.

Wisdom deserves special mention here. It is an essential point in Buddhism, and the culmination of all the teachings.

Following the Nalanda tradition, and the way of meditation taught in the Gelugpa lineage, we first investigate what we take to be a self. Seeing through our projections and imaginings, we arrive at a freedom beyond the ego. This can be said in one line, but it takes a good deal of study and and then looking into our own experience, along with deep and clear meditation to gain the result of Buddhist Wisdom practice. This accords with the way liberation taught in the Pali canon.

Another approach to freedom and peace is by the direct experience of the nature of mind. This is what is taught in Zen, as well as in the Great Perfection and Mahamudra lineages of Tibetan Buddhism.

Cycling through the teachings

I can imagine two other people happening on this same talk being given, bringing with them different backgrounds than the first person mentioned. I can imagine someone who's heard and connected with these teachings, or ones similar to them, or who has thought through many of these same things, and is at the point where they see the possibility, and feel the urgent necessity in their own life of gaining freedom from suffering.

If such a person then enters at one point, and hears, for example, the theme of the preciousness of this human opportunity, it can fire him to take advantage of this chance now, while they can, to make progress on the path to liberation.

Another person walking by, can come into the same teaching, at the same point, but bring with them the motivation to work to bring true and lasting health and happiness to all others, by themselves becoming a fully capable being, a Buddha, 'free of all faults and complete in all qualities', as the scriptures describe. Such a person, hearing the same teaching on this

precious human life we now have, can feel that, 'yes, this day, this hour is most precious, because of what can be done with it – I can use it to alleviate suffering, and bring temporal and ultimate happiness to as many as I can!' The same differences can be found, again, depending on what's already there in the individual mind and heart of the listener, in response to each of the themes that came before, on Buddha Nature, and devotion to our teachers; death and rebirth, and the suffering of samsara, cause and effect, and the efficacy of refuge.

Hearing about and reflecting on these can have the effect of either bringing a new motivation to a person's mind, or of enhancing, in the sense of empowering, further clarifying, and strengthening the motivation and the practice of the path.

Although they are introductory teachings for someone who's never heard them before, as we go over them again, and reflect on them, our knowledge about the truth of these subjects can deepen, and can be a continuing source of inspiration to us on the path.

I've heard, in a couple of different contexts, that it's not the later, more developed teachings and practices that are all that deep, but the introductory themes – what we share with everyone – that are so profound to think on. The more we look into them, the more we can see how they are really effective for transforming our mind.

In the Stages of the Path teachings, then, we get to be gently reminded that we don't just go through these first subjects once, like checking something off a list, and moving on to other things. Reflecting on these themes, again, and again, and developing our understanding and awareness of them, in fact, remains throughout our life as a foundation. This is the basis for everything else that follows – the seeking, and strengthening of one's sense of refuge, the thought of getting free and the path of liberation, and the motivation and practices that bring enlightenment. It's like when we water the roots of a tree – the leaves, flowers and fruits all flourish.

There are two ways that having a clear sense of the path factors can be beneficial. The first is that we can then choose to reflect on, nourish and reinforce those factors that strengthen the motivation that is most meaningful for us, or the one that we want to move towards, and develop more and more in our life, such as the sense of having a secure refuge.

Secondly, we can use our sense of the goal we have in mind as a reference point, to encourage and empower us, wherever we are, day by day, hour by hour. We can use that aim of ours to make our way most skillfully.

I imagine it being like a person making his or her way through a crowded bazaar. If they know where they are going, they can navigate the twists and turns, never losing sight for long of where they want to go. They can even find shortcuts, based on that clarity of vision.

*May all beings find a path suitable to their needs and interests,  
May they follow it skillfully,  
and swiftly attain the full result of their practice!*

With faith in Buddha Nature  
and heartfelt gratitude to my spiritual teachers,  
I reflect on the Four Thoughts,  
and on the qualities of the Three Jewels  
Take refuge,  
and aim for liberation, the happiness beyond samsara;

I meditate on the Four Immeasurables,  
generate the Awakening Mind,  
and practice the Perfections,  
with prayer, mantra, visualization, and samadhi;

I meditate on the Nature of Mind,  
and dedicate the merit.

