

The Essence of Dharma Practice

Practice in brief (2 pages)

Homage to the Victorious One and His Heirs

From beginningless time until now

An Awakened One has appeared in this world

From A Direct Meditation on the Graduated Path I

Virtue relieves the sufferings of samsara

Three quotes on sila

From the Ritual for Taking the Eight Mahāyāna Precepts

The Cultivation of Loving Kindness

Verses for generating the mind of enlightenment

From A Direct Meditation on the Graduated Path II

Individual Liberation Vows

This is our received teaching, to be practiced, and realized

I call upon my teachers and spiritual ancestors

The Heart Sutra

A prayer dispelling hindrances

A verse from the Diamond Sutra

A Dedication Prayer after Reading the Diamond Cutter Sutra

Two quotes

Dedication from the Avatamsaka Sutra

From the Diamond Sutra

From A Dedication Prayer by Thich Nhat Hanh

A Dedication Prayer by Thich Nhat Hanh

Additional material for reflection

For the sake of all who struggle and suffer

A summary of the Stages of the Path Teachings

A Simple Visualization

The Essence of Dharma Practice

is to relinquish harmful actions,
and to cultivate positive, beneficial actions

to free our minds from all suffering and its causes forever

and from great love and compassion,
to accomplish each of the stages of liberation
and enlightened understanding and activity,
and to help bring all others to these very same states.

An Awakened One has appeared in this world.
He has taught the way to freedom,
and generations of his followers to this day have realized his teachings.

I take refuge in the Buddha, the Great Compassionate Teacher

I take refuge in the Dharma, in all the Liberating Teachings

and I take refuge in the Noble Sangha, the Accomplished Spiritual
Community, the Great Assembly of Saints and Bodhisattvas

*I vow to relinquish harmful actions,
and to cultivate positive, beneficial actions*

*I vow to free my mind from all suffering and its causes forever
In this way, fully realizing the Buddha's Path,
I will be able to perfectly accomplish my aims*

May I think all beings with great love and compassion,
and generate the supreme awakening mind
May I think of them all as my family, and care for them all as my own.

May I clearly see that what I and all others need
is ultimate liberation of mind, perfect peace and freedom,
and that in taking care of myself, I am taking care of all of us
With an understanding of the Noble Truths,
may my love and compassion become the dedication to helping others
through my realization of this path

May the supreme jewel, bodhicitta,
arise where it has not yet arisen,
Where it has arisen, may it not diminish,
May it ever grow and flourish...

*I vow to accomplish each of the stages of liberation
and enlightened understanding and activity,
and help bring all others, without a single exception,
to these very same states.*

Homage to the Victorious One and His Heirs

Homage to my Spiritual Teacher, the Holy Exemplar,
in whom all the Enlightened Qualities are found

From beginningless time until now, all sentient beings and I have been uncontrollably experiencing the many general sufferings of samsara, and especially the sufferings of the three lower realms...

It is difficult to even begin to grasp the depths and extent of our suffering, but this is something we must try to do...

This is a story that is still being written

At this time, I have these greatly fortunate conditions, which are truly difficult to find, and, once found, are so valuable

This is an opportunity to cultivate the path of liberation, for myself and for all others, and I have faith that my teacher, and the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha have the ability to guide us to freedom.

Therefore, I will go for refuge to my teachers and to these Three Jewels, and I will practice and accomplish these most excellent and precious teachings

What I have not yet understood, I will understand

What I have not yet realized, I will realize

What I have not yet healed, I will heal

An Awakened One has appeared in this world.
He has taught the way to freedom,
and generations of his followers to this day have realized his teachings.

Homage!

I take refuge in following the way of the Buddha, the Light of the World,
the True Guide, the Great Compassionate Teacher,

From this point forward,
I will learn, practice, and realize his Sacred Dharma
{and in this way I take refuge in all the Liberating Teachings},

and I take refuge in the Noble Sangha,
the Accomplished Spiritual Community,
the Great Assembly of Saints and Bodhisattvas

Learning the Teachings, meditating,
and carrying the practice into everyday life
gives rise to benefits without limit.

Em Ah Ho!
How wondrous!

May all share in these blessings!

From A Direct Meditation on the Graduated Path I

At this time these exceptional conditions have come together for me:
I celebrate the life that I have now... it is as rare as a star in the daytime...

However, these conditions as they are now are impermanent
Look: one day, by nature, all this as it is now will no longer be seen...
Death comes to all in this world and the time of death is uncertain.
I should meditate strongly on this, and use this understanding well...

