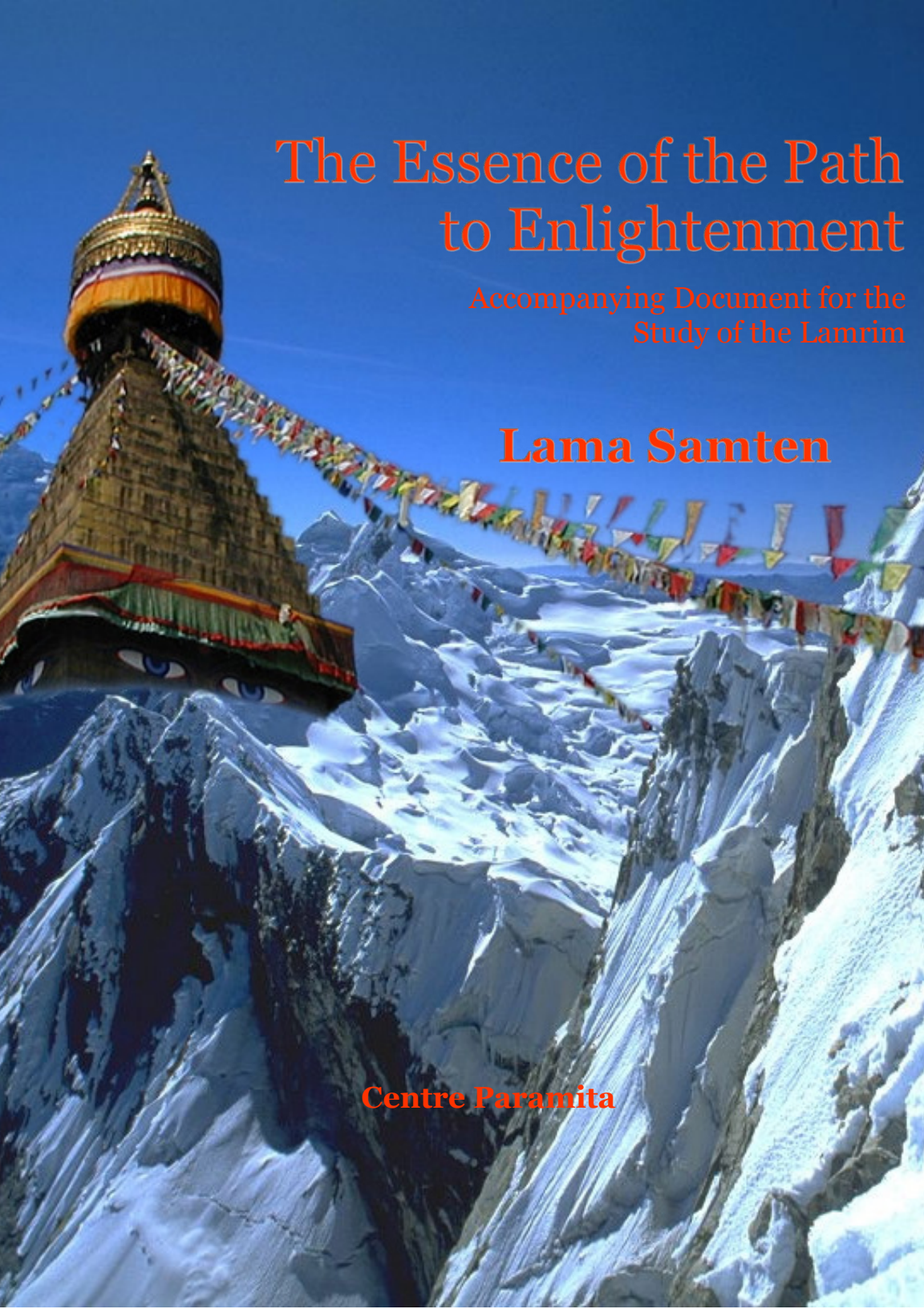




The Essence of the Path to Enlightenment

Accompanying Document for the
Study of the Lamrim

Lama Samten

Centre Paramita

The Essence of the Path to Enlightenment

UNDERSTANDING THE SENSE OF
THE SUTRAS AND TANTRAS

ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENT
FOR THE STUDY OF THE LAMRIM

Lama Samten

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Introduction

This course presents the stages of the path to enlightenment. It is offered for the benefit of all those who, in this day and age, have an interest in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, not only in its intellectual but particularly in its practical aspect. This text was written following the structure of *The Swift Path*, an authentic text of practical instructions written by the Fifth Panchen Lama, Djetsun Lobsang Yeshe. It contains the quintessence of the *Lamrim*s (namely, *The Great Treatise of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* by Lama Tsongkhapa), works which in themselves contain the essence of all the excellent words of the Victorious One. Furthermore, the author has added nothing to that which is not already stated in these texts. He also requests of those scholars who might detect superfluous elements, omissions or errors, to be indulgent towards him.

Certain terms used in this book can be found in the glossary at the end.



Homage to Buddha Shakyamuni

I. Preliminaries to the instructions

***I respectfully render homage to
the incomparable compassionate
Teacher***

The course on the stages of the path to enlightenment comprises four topics:

- A. Presentation of the noble origin of the teaching
- B. The greatness of the Dharma in order to generate respect for the instructions
- C. How to teach and listen to the Dharma that possesses these two excellent qualities
- D. The sequence in which students will be guided through the actual instructions

Preliminaries

A. Presentation of the noble origin of the teaching



The Venerable Atisha

Preliminaries

Presentation of the noble origin of the teaching

More than two thousand five hundred years ago, the incomparable and compassionate Teacher¹ came to teach the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana in the noble land of India with the sole purpose of relieving sentient beings of their suffering. This teaching was transmitted in an unbroken lineage of masters to the glorious and incomparable Indian teacher, Atisha. During seventeen years, he turned the Wheel of Dharma in an exceptional way and wrote the *Lamp on the Path to Enlightenment*. The term *Lamrim*, which is currently used, originates from this text. The Venerable Atisha transmitted all his teachings to his main spiritual son, Tibetan master Dromtonpa. They were then handed down to a lineage of masters, to the founder of an excellent tradition of teaching in Tibet, namely, pioneer Lama Tsongkhapa, and from him to his Holiness, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. This is how the teaching spread from India to Tibet.

The fact that this line of transmission has remained perfectly pure and intact is due to the great kindness of the incomparable and compassionate Teacher, the glorious Atisha, and of the holy Tibetan masters of the past.

¹ One of the names frequently assigned to Buddha Shakyamuni

Preliminaries

B. The greatness of the Dharma, presented in order to generate respect for the instructions

1. The greatness that enables us to realize that all the teachings are without contradiction
2. The greatness that allows us to regard all these excellent words as instructions for practice
3. The greatness that permits us to easily understand the thinking of the Victorious One
4. The greatness that protects us from committing serious mistakes

The greatness of the teaching presented in order to generate respect for the instructions

1. The greatness that enables us to realize that all the teachings are without contradiction

This includes two elements: 1) the realization that the mode of expression (the Dharma of transmission) is without contradiction, and that 2) what is expressed (the Dharma of realization) is equally free of contradiction. It is stated in the *Treasury of Phenomenology*:

The two aspects of the sublime Dharma of the Teacher (Buddha) are those of the Dharma of transmission and the Dharma of realization.

The means of expression, the Dharma of transmission, consists of three volumes (traditionally called "baskets"): the Vinaya, the Sutras and the Abhidharma, and the four classes of Tantra (Kriya, Caryā, Yoga, and Anuttarayoga Tantra)². As for the Dharma of realization, it includes the Hinayana, the Mahayana, and the Vajrayana.

The greatness facilitating the understanding that all elements of the Dharma of transmission are without contradiction is attained when one comprehends that the three volumes and four classes of tantra constitute a common foundation for the practice, which ultimately leads an individual to complete Buddhahood. There is not the least contradiction among them.

Likewise, the greatness of facilitating the appreciation that all elements of the Dharma of realization are without contradiction is achieved upon understanding that the Hinayana, the Mahayana and the Vajrayana form a common base for the practice that leads to the attainment

² Refer to the authentic, classical texts for more details.

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of complete Buddhahood. Nor is there the least contradiction among them.

We might wonder why a single Victorious One (Buddha) taught the various vehicles of Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana. This is because sentient beings have different dispositions and interests: inferior, intermediary, or superior. It is the same for a doctor who prescribes appropriate medication for each of his patients, aimed at healing their specific ailments.

2. The greatness that allows us to regard all these excellent words as instructions for practice

Several ways can be used to introduce these excellent teachings, but they can all be condensed into the three volumes (or "baskets"). All these excellent words can be perceived as instructions for practice by acquainting the mind with them through reading, listening, reflecting, etc. For example, we would only race a horse on a track it is familiar with. People who practice something other than what they have read, heard and contemplated, are making a mistake. The Precious Teacher has said:

Looking for another way to practice the Dharma after having received several teachings is a mistake.

3. The greatness that permits us to easily understand the thinking of the Victorious One

The thinking of the Victorious One consists in the excellent words expressed in the Sutras, the Tantras, and their commentaries. They present the paths for practitioners of all three scopes and their essence: the three principal aspects of the path (renunciation, Bodhichitta and perfect view).

The Sutras and Tantras of the Victorious One, along with the commentaries, can be compared to an ocean. The paths used by practitioners of the three scopes are like a

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boat; the spiritual master is like the captain, and the three principal aspects of the path, like the jewels in the ocean.

4. The greatness that protects us from making serious mistakes

Developing renunciation puts an end to suffering in this lifetime and in those to follow. Meditating on Bodhichitta stops self-cherishing. Meditating on the non-self leads to abandoning its opposite, namely, the belief in or concept of the "I".

Not only are the four greatnesses included in *The Essence of the Path to Enlightenment*, this teaching also has three distinctive features:

- 1) It includes the entire teaching of the Buddha because it contains the excellent words of the Sutras and Tantras in their entirety.
- 2) It facilitates the practice of the teachings since it emphasizes the stages conducive to disciplining the mind.
- 3) It is superior to other traditions because its instructions originate from two scholarly Lamas (Rikpekuyuk and Serlingpa³), both trained in the tradition of the two great pioneers, Nagarjuna and Asanga.