Practice in Stages, by Geshe Acharya Thubten Loden, from *The Path to Enlightenment in Tibetan Buddhism*

Practice in Stages. While meditating on the lower subjects, the aspirations for higher subjects should be strengthened. While listening to the teachings on the higher subjects, your intention to practice the lower ones should also be strengthened. If it goes like this, you are practicing properly. On the other hand, if, while listening to higher teachings, your interest in the lower ones wanes, you will end up practicing in a vacuum, with no proper basis or support.

If your guru devotion weakens, resort strongly to reflecting on the benefits of guru devotion, and generate a clear view of how it is the root of the path.

If your aspiration for the Dharma weakens, you must focus on the aspects of leisure and fortune to discern clearly the purpose and real value of your life.

If you succumb to strong attachment to the allurements of the pleasures of this life, focus your attention on impermanence to dispel this attitude.

Becoming neglectful of your vows indicates indifference to the results of actions, so direct yourself to the study of karma.

If your revulsion toward cyclic existence is weak, discussing liberation is mere words. You must reflect again and again on the disadvantages of cyclic existence.

If you lack a strong compulsion to benefit others, you have severed the root of the Mahayana, so you must direct yourself to the contemplation of bodhicitta and its basis - great compassion.

If, having taken the bodhisattva vows and engaged in the Perfections, you find that your mind strongly adheres to appearances as real, you must direct your attention to contemplating space-like emptiness, and see all that appears as like an illusion. Focus on the non-dual nature of appearances and emptiness.

If your mind continues to wander uncontrollably from the virtuous object of meditation and remains a slave to the objects of the senses, emphasize calm abiding to bring it under control.

Take each subject from guru devotion to special insight and make it your meditation object for a week at a time. Then start over once more at the beginning and repeat the cycle again and again. In this way you will progressively deepen your understanding of each subject, while, at the same time, keep the whole path in mind.



## A Summary of the Stages of Meditation

An Extract from the Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment,

by Lama Je Tsongkhapa

Now I will give a brief summation of the general meaning of the path.

At the outset, the root of the path derives from your reliance upon a teacher, so consider this seriously.

Then, once you have developed an uncontrived desire to take advantage of your leisure, this desire will spur you to practise continually. Therefore, in order to develop this, meditate on the topics connected with leisure and opportunity.

Unless you then stop the various sentiments which seek the aims of this life, you will not diligently seek the aims of future lives. So, work at meditating on how the body you have is impermanent in the sense that it will not last for long, and on how, after death, you will wander in the miserable realms.

At that time, by creating a genuine awareness which is mindful of the horrors of the miserable realms, build certainty from the depths of your heart about the qualities of the three refuges.

Be constant in the common vow of going for refuge and train in its precepts.

Then, from a range of perspectives develop faith, in the sense of conviction, in karma and its effects - this being the great foundation of all positive qualities. Make this faith firm.

Strive to cultivate the ten virtues and to turn away from the ten non-virtues and always stay within the path of the four powers.

When you have thus trained well in the teachings associated with a person of small capacity and have made this practice firm, you should contemplate often the general and specific faults of cyclic existence, and in general, turn your mind away from cyclic existence as much as you can.

Then, having identified the nature of karma and the afflictions- the causes from which cyclic existence arises- create an authentic desire to eliminate them.

Develop broad certainty about the path that liberates you from cyclic existence, i.e., the three trainings, and particularly make effort at whichever of the vows of individual liberation you have taken.

When you have thus trained well in the teachings associated with a person of medium capacity and have made this practice firm, consider the fact that just as you yourself have fallen into the ocean of cyclic existence, so have all beings, your mothers.

Train in the spirit of enlightenment which is rooted in love and compassion, and strive to develop this as much as you can. Without it, the practices of the six perfections and the two stages are like stories built on a house with no foundation.

When you develop a little experience of this spirit of enlightenment, confirm it with the rite.

By making effort in this training, make the aspiration as solid as you can.

Then study the great waves of the Bodhisattva deeds, learning the boundaries of what to discard and what to adopt, and make a strong wish to train in those Bodhisattva deeds.

After you have developed these attitudes, take the vow of the engaged spirit of enlightenment through its rite.