May I see that giving careful attention to actions and their results,
with right view and a positive motivation,
is the dividing line between creating the causes of suffering
and those of happiness, for myself and for others,
in this world, and the next,

and that there is no lasting happiness in samsara...

Understanding this much,
I take refuge in the Buddha, in the Dharma,
and in the Noble Sangha

With loving kindness and compassion,
understanding that transforming myself is the great work,
I vow to relinquish harmful actions,
and to accomplish virtue and inner freedom according to the teachings.

*Do no harmful actions.
Accomplish only what is good,
Purify your mind.
This is the teaching of the Buddha...*

*Virtue relieves the sufferings of samsara;
and brings happiness and peace visible even in this life.
Virtue is the basis of a higher rebirth in the human or deva realms,
and is the sure basis of each of the stages of liberation and enlightenment*

May I and all others accomplish only these.

Sila is the mother and father of all Dhammas.

- Ajahn Chah

Virtue and integrity are the foundation of all good things.

- Ajahn Pasanno

Let us now observe the pure precepts, the magnificent adornment in the world, to which gods and humans make offerings.

- Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche

From the Ritual for Taking the Eight Mahāyāna Precepts

I call upon my teachers and spiritual ancestors
Lord Buddha with your Retinue of Holy Ones,
please come to this place

May we all receive your blessings
May we all receive your light, inspiration, and strength
to accomplish this essential practice

Just as my teachers, the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Arhats before me
made the commitment to live in virtue,
following their perfect example, I will live guided by these precepts:

I will not kill, or cause harm to any living being

I will not steal {or possess anything that should belong to others}

I will not engage in sexual activity,¹

{or follow thoughts of attachment at this time}

I will not lie, {use harsh speech, or divisive speech, or engage in
meaningless chatter}

and I will avoid intoxicants;

I will not sit on luxurious seats and beds.

¹ The Third Precept is traditionally given as ‘I will avoid sexual misconduct.’ There will be occasions also for the householder, such as when one is on a retreat, or engaged in more focussed practice, that require complete abstinence. When taking the Eight Precepts, this changes to ‘I will not engage in sexual activity, {or follow thoughts of attachment at this time}’, or, ‘I undertake the precept to refrain from any intentional sexual activity.’ The Eight Mahayana Precepts are can then be taken for a 24 hour period, and they can be renewed once a day during those times.

I will not eat food at the wrong times, an improper amount, or type of food
and I will avoid perfumes, garlands, and ornaments,
and wasting time with frivolous games, dancing, singing, and so forth.

{as much as I can}

*I will protect life in all circumstances,
heal all suffering and its causes,
and nurture all beings along the way*

*I will live generously,
giving my time, energy, and material resources
abundantly to those in need,
increasing their happiness*

*Abiding chaste, and not attached, quite secluded within,
highly praising this foundation of purity, coolness, and inner freedom,
I will continue to realize this sense of wholeness in myself,
with its safety, peace, and lasting benefit*

*I will speak as necessary,
truthfully, with kindness,
harmoniously, and meaningfully,
and practice kind and compassionate deep listening*

I will cultivate a clear mind.

And I will pursue only what is essential now.

*I take refuge in practicing the fullness of the Precepts,
the fullness of love and far seeing wisdom,
the Heart Treasure of the Noble Ones.*

{Concisely}

I will

cherish and protect life

live generously

abide chaste

speak truthfully, with kindness and respect

cultivate a clear mind

and pursue only what is essential now

From In Praise of the Precepts

Homage to the precepts that give life...

Homage to the virtue that heals

Praise to the moral conduct that liberates from the lower realms

and,

Homage to the ethics that is the foundation for all the good that arises in this world...

This is my contribution to the world, and to the happiness, health and peace of all sentient beings.

Dedication

Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, the buddhas, the bodhisattvas, and all other sentient beings, may I and all sentient beings be able to complete the paramita of morality by keeping it purely, and without pride.

A dedication prayer from the Avatamsaka Sutra

May all sentient beings be filled with the fragrance of morality,
and attain to the standards of the wise;

Emancipated from the world,

and living in the transcendent ways of enlightened beings,

May all sentient beings, by actualizing Right View and Right Conduct,
all accomplish the body of morality of the Buddhas.

The Cultivation of Loving Kindness

Having seen that like oneself
all beings seek for happiness,
one patiently then cultivates love for all beings

May all the precious children of this world
be entirely well and at their ease...
May they always be safe...
May they be always healthy, happy, and at peace...