³ Rikpekuyuk is the Tibetan name for Vidyakokila (Skt.). Serlingpa is the Tibetan name for Dharmarakshita, also known under the name of Suvarnadhipi Dharmakirti (Skt.).

Preliminaries

C. How to listen to and teach the Dharma

1. How to listen
2. How to teach
3. How the teacher and student should behave at the end.

How to listen to and teach the Dharma

1. How to listen to the Dharma

In the Sutras, we notice that the Bhagavan⁴ insists on this point:

Listen correctly, listen perfectly, and remember.

To listen correctly means listening with a mind that is free of all disruptive emotions. *To listen perfectly* means listening without being distracted. *To remember* means to keep in mind what was taught.

If we listen to the Dharma while being aware of the presence of negative emotions in the mind, we will be able to tame the mind despite its level of resistance. However, if our mind is not in harmony with the Dharma when listening to the teachings, no benefit whatsoever will be gained, regardless of the Lama's erudition or the wisdom of the instruction.

While receiving a teaching, some people may think: "What will I learn today that I do not already know or that I've never heard before?" Others will listen to the Lama checking to see if what he says is in accordance or not with the texts, as though it were a test. This kind of listening is of no use whatsoever to the mind. It is important to listen, knowing how to apply the Dharma immediately and energetically to the mind. For example, if we wish to know whether our face is clean or not, we must look at ourself in the mirror, then wash away the dirt we may find. Likewise when we listen to the Dharma, we must be aware of the shortcomings of our attitude. We must want to eliminate them and replace them with the qualities being taught.

⁴ Epithet for the Buddha: literally, "the transcendent Conqueror".

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Of course, these instructions are for those who listen to the Buddhist Dharma with the purpose of attaining liberation and omniscience. It is not meant for everyone.

2. How to teach the Dharma

It is said in *The Treasury of Phenomenology*:

Since being generous with the Dharma is not a perturbed act, teach the sutras and the other texts perfectly.

In order that the act of giving the Dharma not be influenced by afflictive emotions, we must develop an excellent motivation. Then, the Dharma topic to be discussed should be explained with the help of quotations, logical reasoning, and examples.

3. How both teacher and student should act at the end

With a strong aspiration for attaining the happiness of positive conditions and elevated states of mind, let us dedicate all the virtues acquired while teaching and listening to the Dharma. There are many ways of making the dedication, but here is a short version:

The spirit of Enlightenment is precious. May it grow where it has not yet grown. Where it has grown, may it never decline but flourish for evermore.

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Preliminaries

D. How to guide students in the use of the actual instructions

Preparing for meditation

A- What to do during a meditation session

1. Preparations:

- 1) Clean the room where you meditate and arrange the symbols of the body, speech and mind of the Enlightened Ones
- 2) Arrange the offerings acquired through honest means in a beautiful way
- 3) Sit in the seven-point Vairochana posture and generate an especially virtuous state of mind
- 4) Petition the merit-field
- 5) Perform the seven-limbed practice and the mandala offering, including all essential steps for accumulating merit and self-purification
- 6) Ask wholeheartedly that the three very important elements be integrated into your mindstream

2. The session itself

3. What to do at the end

B- How to act between meditation sessions

How to guide students in the use of the actual instructions

A - What to do during a meditation session

1. Preparations

1) Clean the room where you meditate and arrange the symbols of the body, speech and mind of the Enlightened Ones

All Tibetan Buddhist schools consider it important to clean the room where we meditate, thereby following the example given by Lama Serlingpa, as mentioned in his biography. The Muni⁵ has said:

Bodhisattvas sit with their legs crossed in a clean environment.

If even the Bodhisattvas who have attained the pure lands⁶ must clean the place where they meditate, it goes without saying that beginners like us should also begin a meditation session by cleaning, as a sign of respect for the merit-field and to benefit this life as well as the next ones. However, our motivation must not be simply aimed at our own happiness or for the sake of appearance, etc. Rather, we should do this with the intention of purifying our own mindstream and that of others of disruptive emotions. The Bhagavan has said:

Abandon dirt; abandon impurities.

Here is what the Buddha meant by these two recommendations: By purifying the temporary veils of

⁵ An epithet for a Buddha which means “able” or “wise”.

⁶ The Arya Bodhisattvas: those Bodhisattvas having realized emptiness.

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disruptive emotions and ignorance present in our consciousness, we will obtain, respectively, the sublime happiness of liberation and omniscience. It is said that Arya Chudapanthaka achieved the state of Arhat by sweeping the floor in the meditation hall. The holy Tibetan masters of the past have said:

If we fully grasp the crucial point of the practice, each of our actions will become an opportunity to practice virtue.

So we must not think: "Meditation is important, but actions such as cleaning are not". If we understand the importance of sweeping, we will also see that it too is an opportunity for practice.

The manner of arranging the meditation supports of body, speech and mind is as follows: we should have a representation (statue or Thangka⁷) of the master who brought the teaching to our world, Buddha Shakyamuni, in the middle of an altar at approximately the height of our waist. If we have representations of other Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, etc., we may arrange them alongside. However, these are not a necessity. In fact, we could not possibly find a master possessing greater kindness than the incomparable and compassionate Teacher himself. In no case should the age, price, beauty, or quality of the material of these representations be considered important.

As for the support representing the word, we may place a book or text containing the essence of the excellent words of the Victorious One; for example, *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Verses* or any other text on the stages of the path to enlightenment. To represent the mind, we may use a stupa or a vajra and bell.

⁷ A thangka is a painting on canvas decorated with brocades.

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2) Arrange the offerings acquired through honest means in a beautiful way

It is very important that the objects being offered not have been obtained through dishonest means. In fact, it would be better to have no offerings at all than to have acquired them in such a way. The offerings are arranged so as to please the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas. If these offerings are contaminated or obtained dishonestly, how could they possibly be pleasing to these sublime beings?

Finally, the main reason for placing offerings is to overcome the afflictive emotion of desire-attachment in our mind. Just as a drop of oil is absorbed into a sheet of paper, desire-attachment permeates the mind and becomes extremely difficult to remove. For this reason, it is also very difficult to free oneself from Samsara. In the *Prayer for Rebirth in Soukhavati*:

The lasso of desire confines us to the prison of Samsara.
“The river of karma drags us into the ocean of conditioned existence.

3) Sit in the seven-point posture of Vairochana and generate an especially virtuous state of mind

3.1 Sit in the seven-point posture

The Victorious Ensapa described this posture as follows:

The legs, hands and back make three; with the teeth, tongue and lips, it makes four. The head, eyes, shoulders and breath make another four. These are the seven or eight⁸ points of Vairochana.

a) The legs are in the lotus position. Other than meditations during the stage of completion when this position is mandatory, it is also possible to adopt the position of the

⁸ This makes for eight points if we include the element of breathing or motivation.

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half-lotus (legs crossed in the usual way), or to simply imagine ourselves in the lotus position. It is also permitted for anyone experiencing certain physical discomfort to adopt another posture, on a chair, etc.

b) Both hands are resting in the mudra of meditative equanimity: palms facing upwards, right hand resting on the left hand. The tips of the thumbs are touching and pointing upwards. Both hands should be placed approximately four centimeters below the solar plexus.

c) The back should be as straight as an arrow. If the body is straight, the energy channels and winds will be as well. This allows the mind to become flexible.

d) The teeth and lips are in a natural position with the tip of the tongue touching the palate. This prevents the mouth from drying up and keeps the saliva in the mouth when absorbed in more profound meditative states.

e) The head is bent slightly forward.

f) The eyes are looking downwards following the sides of the nose. This technique helps to prevent agitation and mental laxity. It is sometimes suggested to meditate with eyes completely closed, or looking directly ahead. However, this is not in accordance with Lama Tsongkapa's thinking.

g) The shoulders are straight, neither too tense nor too loose.

Finally, the meditation cushion should be positioned in such a way that the back of the body is slightly higher than the front. This is thought to have a particular impact on meditation.

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3.2. Generating an especially virtuous state of mind

Depending on our motivation at the beginning of meditation, we may practice counting the breath or not. The incomparable Tsongkhapa said:

Positive or negative karma is the result of good or bad intentions. If the intention is virtuous, the way and the stages will be also. If the intention is inferior, the way and the stages will be inferior. It all depends on the motivation.

Consequently, success or failure in meditation on the Lamrim depends exclusively on the motivation and the intention of the meditator. Let's recite the following passage so as to leave a true impression on our consciousness regarding taking refuge and Bodhichitta:

In the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sublime Assembly, I take refuge until Enlightenment. Through the merit accumulated by practicing generosity and other perfections, may I attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings.

The first sentence refers to taking refuge and the second, to developing Bodhichitta and other qualities.

4) Petition the merit-field

In the Sutras, we read:

The Muni is present before the one who imagines him to be truly there.

We do not see the deities of the merit-field; but this is due solely to our karmic veils. In fact, these deities are truly present simply due to the power of our visualization. We call it the merit-field because this field is what makes it possible for us to "harvest" the accumulation of merit and wisdom.

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The Merit-Field

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5) Perform the seven-limbed practice and mandala offering, including all the essential steps for accumulating merit and self-purification

I bow down respectfully with my three doors (body, speech and mind).

I present all the offerings - real or imagined.

I confess my wrongdoings and errors accumulated since beginningless time.

I rejoice in the positive acts of the Aryas and ordinary people.

I ask the masters to turn the Dharma wheel for the benefit of all sentient beings.

I beseech them to remain until Samsara is completely emptied.

I dedicate all the accumulated virtues, mine and those of others, to ultimate Enlightenment.

(Offering the mandala)

I offer this base anointed with incense, strewn with flowers, illuminated by Mount Meru, the four continents, the sun and the moon, all visualized as a pure Buddha field. May all beings delight in this pure land.