Train in the six perfections that mature your own mind and the four ways of gathering disciples which mature the minds of others.

In particular, risk your life in making a great effort to avoid the root infractions. Strive not to be tainted by the small and intermediate contaminants and faults, and even if you are tainted, work to repair it.

Then, because you must train specifically in the final two perfections, become knowledgeable in the way to sustain meditative stabilization and then achieve concentration.

As much as you can, develop the view of the two selflessnesses, purity free from permanence and annihilation.

After you have found the view and stabilized your mind upon it, understand the proper way to sustain the view in meditation, and then do so.

Such stabilization and wisdom are called serenity and insight, but they are not something separate from the last two perfections.

Therefore, after you have taken the Bodhisattva vows, they come about in the context of the training in its precepts.

You have reached a critical point when, while meditating on the lower levels, you increasingly wish to attain the higher levels, and when studying the higher levels, your wish to practise the lower levels becomes stronger and stronger.

Some say to expend your energy only to stabilize your mind and to understand the view, ignoring all earlier topics, but this makes it very

difficult to get the vital points. *Therefore, you must develop certainty about the whole course of the path.*

When you meditate on these topics, train your understanding and then go back to balance your mind.

So, if it seems that your faith in the teacher who instructs you on the path is decreasing, since this will cut the root of everything good that has come together, work on the methods for relying on the teacher.

Similarly, if your joy in your practice loses strength, make meditation on the topics connected with leisure and opportunity your primary focus;

if your attachment to this life increases, make meditation on impermanence and the faults of the miserable realms your primary focus.

If you seem to be lazy about the proscriptions you have accepted, consider that your certainty about karmic cause and effect is meager and make meditation on karma and its effects your primary focus.

If your sense of disenchantment with all of cyclic existence decreases, your desire to seek liberation will become just words. Therefore, contemplate the faults of cyclic existence.

If your intention to benefit living beings in whatever you do is not strong, then you will sever the root of the Mahayana. Therefore, frequently cultivate the aspirational spirit of enlightenment together with its causes.

Once you have taken the vows of a conqueror's child and are training in the practices, if the bondage of the reifying conception of signs seems strong, use reasoning consciousness to destroy all objects which are apprehended by the mind which conceives of signs, and train your mind in the space-like and illusion-like emptiness.

If your mind is enslaved to distraction and does not remain on a virtuous object, you should primarily sustain one-pointed stability, as former teachers have said.

From these illustrations, you should understand the cases I have not explained.

In brief, without being partial, you have to be able to use the whole spectrum of virtues.

Among the stages of the path of a person of great capacity, I have explained how one who trains in the Bodhisattva path practises insight, which is wisdom.

After you have trained in this way in the paths common to both Sutra and Mantra, you must undoubtedly enter the Mantra path because it is very much more precious than any other practice and it quickly brings the two collections to completion.

If you are to enter it, then as Atisha's Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment says, you must first please the Guru-even to a greater extent than explained earlier-with deeds such as respect and service and with practice that is in accordance with the Guru's words. And you must do this for a Guru who meets at least the minimum qualifications of a teacher explained there.

Then, at the outset, your mind should be matured through the ripening initiation as explained in a source Tantra.

You should then listen to the pledges and vows to be taken, understand them, and maintain them.

If you are stricken by root infractions, you may make these commitments again. However, this greatly delays the development of the good qualities

of the path in your mind. Make a fierce effort not to be tainted by those root infractions.

Strive not to be tainted by the gross infractions, but in the event that you are tainted, use the methods for restoring your vows. Since these are the basis of the practice of the path, without them you will become like a dilapidated house whose foundation has collapsed.

Manjushri- Mula-Tantra (The Root Tantra of Manjushri) says, “The Master of the Sages does not say that faulty ethical discipline achieves the Tantric path,” meaning that those with faulty ethical discipline have none of the great, intermediate, or low attainments.

And it says in the Highest Yoga Tantra texts that those who do not maintain their vows, those who have inferior initiation, and those who do not understand reality do not achieve anything despite their practice.

Therefore, someone who talks about practising the path without maintaining the pledges and vows has completely strayed from the Tantric path.