May I be safe...
May I be healthy, happy, and at peace...
May I be completely free from all suffering...

May my family, friends,
neutral ones, and all honored guests always be safe
May they all have every happiness
May they be all free from all suffering
May they all be completely free from all danger, and all difficulty

Within the boundaries of this town,
may all beings have happiness
Likewise those in other places,
in other cities, and countries, in all places,
may they all be safe
May they all have happiness, health and peace

All creatures and all breathing things,
all persons and all entities...
men, women and children,
the Noble Ones, the unawake,
Devas, and unhappy ones
who in the ten directions dwell -

*May all beings be happy and at peace,
and may their hearts be filled with joy!*

Verses for generating the mind of enlightenment

May I think all beings with great love and compassion,
and generate the supreme awakening mind...

May I think of them all as my family,
and care for them all as my own.

May I clearly see that what I and all others need
is ultimate liberation of mind, perfect peace and freedom,
and that in taking care of myself, I am taking care of all of us
With an understanding of the Noble Truths,
may my love and compassion become the dedication to helping others
through my realization of this path

May all beings have happiness
and all the causes of true happiness flourishing...

May all beings be completely and permanently free of all suffering
and all the causes of suffering...

I celebrate all that is beautiful and right in the world,
I rejoice in all kindness, virtue, and positive action and intentions,
and in all success, happiness, and good fortune...

and abide in inclusive, impartial love and compassion...

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

Especially now, seeing the world of sentient beings,
so full of suffering, I will follow the bodhisattva's way.

An Awakened One has appeared in this world.
He has taught the way to freedom,
and generations of his followers to this day have realized his teachings.

Homage!

{The Bodhisattva Vow}

Just as all previous Buddhas first awakened the precious bodhimind -
the aspiration to enlightened understanding and activity,
and just as they then carefully followed each of the requisite stages of the
Bodhisattva disciplines,
in the same way, for the sake of living beings,
I vow to awaken and to cultivate the bodhimind,
this all embracing intention,
and then train in every one of the essential disciplines of a Bodhisattva.

I take refuge in the the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Supreme Assembly,
and bring forth this Thought of Enlightenment, in both its aspects
By the merit I have accumulated by practicing Generosity and other
Virtues,

May I swiftly accomplish each of the stages of liberation and enlightened
understanding and activity,
and help bring all others, without a single exception, to these very same
states.

With my heart going out with great compassion
in whatever direction the most precious teachings have not yet spread,
or, once spread have declined,
there may I bring this treasure of happiness and aid!

Limitless is the extent of space,
and limitless is the number of sentient beings

Limitless are the karmas and delusions of beings
Such then are the limits of my aspirations!

For as long as space endures,
and for as long as living beings remain,
until then, may I too abide,
to dispel the misery of the world

May the supreme jewel, bodhicitta,
arise where it has not yet arisen,
Where it has arisen, may it not diminish,
May it ever grow and flourish...

From A Direct Meditation on the Graduated Path II

In dependence upon higher rebirth,
even if we achieve the levels of a deva or human,
we will still have to experience endless suffering in samsara
because of not having completely abandoned from their root
ignorance and the afflictive emotions.

Therefore, I will look deeply into the nature of all of samsara,
and continuously follow the unified path of the Three Trainings,
of ethics, meditation, and wisdom
the way to peace, nibbana,
true and lasting health and happiness.

I vow to free my mind from all suffering and its causes forever
In this way, fully realizing the Buddha's Path,
I will be able to perfectly accomplish my aims

Individual Liberation Vows

I vow to free my mind from all suffering and its causes forever

Until this is fully accomplished,

I vow to steadfastly continue to cultivate the causes
that will enable me to do this

wise reflection, keeping pure ethics,
the purification of past negative karma,
great loving kindness and compassion, for myself and for all others,
strengthening my vows, further study, and clear meditation

I vow to maintain and to increase each of these as much as needed

and I vow to continue to cultivate my understanding and direct insight

In this way, fully realizing the Buddha's Path,
I will perfectly accomplish my aims

This is our received teaching, to be practiced, and realized.

Wakeful calm abiding meditation, free of faults, is traditionally cultivated separately;

and then, vipassana - liberating insight needs to be unified with this dhyana - samadhi meditation, over a sustained period of time.

In this way, we can ultimately cure all the sufferings of samsara.

May all beings benefit.

I call upon my teachers and spiritual ancestors

Lord Buddha with your Retinue of Holy Ones,
please come to this place...