Idam gourou ratna mandala kam niryatayami

Each of the seven limbs is an antidote which can be applied to afflictive emotions:

- a) Prostrating and rendering homage are antidotes to pride.
- b) Offerings help to counter avarice.
- c) Purification is the antidote to the mental poisons of desire-attachment, aversion and confusion.
- d) Rejoicing destroys jealousy.
- e) Turning the Dharma wheel is the antidote to the karma of having abandoned the Dharma.
- f) Imploring the spiritual masters to postpone entering Nirvana is the antidote to negatively criticizing them.
- g) Dedicating all virtuous activity is the antidote to false views.

In the oral tradition of the holy masters of the past, it is said:

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Without the accumulation of merit, we are like a dry seed.

The accumulation of merit and the purification of veils are the conditions supporting the development of the Path in the mind. Without them, and with the sole main condition of internalizing the subjects of meditation, it will be very difficult for us to generate any realizations.

6) Ask wholeheartedly that the three very important elements be integrated into our consciousness

The great Tsongkhapa once asked Manjushri what would be the quickest method to use in order to develop realizations in his mind. Manjushri told him to vigorously combine the three following elements: 1) to perceive his Lama as being inseparable from his meditation deity; 2) to energetically persevere in accumulating merit and self-purification; 3) to devote himself to the principal cause [of Buddhahood], i.e. the visualizations. Here is how to express these three great objectives:

Bless me as well as all sentient beings, who have been my mothers, so that we may swiftly put an end to all the various forms of wrong-thinking, beginning with the lack of respect for our spiritual guides, to our notion of attributing specific characteristics to the two kinds of self. Bless us so that all righteous thoughts may arise easily, beginning with respect for our spiritual guides, to the realization of the emptiness of the self. Bless us, we pray, and completely pacify all obstacles, both external and internal.

Repeat this request wholeheartedly several times. Whether in detailed or abridged form, the six preparations are the foundation of every path (Hinayana, Mahayana, or Vajrayana) that we practice. Consequently, we should put all our effort into combining all three from the very beginning.

2. The practice itself

We may choose any *specific meditation topic* (from how to follow a spiritual master, the root of the Path, to calm-abiding and special insight), and meditate on each of the points mentioned in this theme, knowing when best to alternate between analytical and stabilizing meditation. At the end of the session, we dissolve the merit-field with prayers and dedications.

The main part of the session may also consist of a meditation on all the topics as a whole, starting with how to follow a spiritual guide to developing calm-abiding and special insight, always knowing when to alternate between analytical and stabilization meditation. We may choose which of these two methods we prefer or which is most suitable to our temperament.

Analytical meditation consists in the use of quotations, logical reasoning, and examples during the meditation session. Stabilization meditation consists in focusing the mind single-pointedly on a chosen object.

The various meditation topics will be explained throughout the text. It is most important to start by listening and reflecting on the teachings of the Lamrim. Without the lamp of listening to the teaching, we could not possibly know what should be practiced and what should be abandoned.

Certain people use analytical meditation to develop attachment and love while thinking of dear ones, and develop aversion and hostility while thinking of persons whom they do not like. This, however, is far from being a positive and beneficial analytical meditation. It is, in fact, a meditation contaminated by attachment and aversion and, therefore, generates suffering. We should not meditate in this way; rather, we should meditate with enthusiasm on the methods that allow us to find the happiness of higher conditions and ultimate states.

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3. What to do at the end of the meditation session

The merit-field is dissolved and we recite prayers and dedications.

We dissolve the merit-field as follows:

Precious and glorious root-Lama, take your place on the lotus at the top of my head. Take care of me with your great kindness and grant me the realizations of your body, speech and mind.

And the dedication:

The spirit of Enlightenment is precious. May it grow where it has not yet grown. Where it has grown, may it never decline, but flourish for evermore.

If we have a set meditation time, we may do four sessions daily: at dawn, in the morning, in the afternoon, and at sunset. At first, if our meditation sessions are too long, we may easily fall prey to mental laxity and agitation. We should, therefore, consider several shorter sessions. It is especially important to respect our capacities and our possibilities.

B- What to do between meditation sessions

Make the most of the time between sessions by reading biographies of the great masters: Buddha Shakyamuni, Naropa, Tilopa, Milarepa, Atisha, Dromtonpa, Lama Tsongkhapa and his spiritual sons, etc.

Preliminaries

The Spiritual Master, Foundation of the Path

How to rely on the spiritual guide

1. Advantages of relying on a spiritual guide
2. Disadvantages of not correctly relying on a spiritual guide
3. How to rely on him in thought
4. How to rely on him in action

Preliminaries

How to rely on a spiritual guide

It is said in the *Collection of Sutras*:

He who respects his spiritual master and always relies on learned Lamas is a virtuous disciple. Why is this so? Because the qualities of erudition come from the Lama. It is he who explains the perfection of wisdom. All the Buddha's teachings depend on the Lama.

1. Advantages of relying on the spiritual guide
2. Disadvantages of not correctly relying on the spiritual guide
3. How to rely on him in thought
4. How to rely on him in action

The instructions concerning these four topics are not meant to be followed by everyone. They concern only those who aspire to the happiness of liberation and omniscience, and who have the potential of advancing on the Mahayana Path. To learn more about these instructions, we may refer to *The Great Treatise of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* by Lama Tsongkhapa.

Why is it important to place your confidence in an authentic spiritual guide? - In order to achieve the desired result of the Path, namely, the two bodies of a Buddha. For this, two specific conditions must be met: the external or supporting condition (meeting a spiritual guide), and the internal and main condition (a precious human life).

The causal path (the main cause) that allows for the attainment of the two resultant bodies consists in the Method (the root) and the Wisdom (the seed). An authentic spiritual master (the supporting condition) is one who correctly explains both truths, which are the bases necessary for understanding the causal path. In every field of study, a master is needed for proper guidance. Is it necessary then to stress the importance of the spiritual guide for our understanding of the Path?

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If the spiritual master is so important, how do we recognize his authenticity? It has nothing to do with his physical appearance, nor the number of his students, nor his wealth, power or popularity. He must not necessarily be old, or an abbot, a geshe, or a recognized incarnation (tulku). Where he comes from, or whether the master is a man or a woman, is also irrelevant.

Some people may have been led to believe that relying on a spiritual master means that they must always be at his side or live in the same city. Others believe that they must become his servants or bring him offerings. Of course, these people are mistaken.

Relying on a spiritual master does not mean believing everything he says without question. Neither does it mean that we have no other choice but to follow him, nor that we must meet with him often. The quality of the relationship does not depend on the number of our offerings to him; nor does it mean that we must become his friend, director, or sponsor. Nor is it required to make him a member of our family, to become his physician, or provide him with food and shelter.

Lama Potowa explains how we should rely on a spiritual master according to our tradition:

Not just any spiritual master will enable us to attain complete liberation. As is mentioned in Maitreya's *The Ornament of the Sutras*, we should rely on a spiritual master who possesses the ten qualities including a perfect code of ethics. If we are unable to find a Lama possessing all these qualities, we should, nevertheless, rely on one who observes at least a pure code of ethics, and who has kept perfectly pure ties with his masters. He should also have received oral transmissions from his masters, and should encourage his students to act not only for the benefit of this lifetime but for the benefit of the next ones.

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The spiritual Master common to the
Three Vehicles:
Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana

1. Characteristics of the spiritual master you can rely on
2. Characteristics required of the student who relies on the spiritual master

Preliminaries

1. Characteristics of the spiritual master you can rely on

This is what Maitreya says on this subject in *The Ornament of the Sutras*:

Rely on a spiritual master who is disciplined, pacified, most pacified, who is more knowledgeable than yourself, who is perseverant, well-versed in the scriptures, who has realized emptiness, is a skilled orator, who possesses love and has abandoned discouragement.

Various kinds of reliable spiritual masters (an abbot, the spiritual master of the combined Hinayana and Mahayana, the Vajra master of the Vajrayana, etc.) and the specific characteristics each should possess, are described in the Vinaya. However, in the context of this present age, the person able to guide us progressively on the Path of the Small, Middle, and Great Scopes is the spiritual guide of the Mahayana. He should possess the following ten qualities:

- 1) Be disciplined through training in ethics
- 2) Be pacified through single-pointed concentration
- 3) Be wholly pacified through training in wisdom
- 4) Be versed in the scriptures
- 5) Have realized emptiness
- 6) Have more knowledge than his students
- 7) Be a skilled speaker
- 8) Have love
- 9) Have enthusiasm
- 10) Have abandoned discouragement.

The first six qualities are developed for his own benefit, whereas the other four enable him to take care of others.

2. The characteristics required of the student who relies on a spiritual master of the Hinayana and Mahayana

In his *Four Hundred Stanzas*, Aryadeva explains:

It is said that an individual who is nonpartisan, intelligent and applied is a good recipient for the teachings.

Thus, it says that a good candidate for receiving the teachings possesses all three (or five, as we will see) of these qualities. Nonpartisan means impartial. Otherwise, partiality would prevent a student from perceiving these qualities, and from grasping the meaning of the excellent explanations. Being partial means being attached to one's own tradition while having an aversion to that of others. If we detect this emotion in our mind, we must eliminate it.

Next, it states that an intelligent person is one who can distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. Effectively, even if we are impartial, if we do not have the mental capacity to differentiate between a perfect path explained with eloquence, and a pseudo path based on faulty explanations, then we are not a suitable student. We must be able to make such a distinction and know when to keep what is essential and when to discard what is not.

Third, we must have a deep yearning for the teaching. Even if we possess the first two qualities, if we are as passive as a picture on the wall when listening to the teaching, then we are not a suitable student.

Fourth, we must have a great respect for both the Dharma and the teacher. And finally, the fifth quality is to listen with a well-oriented mind.

As we can see, being a good student with all three or five qualities makes no reference to nationality, sex, social standing, age, physical appearance, or financial situation. Furthermore, choosing to practice the Dharma should be entirely our decision, one that is taken freely and without

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any outside pressure. The practice of Dharma must not be done blindly without first checking it out. Our religion or belonging to a certain culture are irrelevant. This does not mean that we must follow only one Lama, nor that we must become a monk or nun.