In order to cultivate the Mantra path, someone who keeps the pledges and vows should, at the outset, meditate on the stage of generation, the complete divine wheel as explained from a source Tantra.

The unique object to be eliminated on the Tantric path is the conception of ordinariness which regards the aggregates, constituents and sensory sources as common.

It is the stage of generation itself that eliminates this and transforms the abodes, bodies and resources so that they appear as special.

The Conquerors and their children continually bless the person who clears away the conception of ordinariness in this way. Such a person easily brings

to completion the limitless collections of merit, thereby becoming a suitable vessel for the stage of completion.

This person should then meditate on what appears in the source Tantras on the stage of completion.

Neither the Tantras nor the scholars who explain their intended meaning hold that you should discard the first stage and merely classify it within the latter stage, training only in individual portions of the path.

Therefore, you must bear in mind the vital points of the two stages of the complete corpus of the path of Highest Yoga Tantra.

Considering only the terms, I have described a mere fraction of what is involved in entering the Mantra path. Therefore, understand this in detail by using works on the stages of the Mantra path.

If you train in this way, you will train in the entirely complete corpus of the path, which includes all the vital points of Sutra and Mantra. As a result, your attainment of leisure in this lifetime will have been worthwhile, and you will be able to extend the Conqueror's precious teaching within both your own and others' minds.

## Importance of Studying and Applying Lamrim in Daily Life

by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Practice mindfulness and the three principal aspects of the path to enlightenment - renunciation, bodhichitta, and right view. Then everything done with renunciation becomes the cause of liberation and does not become the cause of samsara. Then everything done with bodhichitta becomes the cause of enlightenment. Then with right view, everything becomes a remedy to samsara, a remedy to ignorance, which is the root of all your suffering, your samsara, the root of all your sufferings of samsara. It eliminates that; that's what you need.

If you don't like suffering, you have to put in effort to actualize emptiness, if you don't like suffering. If you don't like depression, if you don't like any suffering, even diarrhea, whatever you don't like, then you need to meditate on emptiness, and in particular you have to put effort into realizing emptiness. Study emptiness, all the extensive philosophy teachings, then lamrim, the essence, the short teachings, very important teachings.

You need to not only study - you leave it up to the intellect, you leave it up to the tape recorder, you invest so much information, you put in a tape recorder or computer - not like that. You invest in your brain so much information, but no practice, you only discuss, only to be an important professor - not like that. You need to *actualize*. So everything becomes practice, and through practice, you actualize. Everything becomes the antidote to your samsara, to your ignorance, which is the root of your samsara. So it eliminates the root of oceans of suffering of samsara. That's what you need. If you don't like suffering, you need to put effort in that. It's extremely worthwhile.

Not only that, not only to free yourself from oceans of suffering of samsara, not only that, but with the help of bodhichitta, you collect inconceivable,



inconceivable, inconceivable merits, with that support. Then with the wisdom realizing emptiness, you directly cease the obscuration, not only gross but subtle obscuration. Then you achieve enlightenment for sentient beings, and you are able to liberate all sentient beings from oceans of samsaric sufferings and bring everyone to buddhahood.

If you don't like suffering, if you have problems - a relationship problem, a problem with the family, with the husband, with the wife or children, with friends, whatever - you should know that. The antidote - to be free from the suffering of samsara - you need to be free from delusion and karma; you need to be free from ignorance, the root of samsara. So you need to meditate on emptiness. That is what you need.

Otherwise, your problems have no end. Then you rely on psychology. It has no end, relying on psychology or psychiatry. It has no end. Your going to hospital has no end; it's endless. Your going to hospital, having an operation on your brain, it's endless. It becomes endless. That is the nature of samsara.

When you have problems, think: "Oh, this is a sign that I'm in samsara. This shows me. This proves it to me. It is sign that I'm in samsara. So, oh, I need to be free from samsara, so then I should practice Dharma." It should have that as a conclusion. The conclusion you should come to is that.

To actualize Dharma, the heart of Buddhadharma - renunciation, bodhichitta, right view - you should come to the conclusion to practice lamrim. You should come to that conclusion, then that is the best.