May we all receive your blessings

May we all receive your light, inspiration, and strength²

² This can be done with a visualization of our teachers, and the Refuge Tree. See 'A simple visualization' for a description of this practice.

{Calm abiding, or sitting quietly can be alternated with insight practice}

The Heart Sutra

Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, when practicing deeply the prajnaparamita, saw that all five collections are without a separate self and with this insight was liberated from all suffering

O Shariputra, form does not differ from specifically this emptiness, and this emptiness is not found apart from form; that which is form is empty in exactly this way, that which is empty in this way, form; the same is true of feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness

O Shariputra, all dharmas have this characteristic, and cannot be said to either appear or disappear; they are not ultimately tainted or pure, and cannot be said to either increase or decrease

Like this, the collections, elements of experience, links, Truths, Paths, and their result do not have independent self existence.

With nothing placed in front of themselves, pursued, and taken hold of, the bodhisattvas depend on insight-understanding and the mind is no hindrance; without any hindrance, no fears exist; far apart from every wrong view, one dwells in nirvana

In the three worlds all Buddhas realize Right Understanding, and attain unsurpassed, complete, and perfect enlightenment;

Therefore know the prajnaparamita mantra is the great transcendent mantra, is the great bright mantra, is the utmost mantra, is the supreme mantra, which is able to relieve all suffering, and is true, not false; so proclaim the prajnaparamita mantra, proclaim the mantra that says

Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhi, svaha!

A prayer dispelling hindrances

We take refuge in the Buddha,
Dharma,
and Sangha

Homage to Prajnaparamita

Just as in the past, when the deva king, Indra, by the power of
contemplating
the profound meaning of Prajnaparamita, and by reciting its words,
was able to dispel maras,
so too in the very same way, may we accomplish this now.

By this meditation and recitation,
May all inner and outer hindrances be overcome.

May they become non-existent! (clap)

May they be pacified! (clap)

May they be completely pacified! (clap)

*Everything that arises interdependently
Is unceasing and unborn,
Neither non-existent nor everlasting,
Neither coming nor going,
Neither several in meaning nor with a single meaning,
All concepts and duality are pacified.*

*To this teaching,
the words of the fully enlightened Buddha,
We pay homage!*

By this realization,
May all negative forces be completely removed.

May we obtain all circumstances conducive to the Dharma,
and may there be auspiciousness, happiness, and well-being here, right
now!

See all conditioned things like this:

They are like a star (seen in the daytime),
a defective view,
or the flame of a lamp...

They are like an illusion,
a drop of dew, or frost,
or a bubble...

They are like a dream,
a flash of lightning,
or a cloud...

That is how to meditate on them,
that is how to observe them.

A Dedication Prayer after Reading the Diamond Cutter Sutra, by Mipham Dawa, translated by Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, revised

Having written about, read, listened to,
and made offerings to the Supreme Dharma of all the Buddha's teachings,
the Heart of Prajnaparamita, the Wisdom Gone Beyond,
the Ultimate One,
the Sutra called Diamond Cutter,
May it cut the continuity of sickness,
interference, possession, obstacles, and so forth,
and increase life and wealth;

May all our aspirations in the Dharma be spontaneously accomplished

Due to the merits and imprints of having listened to this Sutra
and having read it at this time, and investigated its meaning,
in all future lifetimes,
May I and all sentient beings who have any connection with me whatsoever
be able to hear, contemplate, and meditate on this profound Sutra.

May we each become exactly like the life stories of Shariputra and
Mogallana, {and Hui Neng},
and the very moment we hear the words of the Prajnaparamita Diamond
Cutter Sutra, the Wisdom Teachings of the Buddha, or their explanation,
may we have the meaning arise in our understanding,
and achieve the result.

By the virtue of having read this profound Sutra,
May I directly perceive the truth,
and liberate in that very second all transmigratory beings,
equaling the sky,
from the great ocean of samsaric suffering.

Not grasping at mere emptiness,
by seeing that the meaning of emptiness here affirms dependent arising-
while the mind is in *that emptiness,
free from mental fabrication projecting true existence,
may I enjoy the view of emptiness-of-that-only.

Ascertaining that the various appearances of the dual dharma,
are mere appearance,
May I realize their emptiness while there is appearance,
directly seeing that,
even though there is appearance, it is not truly existent.

Em Ah Ho! How wondrous!

By this eminent heart wisdom,
without abiding in the extremes of either samsara or peace,
quickly proceeding on the five paths,
may I become a splendid leader of all transmigratory beings.