A person who truly wishes to commit himself/herself to studying Buddhist Dharma should first seek a spiritual guide who possesses all the previously mentioned characteristics required to teach the Lamrim. We must at first avoid acting like a mother who has finally found her long-lost child. For several years, we must have the feeling of being spiritual friends. Later, if faith and confidence in this master have been established, we receive verbal instructions from him, inspired from an uninterrupted lineage of masters beginning with Buddha Shakyamuni. We combine listening, reflection, and meditation, using each element of practice as a support for the other. We must also take refuge in the Three Jewels, know the various types of Karma, and respect what must be practiced and what must be abandoned. This is the doorway to Buddhist Dharma. The Buddha also said:

Bhikshus! You should not follow me simply out of respect or because of my reputation. You must examine my words carefully, just as you would heat, cut, and polish gold in order to verify its quality.

This verse means that we alone have the power and the right to make a commitment after verifying Buddha Shakyamuni's instructions. No one can force us to do this.

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Precious Human Rebirth

The stimulus to extract the essence from
this life of freedoms

1. Identifying its freedoms and endowments
2. Contemplating its great advantages
3. Contemplating how difficult it is to acquire

The stimulus to extract the essence from this life of freedoms

1. Identifying the Freedoms and Endowments

1.1. The Freedoms

We find in the *Verses on the Perfection of Wisdom* which are a *Summary of Precious Qualities*:

In abandoning the eight unfavorable conditions, we always find freedom.

If we are not born in any one of the eight unfavorable conditions, we possess the eight "freedoms".

1) We must first have the freedom of not being born in an uncivilized or isolated place, because in such a place we could not understand the significance of the sublime Dharma.

2) We must have the freedom of not being born stupid or with a defective mind, because we would be unable to learn, reflect, and meditate.

3) We must not be born in a place where the Buddha's teachings do not exist, because it would be impossible to obtain explanations and learn about the Dharma of Transmission and the Dharma of Realization.

4) We must not have grown up with wrong views, that is to say, with wrong ideas such as the belief that the Three Jewels, reincarnation, or the law of Karma do not exist, etc.

In the first three examples, we do not have the power to know what we must practice or abandon; and in the fourth, we have no admiration for the sublime teaching. These four descriptions are types of unfavorable human rebirths. They create an obstacle to knowing the Buddha's teaching.

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Then, in rebirths 5) in a state of extreme suffering, 6) as a hungry ghost or 7) as an animal, it is extremely difficult to come into contact with the Buddha's teaching. If there is contact with the teaching, then it becomes impossible to put it into practice since we are tormented by suffering. As soon as they are reborn, 8) the long-lived gods think: "I have been born as a god!". Distracted by the feeling of plenitude that they experience, the gods squander the life they have, and at the moment of death, they suddenly awaken from what seems like a long sleep, only to think: "Oh no! My life as a god is over!" They abandon their bodies in a state of great anxiety. Thus, we should not be reborn as a long-lived god. These are the four kinds of non-human rebirths that are unfavorable to making a commitment to the Buddha's teaching.

Consequently, we should now think: "What an extraordinary chance I have to not have been reborn in such conditions!" Moreover, having realized that the combination of these eight elements is the unique and extremely rare opportunity allowing a person to attain Buddhahood, let's rejoice wholeheartedly and think: "How lucky I am to have brought all these elements together!"

1.2. The Ten Endowments

Five endowments are personal and five relate to others.

1) The first personal endowment is rebirth *as a human*: This type of rebirth is particularly superior to the others for attaining objectives after this life.

2) A *central place* is, in Buddhist terminology, a region where the Buddha's teaching is established, as on Jambudvīpa⁹, the continent of the south.

⁹ Buddhist cosmology teaches that there are four "continents". Our planet is part of the continent of the south, Jambudvīpa. This continent is the most favorable for practicing the Dharma.

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3) *Possessing all of one's faculties* means having all the normal faculties and organs at birth.

4) *We must not have committed a major crime*, namely, one of the five crimes of immediate retribution¹⁰.

5) It is important to *have confidence in the teachings* of the three scopes and in the stages of the path to enlightenment.

Because we ourselves must possess these five endowments in order to be able to engage in the teachings, we call them personal endowments.

6) The first endowment relating to others consists in *the coming of a Buddha* into this world.

7) *He has taught the Dharma in this world*.

These two endowments are not really present, but the Lama is, and it is he who teaches the sublime Dharma and acts as Buddha's representative. Thus we can say that the equivalents of these two endowments are present.

8) *The Buddha's teaching has not degenerated and still endures*. Even though the Dharma of Realization (the actual attainment of the Path of the Aryas) is not really present, an approximation is present, namely, the Dharma of Transmission which enables us to follow the teaching.

9) *Some people are committed to the teachings*. Presently the Buddha is not physically with us. Nevertheless, we are able to observe sublime beings giving us examples by their extraordinary actions. Thus an approximation of this endowment is also present.

10) *Others are generally benevolent*. For those who practice the Dharma, favorable conditions can be brought

¹⁰ Killing our father, mother, an accomplished spiritual master, injuring a Buddha, and creating a schism in the Sangha.

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together due to the kindness of others who become benefactors, etc. This greatly facilitates the practice of Dharma.

These are the five endowments relating to others, which are necessary to guarantee our ability to commit ourselves to the teachings. For this reason, we refer to them as the endowments relating to others.

Thus a precious rebirth can be defined as the combination of all these freedoms and endowments. Simply being reborn as a human, does not necessarily imply that it is a precious human rebirth. Let us verify whether or not we possess these freedoms and endowments. If we do, then let us meditate on the joy of having something so precious and beneficial! If we do not, then from hereon let us strive to develop all the causes needed to obtain them.

2. Contemplating its great value

2.1. Very beneficial for short-term happiness

The foundation for obtaining temporary happiness and the endowments of a higher rebirth as a human or a worldly god is to have preserved a pure code of ethics, supported by generosity and the other perfections, as well as immaculate prayers. This precious temporary rebirth is extremely beneficial for accomplishing this.

2.2. Very beneficial for ultimate happiness

Attaining the ultimate states of happiness which are liberation and omniscience, rests on the three higher trainings (the path explained in the Sutras) and the stages of generation and achievement (the path revealed in the Tantras). The foundation of these two paths is Ethics: the Pratimoksha vows, the Bodhisattva vows, and the Tantric vows. These can be generated on the basis of a pure renunciation. Apart from the human beings on the continent of Jambudvīpa, it is very difficult to develop

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renunciation on the other continents, or among the gods and other classes of sentient beings.

The human body born from a womb on Jambudvīpa and possessing the freedoms, endowments, and the six factors is the best support to achieve Buddhahood in a single body and in a single lifetime. If we have not already accomplished this, doing so is our sole responsibility. It would be impossible to find a better opportunity than the one we have right now.

Certain people will pray before a wish-fulfilling jewel to grant them all that they desire. However, this wish-granting jewel cannot help them avoid death or the suffering of inferior rebirths. We have obtained a human body identical to Lama Tsongkhapa's and Milarepa's, but we actually do not practice the Dharma. Yet, there is no difference between the quality of our body and that of the great masters.

2.3. Contemplating how very beneficial it is at every moment

Being now in possession of a precious human rebirth, it would be a mistake not to be concerned by the loss of months and years squandered in worldly activities and, to the contrary, be worried about losing an hour or two of work. There could be no worse desolation than to have obtained a precious human rebirth, which is acquired only once, and to not even have used it at least once to listen, reflect, and meditate on the Path leading to the happiness of liberation and omniscience; and then to die after having accumulated nothing but negative karma. Consequently, it is most important to give this lifetime its true significance by devoting every moment towards attaining the happiness of liberation and omniscience.

3. Contemplating the great difficulty of obtaining a precious human rebirth

3.1a) From the perspective of the cause, it is difficult to obtain

Generally speaking, obtaining a simple, happy rebirth depends on the practice of one form of ethics or another. Not only is creating this cause very difficult, but it is said that particularly for a precious human rebirth with all its freedoms and endowments, several types of specific root virtues are required, which result from pure ethical behavior. These causes are still more difficult to produce because it is said that maintaining such a code of ethics is extremely difficult. Particularly in these degenerate times, it is very rare that a person is able to maintain even one pure form of ethics.

3.1b) From the perspective of the effect, it is difficult to obtain

Compared to unfavorable rebirths, happy rebirths are infinitely rare. Among these rare happy rebirths, more rare still are those who have an interest in the Dharma (reincarnation, the law of cause and effect, etc.). Among the latter, those who enjoy a precious human rebirth with all its attributes are extremely rare.

3.2. Analogies showing how difficult it is to obtain

A blind turtle is swimming in a vast ocean where, floating on the water, is a golden, wooden ring being tossed about by the wind. The turtle pokes its head out of the water only once every hundred years. It is almost impossible for the turtle to succeed in poking its head through the hole in the ring. Like the turtle, we are in the great ocean of Samsara. Victims of our own karma and disruptive emotions, we usually drift from one bad rebirth to another. Just as rarely as the turtle pokes its head out of the water, do we emerge

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from bad rebirths to obtain a human life. However, meeting up with the gold ring of the Buddha's teaching is also very rare. From this example, we can appreciate just how very difficult it is to obtain a precious human rebirth.

3.3. The nature of this difficulty

Taken separately, there are far less human beings than there are sentient beings in the five other realms of existence. It is, therefore, vital not to waste this precious human rebirth, this priceless jewel comprised of eighteen attributes, and which comes our way only once. Having access to the precious happiness of liberation and omniscience at our fingertips, nothing could be more ignorant and stupid than not taking advantage of it, and having to remain in Samsara. Shantideva says:

Having found such freedom, there could not be worse delusion, worse insanity, than not to use it to cultivate virtue.

This extraordinary support which is obtained only once, serves at best to attain enlightenment in one lifetime, in one body. Otherwise, we can not attain liberation. At least, we must absolutely strive to avoid sinking into unfavorable rebirths! If we make this mistake, the repercussions will not only be felt for one or two days, but for a long series of rebirths.