You have something to do that is most worthwhile for you and every sentient being - every hell being, they are numberless, for everyone, to benefit every ant, every fish, every chicken, every goat, sheep, what we eat, to benefit every mosquito, every small ant, small flies, so tiny, but numberless, to everyone, to benefit, especially with bodhichitta, then, every human being, every sura being, every asura being, every intermediate state

being. Then instead of depression, you have so much happiness in life, because you know what to do, you know what you should do. *You know the meaning of life!*

*A Prayer for the Beginning, Middle, and End of Practice, by Je Tsong Khapa*

*I bow before the conquering buddhas, bodhisattvas, and arhats  
of all directions and of all times.*

*I offer this boundless prayer with the purest of minds to free  
countless beings from cycles of existence.*

*By the power of the unfailing Three Jewels  
And of great rishis possessed of the force of truth,  
May these sincere words bear fruit.*

*Life after life, may I never be born into realms  
Of great suffering or unfavorable circumstance,  
But gain always a precious human form  
Blessed with every conducive provision.*

*From the moment of birth may I never  
Be lured by the pleasures of existence,  
But, guided by renunciation intent on freedom,  
Be resolute in seeking the pure life.*

*May there be no hindrance to becoming a monk,  
From friends, family, or possessions,  
And for every conducive circumstance,  
By mere thought may it appear.*

*Once a monk, may I be untainted as long as I live,  
By breach of vow or natural fault, as promised in the presence of  
my preceptor.*

*I pray that on such pure foundation,  
And for every mother sentient being,  
I devote myself with hardship for countless eons  
To every aspect, profound and vast, of the Mahayana.*

*May I be cared for by true spiritual friends,  
Filled with knowledge and insight,  
Senses stilled, minds controlled, loving, compassionate,  
And with courage untiring in working for others.*

*As Sada Prarudita devoted himself to Dharma Arya,  
May I sincerely please my spiritual master  
With body, life, and wealth,  
Never disappointing him for an instant.*

*I pray that the Perfection of Wisdom, forever profound,  
A bringer of peace, unbound by identification,  
Be taught to me as taught to Sada Prarudita,*

*Unsullied by the muddy waters of false views.  
May I never fall under the sway  
Of false teachers and misleading friends,  
Their flawed views of existence and nonexistence  
Well outside the Buddha's intention.*

*With sail hoisted of the sincerest of minds,  
Driven by winds of unflagging effort,  
On this well-built ship of study, thought, and meditation,  
May I bring living beings from samsara's ocean.*

*As much as I excel in learning,  
 As much as I give to others,  
 As pure as my morality grows,  
 As much as I become wise,  
 By as much may I be empty of pride.*

*I pray that I listen insatiably  
 To countless teachings at the feet of a master,  
 Single-handedly with logic unflawed,  
 Prizing open scriptures' meanings.*

*Having examined day and night  
 With fourfold logic all that I have heard,  
 May I banish every doubt  
 With the discerning understanding  
 That arises from such contemplation.*

*With conviction in dharmas profound  
 Gained from understanding born of contemplation,  
 I pray that I retreat to solitude,  
 with a perseverance severing life's attachments,  
 To devote myself to proper practice.*

*When the Buddha's thoughts dawn upon me  
 Through study, thought, and meditation,  
 I pray that things of this life forever bonded to samsara  
 And thoughts of my happiness alone never arise in my mind.*

*Unattached to my possessions  
 I pray that I destroy parsimony,  
 Gathering disciples around me  
 By giving first of material wealth to satisfy them with Dharma.*

*With a mind renounced, may I never transgress  
 Even the smallest precept,  
 Though it may cost my life,  
 Flying forever, therefore, the flag of freedom.*

*When I see, hear, or think of those  
 Who struck, beat, or maligned me,  
 May I be without anger, speak of their virtues,  
 And meditate upon patience.*

*I pray I will apply myself to enthusiasm,  
 Achieving virtues unachieved, improving those attained,  
 Banishing utterly threefold debilitating laziness.*

*I pray to abandon the meditative absorption  
 That lacks the power of insight to quell samsara,  
 That is divorced from the moist compassion to quash nirvana's  
 passivity,  
 And that mostly throws one back to cycles of existence,  
 But develop instead the meditative absorption  
 That unites compassion and insight.*