By this particular virtue, and all other virtues as well,
May the gurus' holy lives be stable,
and may all the activities of the victorious ones
be fully accomplished.

In some places they say, 'Now we are going to sit in calm meditation, after that we'll do insight meditation', but we don't divide them like this...
Actually, you can only divide them in speech...

Tranquillity is the base which gives rise to wisdom, and wisdom is the fruit of tranquillity.

- Ajahn Chah

When we meditate on Mahamudra or Dzogchen, this is not analytic meditation, but primarily it's resting meditation...

We practice resting without altering the mind in any way, as a way to allow the wisdom that is present within us to manifest.

- His Holiness the Seventeenth Karmapa

Dedication from the Avatamsaka Sutra

*To all internal and external worlds
Bodhisattvas have no attachment at all,
and yet do not abandon works beneficial to sentient beings;*

*In all lands in the ten directions,
they do not depend or dwell on anything;
They do not grasp things, such as livelihood,
and do not arbitrarily create distinctions.*

*They engage with all sentient beings
in all worlds in the ten directions;
Knowing their essential original nature,
they practice dedication reaching everywhere.*

May all beings have happiness,
and all the causes of happiness flourishing

Bodhisattvas should give rise to a pure and clear intention thus,
with their minds not dwelling anywhere

From A Dedication Prayer by Thich Nhat Hanh

In this lifetime, I will build my life of practice
and heighten merit to solidify the foundations of practice in lives to come,
so that my highest career may be cultivated
until understanding and love spring up, fresh and lovely.

May peace and joy be realized right in the cycle of samsara, and, may all
beings be given all they need to cross over the ocean of afflictions.

Having untied the knots which bound body and mind,
May we leave unwholesome attachments behind forever,
and to continue to cultivate the wholesome conditions for our highest way
of life, so that, together with numberless other species,
we always go in the direction of freedom

A Dedication Prayer by Thich Nhat Hanh

In this lifetime, may we build our life of practice
and heighten merit to solidify the foundations of practice in lives to come,
so that our highest career may be cultivated
until understanding and love spring up, fresh and lovely.

May we always be born as humans, with fortunate conditions,
meet the teachings, and live a life of true practice.

May we be guided on the path of practice by an enlightened teacher,
and equipped with true faith,
may we join an authentic Fourfold Sangha.

{May we live balanced lives,
and may our lives be in harmony with all others.}

May we not run after the things of this world,
causing us to be caught in bondage.

Wholeheartedly and diligently,
may we practice the teachings of our loving Root Teacher,
holding to brahmacharya and leaving behind all worldly actions.
May we practice fine manners and right conduct until they shine brightly.

With a heart of loving kindness,
may we protect the life of even the smallest beings.
May we always create sufficient wholesome causes and conditions
so that countless misfortunes can dissipate like the morning mist.

With one-pointed mind,
may we cultivate the aspiration to enlightened understanding and activity,
so that the Lotus Seat of true understanding may manifest.

With our constant practice,
may we witness the awakening to the highest truth
and become capable of transmitting True Mind.

May we go beyond the cycle of drowning in the ocean of rebirth,
and develop the practice of the Paramitas in order to rescue beings.

May we open practice centers in many places
so that the nets of doubt can be destroyed
and people and the environment can be purified.

May we subdue all unwholesome spirits,
transmitting the lamp of the Dharma and carrying on the lineage infinitely.

May we be happy to serve the Buddhas in the Ten Directions,
and not be discouraged because of weariness or toil.

However many deep and wonderful Dharma doors there are,
may we realize them all to rescue ourselves,
and then bring that merit and wisdom to benefit other beings,
so that the fruit of Buddhahood is experienced by all.

May we adapt ourselves to circumstances in the ordinary world,
realizing numberless bodies to care for all living beings.

May the nectar of loving kindness rain upon the realms of gods and men
so that the ocean of vows and actions to relieve suffering becomes vast.

Everywhere, may the various regions of the world,
whether near or far away, always be in harmony.

By proclaiming the wonderful Dharma doors may we benefit all beings;

May the light of understanding shine forth,
making wholesome the realms of devas, humans, animals,
plants, and minerals.

Upon seeing our form and hearing our name,
may ten thousand species be released from confusion and from pain.

May we give rise to our deepest aspiration
so that the sufferings of Ten Thousand Realms will dissipate.