If we wish to attain Buddhahood by following the Path of the practitioners of the three Scopes, we need, simultaneously, both the external condition (a spiritual master who shows us this Path) and the internal condition (a body having the freedoms and endowments). Likewise, if we aspire to build a multi-storeyed building, we must have a solid foundation (a precious human rebirth) as well as an experienced architect to guide us in the construction of its various storeys (the spiritual master who shows us the Path).

II. The stages of the path shared with the practitioners of the small scope

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Impermanence

Reminding ourselves that we are not here for long and that death is inevitable

1. The disadvantages of not remembering death
2. The advantages of remembering death
3. How to think about death

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Reminding ourselves that we are not here for long and that death is inevitable

From the Sutras:

The three worlds are as impermanent as autumn clouds;
look at those who are born and those who are dying in the
same way.

Many examples show us that impermanence is the entire
essence of both the external and internal worlds.

1. The disadvantages of not remembering death

There are six disadvantages:

1) We do not give any thought to the Dharma

If we do not think about the sublime Dharma, we will be caught up in the whirlwind of worldly distractions. By thinking only about this present lifetime, our life will be senseless. This problem stems from the fact that we do not think about death.

2) We think of the Dharma, but we do not actually practice it

Because we do not give any thought to death, we procrastinate constantly and say to ourselves: "I will not die now, so I can practice tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, next year, etc.". However, nothing is less certain.

3) We practice, but incorrectly

We practice the Dharma, but with worldly preoccupations or to eliminate unfavorable conditions in our present life, such as sickness, etc. Or we practice listening, reflecting, and meditating with the intention of becoming a scholar or someone famous. This is again due to the fact that we have not considered our own impermanence. In short, if our

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practice becomes the antidote to our disruptive emotions, it is a true Dharma practice. Otherwise, it is not.

4) We practice, but without serious effort

Presently, our spiritual practice is not maintained with joyful perseverance and we are unable to practice consistently. We stop practicing when we are tired. This is because we do not think enough about death.

5) We act in a vulgar manner

Due to our exaggerated attachment to this present life, we become involved in all kinds of actions dominated by the three mental poisons (desire-attachment, aversion, confusion): fights, arguments, hurtful or inappropriate words. This is the result of our lack of concern about death.

6) We are bound to die with regrets

Realizing that we have not taken the time during our life to create the causes of virtue, our mind will be overwhelmed with fear and anxiety. Furthermore, because of our attachment to cares associated with this lifetime, we will find it difficult to leave our body and our surroundings.

2. The advantages of remembering death

The six advantages of remembering death are as follows:

1) It is beneficial

To start with, reflecting on death is beneficial because it lessens our attachment to what we like and our aversion to what we do not like. It goes without saying then, that this reflection is most beneficial for obtaining the happiness of higher conditions. It is also the foundation that allows us to obtain the happiness of both liberation and enlightenment. Remembering death also serves as an antidote for the obstacles to calm-abiding, such as mental laxity and

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agitation. We could compare remembering death to the driver of the vehicle driving us to liberation and enlightenment. In short, remembering death motivates us to practice every stage of the Path, beginning with our precious human rebirth up to the unification envisioned in the practice of the Tantras.

2) It is powerful

Remembering death is very powerful because it greatly facilitates our detachment from exterior objects, such as visual forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. It is like a hammer that instantly eliminates both our disruptive emotions and negative actions. It has an infinite number of advantages, such as boosting our enthusiasm and preventing discouragement when faced with challenges encountered in accomplishing our two accumulations.

3) Remembering death is important at the beginning

It is the motivation that brings us to take our first steps in the practice of the Dharma, the Path to obtaining the happiness of liberation and enlightenment. Remembering death is important at the beginning in the same way that a seed is required to obtain a good harvest.

4) It is important in the middle

It is important in the middle, just like water, fertilizer and heat are essential to the harvest. Remembering our impermanence is what stimulates us to practice with enthusiasm in order to attain the completion of the two accumulations, with the purpose of obtaining the two resultant bodies of a Buddha.

5) It is important at the end

It brings us all the way to the result, the final accomplishment of our practice of the Sublime Dharma. In

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short, remembering death is the doorway to all that is marvelous.

6) Death is experienced with joy and enthusiasm

Having persevered with enthusiasm in our practice of the Dharma, we will be confident at the moment of death and will have a sense of returning home. These benefits come from having remembered death. The best type of practitioner dies joyfully. The middle practitioner dies without fears. The practitioner of lesser capacity dies, nonetheless, with a mind free of regrets. We will die happily, if at that moment we can think, "During my life, I really did my best".

3. How to think about death

To remind ourselves about death, we contemplate the three roots and the nine reasons. This reasoning brings us to three certitudes upon which we will meditate. Here are the three roots, each of which includes three reasons:

1) The inevitability of death

1. Death will inevitably come and no circumstance can prevent it.
2. Our lifespan never increases, but diminishes day by day.
3. We will definitely die before having the chance to practice the Dharma.

2) The uncertainty of the moment of death

1. The lifespan of the people of the southern continent (Jambudvīpa) is not fixed, and is even less so in these degenerate times.
2. The moment of our death is uncertain because many factors contribute to our death, and few to our actual life.
3. The moment of our death is uncertain because the body is very fragile.

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3) At the moment of death, only the Dharma can assist us

1. Food and wealth cannot help us.
2. Our friends and relatives cannot help us.
3. Even our body cannot help us.

Finally, there are three certitudes to develop following our meditation on the three roots:

- 1) We must practice the Dharma because we will certainly die, and at that moment the Dharma will undoubtedly be beneficial for us.
- 2) We should practice the Dharma now because there is no certainty as to when we will die.
- 3) We should practice only the Dharma because only it can assist us at the moment of death.

To summarize then, if we succeed in thinking of death every day, or better still, every hour, it will first bring us to the Path. In the middle, it will help us to persevere. Finally, it will enable us to acquire the clear light of the Dharmakaya. Therefore, remembering death is very important. Many great masters have confirmed this.

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The sufferings of unfavorable rebirths

Contemplating the sufferings of a next life in unfavorable rebirths

1. Contemplating the sufferings of beings that must endure extreme pain: heat, extreme cold, etc.
2. Contemplating the sufferings of avaricious spirits: hunger, thirst, etc.
3. Contemplating the suffering endured by animals: stupidity, etc.

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Contemplating the sufferings of a next lifetime in unfavorable rebirths

It is said in the *Jatakas*:

You may be sure of this: Your next rebirth in this world will be happy or unhappy depending on whether your karma is positive or negative. So completely abandon misdeeds, and cultivate virtue.

The Teacher, Buddha, declared that by engaging in positive acts, we can expect a happy rebirth and by committing wrongful acts, we can expect unhappy rebirths. Presently, we have brought together both the external and internal conditions. These are, respectively, meeting a spiritual master and having a precious human life; but let us not forget that they are impermanent by nature. The moment of death is unpredictable and after death, our consciousness continues to exist. It continues on to the suffering of a happy or unhappy rebirth. These are the only possibilities.

Without having received an explanation of the qualities and particular characteristics of suffering, we might think that suffering constitutes an obstacle to liberation. Consequently, we will describe them. Renunciation [of suffering and its causes] is the indispensable doorway to liberation. Thus, since without suffering we cannot possibly wish to renounce it, experiencing suffering will only contribute to our path to liberation. In *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, Shantideva says:

Without suffering, no renunciation; thus, my spirit, remain firm!

It is also said that the first doorway to the teachings of the Victorious One is taking refuge. What purpose does it serve? To protect us from suffering in general (which will be explained further in the section on practitioners of medium scope), and more particularly from the suffering of unhappy rebirths. We may meditate on this as follows:

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1. Consider the sufferings of beings that must endure extreme pain: heat, extreme cold, etc.
2. Consider the sufferings of avid spirits: hunger, thirst, etc.
3. Consider the suffering of animals: stupidity, etc.

According to the tradition of the Madhyamika-Prasangika school, it is said that all phenomena, internal as well as external, are but mere appearances from the conventional point of view. They do not exist in a way that is real, true, autonomous and natural. Hence, there is no precise location that would exist in an independent or real way that would be the birthplace of hungry ghosts or beings in conditions of extreme suffering.

However, in order to respond to the different dispositions and inclinations of certain students, and eliminate their confusion regarding the law of cause and effect, the Buddha introduced different categories of suffering. If we really understand the usefulness of the latter, not only would meditating on the different forms of suffering not appear to us as an obstacle, but it would also help us to find happiness. Certain people dislike hearing about suffering. Is it not strange then that these same people should wish to be freed from suffering, yet not want to hear about it?

There is not much time left between this life and the next: there remains only the time until our breathing stops. And if we pursue our reasoning along this line, we must think: "Nothing guarantees that at the same time tomorrow, I will not have been reborn in an unfavorable rebirth". We must continue to meditate in this manner until a strong renunciation develops within us, a renunciation that yearns for liberation from Samsara. If we can do this, we will be ready to meditate on taking refuge.

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Taking Refuge

Taking refuge, supreme doorway to the teachings

1. The reasons why we take refuge
2. The objects of refuge
3. The criteria for an adequate taking of refuge
4. The benefits of taking refuge
5. Advice after having taken refuge

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Taking refuge, supreme doorway to the teachings

In Offering to a Lama:

Terrified by the inferno of sufferings of rebirth in the lower realms, from the bottom of my heart, I take refuge in the Three Jewels.

1. The reasons why we take refuge

1) Mindful of the general and specific sufferings of Samsara, 2) confidence in the Three Jewels arises within us once we understand they have the power to liberate us. Both these elements are excellent causes for a genuine taking of refuge. Our refuge-taking will then become an unshakable certainty in our mind.

Three levels of refuge-taking are possible, depending on the motivation of the practitioner of the small, medium, or great scope:

- 1) We may take refuge with the sole purpose of escaping from the sufferings of unfavorable rebirths.
- 2) We may take refuge in order to attain liberation from all the sufferings of Samsara for oneself.
- 3) Taking refuge in the great scope is motivated by the desire to liberate all sentient beings from all forms of suffering in Samsara.