*I pray that I banish false views of emptiness,  
 Mentally fabricated and partially known,  
 Born from fear of the most profound truth, cherished as supreme,  
 And that I realize all phenomena to be forever empty.*

*May I bring to faultless morality  
 Those so-called practitioners with their wayward ethics,  
 Shamelessly empty of pure practice,  
 Rashly pursuing paths shunned by the wise.*

*May I bring to the path praised by the buddhas,  
 Those lost and fallen onto wrong paths,  
 Swayed by deluded teachers and misleading friends.  
 I pray that my lion-like roar of teaching, argument, and  
 composition  
 Flattens the pride of fox-like false orators,  
 And, gathering well-trained disciples about me,  
 I fly the banner of the teachings forever.*

*In whatever life I may drink the nectar of Buddha's teachings,  
 I pray to be born into a good family  
 And be of handsome build, wealthy, powerful, and wise,  
 Blessed with long life and sound health.*

*May I develop the unique love of a mother  
 For those who malign me  
 And harbor ill designs upon my life,  
 My body, or my possessions.*

*By growing within myself  
 The pure and extraordinary bodhi-mind,  
 Whose nature is to cherish others more than self,  
 May I soon give them unsurpassable enlightenment.*

*Whoever hears, sees, or calls these verses to mind,  
 May they be undaunted in fulfilling  
 The powerful prayers of the bodhisattvas.*

*By the power of these vast prayers  
 Made with the purest intention,  
 May I attain the perfection of prayer  
 And fulfill the hopes of every living being.*

*Colophon: Translated by Gavin Kilty from Je Tsongkhapa's A Prayer for the Beginning, Middle, and End of Practice (thog ma dang bar dang tha mar dge ba'i smon lam; thog mtha' ma) in The Splendor of an Autumn Moon: The Devotional Verse of Tsongkhapa, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001, 193–207.*



## Until Buddhahood<sup>2</sup>

Ji si thub chhog ma...

By Gendun Drub, The First Dalai Lama

Until I manifest

The holy state of a supreme subduer,

May I obtain a basis for accomplishing the pure noble path,

Take ordination, and remember all my lives.

May I uphold the treasury of many infinite qualities -

dharani<sup>3</sup>, confidence<sup>4</sup>,

Meditative stabilization, clairvoyance, magical emanation,  
and more.

Having attained peerless knowledge, mercy, and ability,

May I swiftly perfect the conduct of enlightenment.

When I see signs of untimely death,

In that very moment may I clearly see the body

Of Protector Amitayus and destroy the Lord of Death;

May I quickly become an immortal knowledge-holder.

In all my lives by the force of Amitayus

Directly acting as a virtuous friend of the Supreme Vehicle,

May I never turn away, even for an instant,

From this noble path admired by the conquerors.

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<sup>2</sup> The title, "Until Buddhahood" is not a direct translation of the original title, which consists of the first four syllables of the first verse of the text, literally translated as "until a supreme subduer."

<sup>3</sup> Understanding the words and meaning of scriptures without forgetting.

<sup>4</sup> Confidence in explaining the words and meaning of scriptures without any limitations.

May I never generate a mind that,  
 Neglecting sentient beings, hopes for my welfare alone.  
 May I strive for the welfare of others with skill in means,  
 Unobscured regarding the way to accomplish their welfare.

Also by merely expressing and remembering my name,  
 May all those tormented by the result of their negative actions  
 Become rich with the glory of sublime happiness,  
 And may they climb the stairway leading to the Supreme Vehicle.

By illustrating a mere fragment of the biographies of  
 The conquerors' children, may all the interferences  
 To the conduct of the conquerors' children be pacified without exception,  
 And may helpful necessities be achieved by just calling them to mind.

By the truth of the ruler of the Shakyas,  
 The guides Amitabha, Maitreya, Manjushri, the Lord of the Secret,  
 Avalokiteshvara, and the sugatas and their retinues,  
 May all these prayers be quickly fulfilled.