However many wrong actions there have been,
committed by myself or by others,
leading to unspeakable harms and injustice,
and however many sufferings there are in the animal realms,
through our love and compassionate care,
may they all vanish like the dew on the green mountain
when dawn appears.

May we give medicines to the sick in urgent need.
May we give food and clothing to the destitute.
May many countless benefits arise and flourish.

May peace and joy be realized right in the cycle of samsara.
and may all beings regardless of race or belief,
whether they are friends or enemies, or strangers,
be given all they need to cross over the ocean of afflictions.

Having untied the knots which bound body and mind,
may we leave unwholesome attachments behind forever,
and may we continue to cultivate the wholesome conditions for our highest
way of life so that,
together with numberless other species,
we always go in the direction of freedom.

Additional material for reflection

For the sake of all who struggle and suffer

A summary of the Stages of the Path Teachings

A Simple Visualization

For the sake of all who struggle and suffer,
all those who have not yet reached the highest state of freedom and peace,
to relieve their suffering and to bring them happiness,

I take refuge in the Buddha,
the Great Compassionate Teacher,
I take refuge in the Dharma,
in all the Liberating Teachings,
and I take refuge in the Noble Sangha,
the Accomplished Spiritual Community,
the Great Assembly of Saints and Bodhisattvas

By this practice,
just as my teachers before me have done,
May I realize Peace, Perfect Freedom, and Happiness,
and Great Love, ~ the Mind of Enlightenment,
and bring all others without a single exception
to these very same states

{The concerns of others are my concerns,
is that not so?

For their sake, then}

May I accomplish this Path,

and,

May all temporal and ultimate aims be fulfilled

A summary of the Stages of the Path Teachings

'There are three sets of causes, with three results'

*Having fortunate conditions, 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 and compassion naturally awakens reverence, and confidence in the path.

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

the rarity and preciousness of a fortunate human life;

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, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

Seeking safety, and diligence comes from this.

Thinking about these, and remembering the struggles and dangers of samsara; out of real love and compassion for ourselves and for all 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 then, with faith, aiming to continually take refuge in the Buddha as our Teacher, to practice the Dharma as our way of life, and to rely well on the Noble Sangha as our Spiritual Companions, *these are the causes, and the result is having fortunate conditions*, now and in the future, including higher rebirth. 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 insight that all of samsara, or ego-centered, unenlightened existence is suffering, and the knowledge of how liberation is possible.

Understanding these 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 is liberation*.

III. Entering the Mahayana directly - the Path of Universal Benefit

In addition to the above realizations, when one has great love and compassion for all that lives, together with the thought that enlightened understanding and activity 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 live an awakened life in order to bring the greatest benefit to all sentient beings, and the practice of the Perfections, *and the result is enlightenment*.

A Simple Visualization

In this practice we see the Buddha, ourselves and others, as having bodies that are made entirely of light. We see ourselves in a Pure land...

The Refuge Tree

Imagine that you are in a large, open, sacred space, beautiful, adorned with flower gardens, lakes, and wonderful trees, with birds sweetly singing...

The sun is brightly shining, as a few clouds float by... It's a lovely day... perfect in every way...

We see before us now the Buddha, or our main teacher, the Holy Exemplar, in whom all Enlightened Qualities are found, at the center of what appears as a great Refuge Tree, surrounded by Bodhisattvas, and all our ancestral teachers, including our very own Root Teacher or Teachers...

These holy ones are all made entirely of beautiful light, and appear in the space in front and above us, on celestial clouds, on lotuses and moon cushions... They smile upon us...

Whatever is most pleasing and uplifting, that is what we see and feel before us now...

Have the sense that all these Noble Ones, the whole company of heaven and faithful here on earth are present...

All should join together - one to the other and one above another - so that they all can receive the heavenly flow of blessings, by way of those above them who are closer to the source of supernal goodness.

{The Baal Shem Tov}

With this Right View and a pure motivation, as we recite verses of refuge and aspiration prayers, meditate, and recite mantra, we visualize that we receive blessings from the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, from all the Bodhisattvas and Devas, from all Holy Beings, and from all that is sacred and pure in the universe, in the form of light and nectar. These dissolve into ourselves, and into all those we see as being with us now, our family and friends, those we don't know, and those who are experiencing any difficulty at all...

We visualize that the light and nectar heals and calms, and nourishes, and inspires us all.

May all share in these blessings.

May all beings receive all they need to awaken and be free.

May all beings have happiness, and all the causes of happiness flourishing.

Meditate like this... Make prayers of aspiration...

To conclude, dedicate the merit to all beings.