The Buddha, Dharma, and the Sangha are called the "Three Sublime Jewels" because it is said they are like a wish-fulfilling jewel, and that they possess the six features corresponding to the Dharma:

- 1) They rarely appear in the world
- 2) They are immaculate
- 3) They possess powers such as clairvoyance, etc.
- 4) They are the sublime ornament of virtuous thought

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- 5) They possess the most sublime qualities
- 6) They are not subject to attachment and aversion

2. The objects of refuge

i. Identifying the objects of refuge

In *The Seventy Verses on Taking Refuge*:

The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha are the refuge for those aspiring to liberation.

The Buddha, the ultimate refuge, perfectly attained his own well being and that of others. As the ultimate refuge, he possesses all qualities and has eliminated all imperfections. The Jewel of the Dharma is all Truth that purifies the mental continuum of an Arya endowed with any of the following eight extraordinary qualities:

- 1) The absence of any thought similar to those of the logicians who adhere to one of the four extreme positions
- 2) The absence of all karma and afflictive emotion
- 3) The absence of all misconception
- 4) Purity, free of obscurations regarding the nature of the Path
- 5) Clear knowledge of emptiness and multiplicity
- 6) Ability to apply the antidote to its opposite
- 7) The truth of cessation which is free of all attachment
- 8) The truth of the Path which liberates from all attachment

The Jewel of the Sangha is of two types: conventional and ultimate. The conventional Sangha is symbolized by a group of four ordinary people having taken the vows of a fully ordained monk or nun. A superior being or Arya constitutes the ultimate Sangha.

There are, therefore, two types of refuge: the conventional and the ultimate.

Conventional, temporary refuge, and refuge taken while progressing on the Path of the nature of things are all

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synonymous. Ultimate, final refuge, and refuge taken in the completion of the Path of the nature of things are all synonymous.

To be protected from a single kind of suffering, all three objects of refuge are not necessary. Each one possesses different powers of protection. However, in order to be completely protected from all the sufferings of Samara, the combination of all Three Jewels is needed. For example, a patient suffering from a serious illness will need a doctor, medication, and a nurse in order to heal. The Buddha, like a skillful doctor, the Dharma, like the powerful medication, and the Sangha, like the excellent nurse, can protect us. If, however, the patient does not take the powerful medication prescribed by the skillful doctor, he will not get better despite the extraordinary qualities of the doctor, the medication, and the nurse. Similarly, despite their extraordinary qualities and the power of their great compassion, the Three Jewels cannot protect sentient beings from the suffering of Samsara if they do not practice the Dharma, i.e. the Buddha's teaching. The Buddha said:

The Munis do not wash away faults with water. They do not eliminate the suffering of beings by touching them with their hands. They do not transfer their own realizations onto others. They liberate sentient beings by teaching the truth of emptiness.

ii. The reasons that make this a valid object of refuge

We refer here primarily to the Jewel of the Buddha. There are four reasons:

- 1) He must be free of all suffering.
- 2) He must be skilled in the methods that liberate others from their suffering.
- 3) He must act with total impartiality and great compassion towards everyone.
- 4) He must act for the good of everyone whether they have helped him or not.

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3. The criteria for a true taking of refuge

There is a great variety of ways in which to introduce this subject, but in this case, we will describe the true taking of refuge after having understood the qualities of the Three Jewels. This reflection is divided into three parts: 1) the qualities of the Buddha, 2) the qualities of the Dharma and, 3) the qualities of the Sangha.

1) The qualities of the Buddha

The Buddha has four qualities: those of his body, speech, mind, and activities.

a. The qualities of his body

They are mentioned in *The Ornament of Clear Realization*:

His hands and feet are marked by wheels, the soles of his feet are smooth and flat like the belly of a turtle...

In other words, his body is adorned with extraordinary signs and marks¹¹. The signs indicate that he is of noble birth. The marks reflect the nature of his inner qualities.

b. The qualities of his speech

Its essence is revealed in a tantra:

In uttering a single word for many, everyone receives it personally.

c. The qualities of his mind

His qualities are summarized in his omniscience, his love, and his skill. Due to his omniscience, even while in a state of meditative absorption on emptiness, he can perceive the

¹¹ It is said that the body of a Buddha possesses thirty-two extraordinary major signs and eighty minor marks.

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multiplicity of knowable objects as clearly as a fruit¹² resting in the palm of his hand.

d. The quality of his activities

The qualities of the Buddha's activities are exposed in the *Sublime Continuum of the Great Vehicle* by Maitreya:

They are like Indra, the drum, the rain cloud, Brahma, the sun, a precious gem. Tathagatas are like an echo, like space, like the earth.

The Buddha disciplines sentient beings with magical emanations from his body and teaches the Dharma through the enlightened activities of the word. By abiding in one-pointed concentration, free of all afflictive emotions, he accomplishes the enlightened activities of the mind. In reality, the Buddha's enlightened activities are defined as virtuous qualities, arising from the dominant condition which is the body of primordial wisdom in his mental continuum.

Here are the nine examples symbolizing the qualities of the enlightened activities of a Buddha:

- 1) The form body of a Buddha is comparable to that of Indra, Lord of the gods
- 2) The word of the Buddha is like the great drum of the gods
- 3) The mind of the Buddha is like the rain cloud
- 4) The enlightened activities of the body and speech of the Tathagata are like the emanations of Brahma
- 5) The enlightened activities of the mind of the Tathagata are like the sun
- 6) The secret of the mind of the Tathagata is like a wish-fulfilling jewel
- 7) The secret of the word of the Tathagata is like an echo

¹² Here, the original version mentions the amla, a fruit possessing a transparent aspect through which it is possible to clearly see the details of our hand.

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- 8) The secret of the body of the Tathagata is like space
- 9) The great compassion of the Buddha is like the precious foundation of the earth

2) The qualities of the Dharma

The truths of cessation and the path of the Dharma of Transmission and Realization lend themselves to disciplining the mind and abandoning mistakes. To make it easier to understand, all these qualities are included in the Lamrim. They include, for example, the four greatneses and the three particular aspects of this work.

3) The qualities of the Sangha

Let us take the example of someone who is on the path of accumulation. He has developed a renunciation of Samsara and has committed himself to the path of accumulation; he has emanated himself for the good of others, and has obtained the powers of clairvoyance, etc. In a general sense, those on the path of preparation have realized the sixteen aspects of the Four Noble Truths. On the path of vision, they have directly realized emptiness. On the path of meditation, they have progressively abandoned the objects to be abandoned. Once they become Arhats, they acquire still more qualities. In short, several great classical works state that the Sangha has this quality of being able to work over three incalculable eons in order to perfect its accumulations.

4. The benefits of taking refuge

In the *Compendium of Perfections*:

If the merits resulting from the taking of refuge were to take form, the space of the three worlds could not contain them.

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It is said that taking refuge provides eight benefits. They are:

- 1) Becoming an interior person (Buddhist)
- 2) Becoming a candidate for all classes of vows
- 3) Purifying the veils acquired from past karma
- 4) Easily accumulating a great number of merits
- 5) Not being affected by the harmful actions of others
- 6) Not falling back into lower rebirths
- 7) Easily accomplishing all temporary and ultimate objectives
- 8) Rapidly attaining Buddhahood

According to the first advantage, if our refuge-taking arises in our mind in a pure manner, we become a Buddhist (someone who lives within, who follows the Buddha's teaching). Again, it is said in several great classical texts that taking refuge is the only supreme doorway to the teachings.

5. Advice after taking refuge

The choice of having confidence in the Three Jewels and taking refuge in them, as well as the choice of practicing the teaching of the Victorious One, rests in the hands of a single person: oneself. It is absolutely impossible to make another person become a Buddhist or force him/her to have confidence in the Three Jewels. This must come from within. Thus, Buddhist philosophy is in harmony with human rights: far from being an obligation, this teaching aims solely at generating a happy mind, and is a right belonging to all those who wish to take advantage of it. Buddhist philosophy is equally in keeping with the nature of reality. In fact, not only is it possible, but indeed necessary, to verify the teaching of the Victorious One through reasoning and logical proof, so as to develop confidence and eliminate any illogicality. The Buddha said:

Bhikshus! You should not respect me simply because of my name, but accept my words after you have examined them the same way you heat, cut, and polish gold.

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Just as a scientist must know how to discriminate the gross and subtle aspects, and the qualities or defects of objects, a Buddhist "scientist of the mind" must know how to differentiate between a supreme and an inferior refuge, and between the subtle and gross, the perfect and imperfect elements of the objects of refuge. If we are not aware of this, we will not know what to practice and what to abandon, making it impossible to attain the happiness of liberation and omniscience.

The importance of having a good understanding of taking refuge concerns only Buddhist practitioners; it obviously does not concern those who are not interested.

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Karma in general

Contemplating in a general way the law
of cause and effect,
the source of all happiness

1. The inevitability of actions
2. The vast increase of actions
3. An incomplete action cannot be experienced
4. A complete action never wears out

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Contemplating in a general way the law of cause and effect, source of all happiness

1. The inevitability of actions

Following a virtuous action, the result will only be happiness and not suffering. The result experienced from a negative action will be only suffering, not happiness. Causality is inevitable. For example, if we plant the seed of a flower, whether it is white, red, or another color, the flower that will grow will also be white, red, or another color. This is certain. The knowledge of these facts applies to everyone, Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. It is therefore important to be cautious when creating the causes of our karma, because once the result occurs, it is too late to act. For example, it happens that people become sick, consult a doctor, ingest a variety of drugs, and yet are not cured. This is due to the fact that the result has already been produced. In the *Transmission of the Vinaya*:

A completed action will generate a result of the same kind.

2. The vast increase of actions

In the *Collection of Indicative Verses*:

Like a poison that has been swallowed, a fault once committed, even if it is small, will result in great damage and terrible hardships in future lives.

And like the seed that has fully matured, the realization of a positive act, even small, will bring us pure and inconceivable happiness in future lives.

Even when our virtuous action is minimal, if we dedicate it at once, it will lead to great happiness. Similarly, even a small negative action will result in great suffering if it is not

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immediately purified. Although externally, in nature for example, we may see certain causes producing effects very rapidly, there is no external example that can equal the speed at which the relation between cause and effect is produced at the internal level.