Colophon: Composed by the omniscient master, Gendun Drub. Translated  
 by Geshe Thubten Sherab, Taos, New Mexico, USA. Scribed and lightly  
 edited by Kendall Magnussen, FPMT Education Services, June 2003. Final  
 editing by Ven. Joan Nicell.

## The Lam Rim Dedication Prayer

From my two collections, vast as space, that I have amassed  
 From working with effort at this practice for a great length of time,  
 May I become the chief leading Buddha for all those  
 Whose mind's wisdom eye is blinded by ignorance.

Even if I do not reach this state, may I be held  
 In your loving compassion for all my lives, Manjushri  
 May I find the best of complete graded paths of the teachings  
 And may I please all the Buddhas by practicing.

Using skillful means drawn by the strong force of compassion,  
 May I clear the darkness from the minds of all beings  
 With the points of the path as I have discerned them:  
 May I uphold Buddha's teachings for a very long time.

With my heart going out with great compassion  
 In whatever direction the most precious teachings  
 Have not yet spread, or once spread have declined,  
 May I expose this treasure of happiness and aid.

May the minds of those who wish for Liberation  
 be granted bounteous peace.  
 And the Buddha's deeds be nourished for a long time  
 By even this Graded Course to Enlightenment completed due to  
 The wondrous virtuous conduct of the Buddhas and their Sons.

May all human and non-human beings who eliminate adversity  
 And make things conducive for practicing the excellent paths  
 Never be parted in any of their lives  
 From the purest path praised by the Buddhas.

Whenever someone makes effort to act  
In accordance with the ten-fold Mahayana virtuous practices  
May he always be assisted by the mighty ones  
And may oceans of prosperity spread everywhere.

## Resources for the Stages of the Path Teachings - Root Texts and Commentaries

### Root Texts

A Lamp of the Path to Enlightenment, by Atisha

The Foundation of All Good Qualities,  
The Three Principal Aspects of the Path,  
and, Lines of Experience, by Lama Je Tsong Khapa

The Essence of Nectar by Yeshe Tsondru

The Gomchen Lam Rim

Clarifying the Sage's Intent, by Sakya Pandita

### Commentaries

#### Gelugpa

The Lam Rim Chenmo - The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment, by Je Tsong Khapa

Steps on the Path to Enlightenment, a commentary on the Lam Rim Chenmo, in five volumes, by Geshe Sopa

Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand, by Pabonkha Rinpoche,

How to Meditate on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment, by Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo, as found in Heart Advice for Retreat

Illuminating the Path to Enlightenment,

The Way to Freedom,

From Here to Enlightenment, and

Becoming Enlightened, by The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso

Essence of Refined Gold, by the Third Dalai Lama, with a commentary by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama

The Essential Nectar, by Geshe Rabten

The Path to Enlightenment in Tibetan Buddhism, by Geshe Acharya Thubten Loden

The Foundation of All Good Qualities, A Commentary by Geshe Tsultrim Gyeltsen

Atisha's Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment, A Commentary by Geshe Sonam Richen

The Tibetan Tradition of Mental Development, by Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey

A Commentary on the Three Principle Aspects of the Path, by Lama Yeshe, included in the book The Essence of Tibetan Buddhism

Commentaries on A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment, and

The Foundation of All Good Qualities, by Khunu Lama Rinpoche

The Wish-Fulfilling Golden Sun of Mahayana Thought Training, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

## Kagyud

The Gem Ornament of Liberation, by Gampopa

Path to Buddhahood - Teachings on Gampopa's Jewel Ornament of Liberation, by Ringu Tulku

Essence of Ambrosia, by Taranatha

## Sakya

Teachings on Clarifying the Sage's Intent, by Khenchen Appey Rinpoche

The Three Levels of Spiritual Perception, by Dezhung Rinpoche

## Nyingma

Words of My Perfect Teacher, by Patrul Rinpoche

Tantric Practice in Nying-ma, by Khetsun Sangpo Rinpoche

The Jewel Ladder, by Minling Terchen Gyurme Dorje

The Emanated Scripture of Manjushri: Shabkar's Essential Meditation Instructions

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Note: There are other wonderful root texts and commentaries, I'm sure, and this is an ongoing list. If there are any Stages of the Path teachings you'd like to recommend, get in touch and I can add them to this list.