The law of cause and effect is still more subtle and more difficult to understand than the notion of emptiness. The Arhats of the Hinayana (the Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas) are able to comprehend and teach the subtle details of emptiness, but the subtleties of the law of cause and effect remain the exclusive domain of the Buddhas. We can only analyze these very subtle details by means of valid texts. Not only should we avoid the least negative act, but being now aware of the inevitability of Karma and how it increases, we must make the firm decision to cultivate virtue and abandon negative actions. In the Sutras, it is said:

Make the decision to cultivate the smallest virtues and to abandon the smallest misdeeds.

At any moment of the day or night, if we immediately purify the tiniest negative actions, they will not be able to ripen into great suffering. For the same reason, if we do not immediately dedicate our positive actions, we cannot foresee whether they will result in happiness, suffering, or neither. Consequently, it is most important to dedicate our positive actions as soon as they are completed.

3. A non-completed action cannot be experienced

If we do not accumulate virtuous and non-virtuous causes, it will be impossible to experience the results of happiness and suffering respectively. For example, we cannot hope to have a good harvest in the fall, if we have not planted the seeds in the spring or provided the conditions for their growth. Similarly, at the moment of a car accident, certain people die, others are injured, and still others are totally unharmed. When we see such events, we may be

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surprised and believe they are miracles or mere coincidences. This, however, is not the case: every individual karmic result is due to previous actions carried out by the person, and to the karma accumulated by that person.

4. A completed action never wears out

In the *Sutra of the Basis of Discipline*:

The karma of sentient beings does not wear out during hundreds of eons. If the prerequisites are met at the opportune moment, the result will ripen at once.

It might take several hundred eons, but one day we will undoubtedly have to experience the effect of all the virtuous and non-virtuous actions we have accumulated, whether they are gross or subtle, remembered or not. For example, an animal does not know how to produce the causes of happiness and suffering. Nevertheless, it is still possible that after seeing a stupa or hearing sounds related to the Dharma, that it will be led to a precious human rebirth. This is an example showing that karma never wears out.

Various Lamrim mentions that the glorious protector Nagarjuna had obtained the knowledge of immortality. However, he died decapitated because in a former lifetime, he had severed the head of an ant while cutting grass. For example, even if a loving son is completely devoted to his mother and gives her the very best medication, if her karma has ripened to maturity, she must die nonetheless. This demonstrates how a complete action never wears out.

This is true even for great practitioners having attained profound realizations or having the capacity to perform miracles. Once their karma reaches maturity, their qualities, accomplishments, magical powers, etc., cannot help them. It is said in the *Sutra of the Hundred Actions*:

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It is impossible that the accumulated positive and negative actions wear out without producing their effect. They must be cultivated or abandoned, respectively, at the most subtle levels.

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Karma in detail

Contemplating more specific traits of the law of causality

1. Reflecting on the causality of positive actions
 - a. The path of positive actions as such
 - b. The effects of these karmas
2. Contemplating negative actions as such

Contemplating more specific traits of the law of causality

1. Reflecting on the causality of positive actions

a) The path of positive actions as such

To simply avoid committing the ten kinds of negative acts will not generate a complete positive karma. A complete path of positive action consists of four elements:

- 1) Identifying the ten negative acts
- 2) Noting the disadvantages of non-virtuous thoughts
- 3) Avoiding these actions completely
- 4) Deciding to abandon them definitively

We have to work very hard to apply these four elements to each of the ten positive acts because they are the causes of happiness. If one of these four elements of the path of positive karma is missing, our virtuous actions will not be complete and only with great difficulty will they lead us to liberation from the ocean of samsaric suffering. The ten positive actions are:

- 1) Having abandoned *killing*, we protect the life of all beings, be they great or small.
- 2) Having abandoned *the appropriation of what is not given*, we make offerings to the Three Jewels and practice generosity toward sentient beings.
- 3) Having abandoned *sexual misconduct*, we protect our code of ethics.
- 4) Having abandoned *lying*, we speak sincerely and honestly.
- 5) Having abandoned *divisive speech*, we prefer harmony and the respect of our family and friends.
- 6) Having abandoned *hurtful words*, we speak pleasant words chosen with care.
- 7) Having abandoned *idle gossip*, we chose to recite spiritual practices of all kinds: mantras, ritual chants, petitions, prayers, etc.

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- 8) Having abandoned *covetousness*, we develop an attitude of generosity and cultivate contentment.
- 9) Having abandoned *malicious intent*, we develop altruism, kindness, and joy.
- 10) Having abandoned *false views*, we cultivate a view that is perfectly attuned to reality.

b) The effects of these positive karmas

1) *The effect of full maturity* consists in a happy rebirth, either as a deity in a higher realm, or as a human or other form in the world of desire.

2) *The effects consistent with the cause* are of two types: experience consistent with the cause, and action consistent with the cause.

Experience consistent with the cause includes for example, a long life, a pretty body, great wealth, harmony with our spouse, a clear mind, the confidence of others, little or no fears or hardships in life, harmony with our friends, few obstacles, a just and positive view, etc.

Action consistent with the cause is illustrated in the reincarnation of a saint, who from birth already has within him/her a love and compassion for others, who has already renounced Samsara, and already likes taking refuge, Bodhichitta, practicing generosity, etc. In short, all of these are extraordinary internal conditions.

3) *The results related to the environment* mean that we are reborn in a peaceful region, where natural resources, water and valuable minerals are abundant. It is a place where epidemics and natural disasters are rare, and where we can easily find work and make friends. It is also a place where our close relations are caring and compassionate, and where our parents are good and loving. In other words, these are all excellent external conditions.

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2. Contemplating negative actions as such

In *The Way of the Bodhisattva*:

Although we wish to avoid suffering, we rush headlong into suffering. Although we desire happiness, due to our confusion, we destroy happiness as we would an enemy.

Thus, we seek only happiness, but are unable to accomplish the positive actions that are the causes of happiness. We do not want to suffer; but are unable to abandon the negative actions that are the causes of our suffering. In the meantime, we remain in the suffering of Samsara. We must see our mistake and think: "If I do not give up negative actions, the causes of my suffering, I will never find happiness. I must first become aware of the ten non-virtuous actions." The Buddha describes them as follows:

There are three actions pertaining to the body; four to speech; and three to the mind. We must purify each of the ten negative actions.

The actions of the body are: 1) killing, 2) appropriation of what was not given and, 3) sexual misconduct.

The four actions of speech are: 4) lying, 5) divisive speech, 6) harsh words, and 7) futile gossip.

And the three actions of the mind are: 8) covetousness, 9) harmful intent, and 10) wrong views.

1) *Killing* is of two types: delayed retribution or immediate retribution. Killing producing a delayed retribution¹³ consists of any act that puts an end to the vital functions of a being possessing a consciousness, regardless of its size.

¹³ Delayed retribution means that the result of the act may ripen in a next life, contrary to immediate retribution, whose result ripens in the same lifetime, due to the extreme seriousness of the act.

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The main emphasis here is on the human being, for example, an enemy. However, it is important to know that among sentient beings are also included oneself, those beings that have begun their life in the uterus (for example, an embryo), animals, whether they have an owner or not, insects, etc. Of course, these days such practices as abortion and euthanasia of animals are unfortunately legally permissible. If we believe in the law of causality, we should do all that is possible to avoid killing in any manner whatsoever.

Finally, killing that carries immediate retribution involves the murder of one of our parents or of an Arhat.

2) *Appropriating what was not given to us* can be done in three ways:

- *Obtaining through force* refers to using a weapon, physical strength, etc. to steal something;
- *Stealing underhandedly* consists in taking something, for example, without the knowledge of the owner or when the owner is not looking;
- *Obtaining something dishonestly* is not robbing in the way we usually understand it. In this category are included lying, trickery, bribes, etc. in order, for example, to skillfully extract something belonging to an enemy or any other person.

3) *Sexual misconduct* is presented under four aspects:

- *Sexual activity is inappropriate* for all ordained persons and for those having taken one-day vows. It is equally inappropriate to have a sexual relationship with the spouse of another person, a pregnant woman, a member of the family, or someone having taken a vow of sexual abstinence.

- The *inappropriate parts of the body* are the bodily parts other than the reproductive organs of the man and woman: the mouth, anus, genitalia of animals, etc.

- The *inappropriate places* are those places that have been blessed, where the supports of the body, speech, and mind

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of the Buddhas are venerated, in front of or near our parents, our spiritual masters, etc.

- The *inappropriate moments* refer to being with someone who is unfit, such as someone who is handicapped, or during the day time.

Finally, the worst of sexual misconducts is rape.

4) *Lying* is of three types:

- *Ordinary lying* consists in saying the opposite of the truth in order to carry out our worldly activities.

- The *great lie* is affirming such aberrations as: There are no effects produced by positive or negative acts; or, there is no suffering in the lower-realm rebirths of Samsara; or, there is no happiness in liberation, etc.

- *Falsely claiming to be a spiritual master* consists in affirming that we have attained calm-abiding and special insight when this is false; claiming to possess magical powers or clairvoyance when it is not true; claiming to perceive spirits, deities and demons when it is not true, etc.

5) *Divisive speech* involves creating discord and animosity between the members of a family, a couple, friends, or between a master and his vajra students, etc.

6) *Hurtful speech* involves speaking disrespectfully to someone about their physical appearance, a handicap, etc., or using unpleasant words in the presence of saintly beings.

7) *Futile gossip* consists in wasting one's time in meaningless conversation. This kind of talk only serves to increase attachment to what we already like and hatred for what we dislike. Not only does it make us waste time in what could otherwise be dedicated to something beneficial, but it often happens that gossip produces the three other negative acts related to speech (divisive speech, hurtful

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speech, and lying). By talking less, we will experience fewer problems and far greater benefits. In the opposite case, there is even the risk of mixing our conversations with our prayers and recitations.

8) *Covetousness* is the negative thought of desiring to obtain the attractive possessions of another person, their spouse, their reputation, job, social prestige, or power, etc.

9) *Malicious intent* generated by anger, is the negative thinking of impatient jealousy towards the success and abundance of others, as well as the rejoicing in their hardships, and disappointment in their triumphs.

10) *Wrong views* are of two types:

- *Eternalism* is the view that affirms, for example, the existence of a permanent "self" or "I", or of a permanent creator of the world.

- *Nihilism* is the view that states, for example, that reincarnation, the law of causality, the happiness of liberation and omniscience, etc., are non-existent.

Of these ten actions, the first, killing, and the last, wrong views, are the most negative. No other action is more negative than killing. And no other has more serious consequences than wrong views.

Each of these actions involves four paths of action. If all four of these paths of action are present when we carry out an act, then it is a *complete* negative act, and therefore a cause of suffering. As a result, the ripening of its effects is but a question of time. If, however, we perform any one of the ten negative acts, and one of the four paths of action is missing, its nature is not the same as the origin of suffering, and thus constitutes an *incomplete* negative act. Even though a result cannot be generated from incomplete causes, the action committed will nevertheless produce a negative karmic imprint, somewhat as if a seed had been planted.

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For example, just as the shadow projected by a bird flying very high up in the sky is imperceptible, we cannot say that there is no shadow at all. Sooner or later, when the bird descends, its shadow will become visible. Likewise, even if we do not always immediately see the karmic result of a past act, it is only a question of time before the result becomes manifest.

Here then, are the four paths of action that render negative actions complete, and causes of suffering:

- The *basis* consists in identifying a sentient being, more particularly a human who would be our enemy; but this also includes all sentient beings regardless of their size.
- The *intention* is related to one of the three poisons: desire-attachment (for example, not respecting life because of the desire to eat meat); aversion (the absence of love and compassion in the face of an enemy); or confusion (for example, not understanding that happiness and suffering are produced by positive and negative actions, respectively).
- The *action* can be carried out by either the body, speech, or mind (for example, a physical act aimed at harming the vital functions of an enemy in order to provoke death).
- The *final result* consists, for example, in actually murdering the chosen victim.

If we perform a negative action and all four of these paths of action are present, this action would then be considered complete. How, therefore, could we not experience suffering as a result? Also, committing the act ourselves or requesting another person to do it, amounts to the same thing. In *A Treasury of Metaphysics*, it is written:

The karma is the same for all members of an army or other groups because they have all equally committed the action.

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For example, when a general sends a thousand soldiers into combat to kill one thousand men, every soldier produces the karma relative to the number of men whom he personally kills. As for the general, however, the result is not divided: he obtains the negative karma for having killed all one thousand men.

Here now is an example of an incomplete path of action. A man with wrong views is preparing to kill five hundred people who enjoy a precious human life. Even if we are an excellent lay practitioner of Buddhism and have taken the five vows, we may adopt the following reasoning. While considering the *base*, which is the man with the wrong views, we develop the *thought*: "This man is presently being influenced by wrong views due to his ignorance. If he kills these five hundred people endowed with a precious human life, not only will he commit an unimaginable negative action, but this will, in the end, bind him to return again and again in Samsara and experience horrific suffering without ever finding an single ounce of happiness."

With an altruistic attitude imbued with love and compassion, committing such a negative physical action as killing this man is not a problem. In fact, as a *result*, we will prevent this man with wrong views from having to endure great suffering, and five hundred people will still be alive, thereby allowing them to perhaps attain the happiness of liberation and omniscience. The venerable Tsongkhapa has said:

If the intention is good, the grounds and the paths will be good. If the intention is inferior, the lands and the paths will be inferior. It all depends on the intention.

Thus the path shared with practitioners of the small scope includes three aspects: 1) meditation, 2) practice, and 3) renunciation and commitment.

1) We *meditate* on the rarity and great importance of a precious human rebirth.

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2) We *practice* diligently while respecting the law of causality after taking refuge in the Three Jewels.

3) Having *abandoned* attraction for this life, we *commit* ourselves to what will be beneficial in our future lives.

This ends the part of the path shared with practitioners of the small scope.

III. The stages of the path shared with practitioners of the medium scope

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The Four Noble Truths

Contemplating the path of practitioners of
the medium scope
according to the Four Noble Truths

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Contemplating the path of practitioners of the medium scope according to the Four Noble Truths

Having studied the teaching of the Dharma intended for practitioners of the small scope (precious human rebirth, impermanence, the suffering of unfavorable rebirths, taking refuge, and the law of causality), we can free ourselves temporarily from the suffering of negative rebirths and obtain a happy one. However, this is insufficient. If we do not definitively free ourselves from Samsara while we enjoy this positive and happy rebirth, what will happen when the positive karma that propelled us here is used up? - We will necessarily return to unfavorable rebirths.

From now on, in order to stop the continuation of suffering in the immense and terrifying ocean of unending Samsara, we must aspire to free ourselves by generating a pure and intense renunciation. In *The Offering to a Lama*:

Violently tossed about by the waves of karma and afflictive emotions, harassed by hordes of marine monsters, the three forms of suffering, bless me so that I may develop an intense desire to liberate myself from this terrifying and endless ocean of existence.

We call "liberation" or "nirvana" the moment when the mind, whose nature is luminous, is freed from the chains of ignorance and afflictive emotions. It is comparable to a prisoner who is being freed from jail. Our contaminated aggregates¹⁴ are bound by karma and afflictive emotions. They are prisoners of the three worlds: the world of desire (or inferior world), and the worlds of form and no-form (the two higher worlds). A world is referred to as inferior when it implies an attachment to sensory pleasures (those occasioned by form, sound, smell, taste, and tangible objects), and superior or higher when it involves the abandonment of this quintuple attachment.

¹⁴ The five aggregates are the causes that perpetuate cyclic existence.

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Sentient beings keep going round and round through the six categories of Samsara: beings enduring extreme suffering, hungry ghosts, animals, gods, demigods, and humans. There are four ways to be born: from a womb, an egg, heat and humidity, and by means of a miracle. There are four states of existence: birth, death, the bardo¹⁵, and the "before" state. The "before" state refers to the lifespan of a being, from the moment of its birth to the moment just before dying. Thus it is the state preceding death.

The path that liberates us from the suffering of the three worlds of Samsara is five-fold: the paths of accumulation, preparation, vision, meditation, and the path beyond apprenticeship¹⁶. We call Samsara the continuum of rebirths of the perpetuating contaminated aggregates, or in other words, the continuum of taking rebirths in a conditioned existence under the power of karma and afflictive emotions. To be freed from this is to be liberated from Samsara. Samsara and conditioned existence¹⁷ have the same meaning.

The process allowing us to understand how Samsara occurs and how to avoid it is presented in four stages. They are the Four Noble Truths:

- 1) The *Truth of origin* is the cause of our bondage in Samsara.
- 2) The *Truth of suffering* is the result of this bondage.
- 3) The *Truth of the path* is the method that liberates us from Samsara.
- 4) The *Truth of cessation* is the essence of the result of this liberation.

¹⁵ The bardo is a Tibetan word that refers to the intermediate state between the moment of death and that of the next rebirth.

¹⁶ These paths are explained in more detail in the "Supplements to the Lamrim" course offered by Centre Paramita.

¹⁷ These paths are explained in more detail in the "Supplements to the Lamrim" course offered by Centre Paramita.

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If we wish to be freed from Samsara, we must know the advantages of liberation as well as the disadvantages of Samsara. Otherwise, a pure renunciation of the suffering of Samsara will not arise within us. How, then, could we wish to be liberated, and attain Nirvana? For example, a patient first wants to know the nature of his illness. Next, he wishes to remove the causes of his illness. Then comes the desire to be cured, and finally he wishes to take the medication that will make this happen. *The Sublime Continuum of the Great Vehicle* states:

We must diagnose the illness, abandon its cause, become healthy, and trust the medication.

According to the process which produces cause and effect, the origin comes first, and suffering follows. Nevertheless, the Bhagavan (Buddha) taught this in reversed order with the purpose of encouraging practitioners to practice. Upon turning the wheel of teaching for the first time in Benares, this is how he introduced this process to his five excellent students:

Bhikshus,
This is the Noble Truth of suffering;
This is the Noble Truth of origin;
This is the Noble Truth of cessation;
This is the Noble Truth of the path...

He explained the Four Noble Truths in three ways so as to reveal the totality of the twelve aspects. This is what we call the turning of the wheel of Dharma on the Four Noble Truths. They are designated as "Truths" because they represent what is perceived as true by the Aryas. According to the logical process of causality, the Truth of Origin should be explained first; but in order to stimulate his students to practice, the Bhagavan introduced suffering first. The following are the words of the great Tsongkhapa on the subject:

If we do not strive to contemplate the disadvantages of the Truth of suffering, we will not develop an authentic yearning for liberation. If we do not contemplate the origin, the gateway to Samsara, we will not know how to destroy the

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root of Samsara. Let us persevere in renouncing this conditioned existence, then cherish the knowledge of what keeps us enslaved to Samsara.

In order to understand suffering, we contemplate the six or the three general sufferings of Samsara. First, the six sufferings: 1) uncertainty, 2) dissatisfaction, 3) having to repeatedly leave our bodies, 4) having to repeatedly be reborn, 5) having to move constantly between higher and lower rebirths and, 6) having no one to help us.

The three sufferings are: 1) the suffering of change, 2) the suffering of pain and, 3) omnipresent suffering.

They are associated with the three poisons of the mind which are, respectively: 1) desire-attachment, 2) aversion and, 3) confusion.

In addition, we experience the following three sensations in the same order as the latter: 1) the sensation of pleasantness, 2) the sensation of unpleasantness, and 3) the sensation of neutrality.

Here is how to free ourselves from these three kinds of suffering: By perceiving pleasant sensations as a form of suffering, we put an end to desire-attachment. By realizing that unpleasant sensations come from these aggregates, which by their very nature are a combination of causes of suffering, we abandon aversion. By understanding that neutral sensations are impermanent by nature and that they will eventually end, we eliminate confusion. This is explained by Asanga in *To Fully Define the Stages of Yogacharya*. Omnipresent suffering is present in every type of suffering and is the root of the other two kinds. Consequently it is the principal form of suffering to be renounced.

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The Twelve Interdependent Links

1. Ignorance
2. Karmic impulses
3. Consciousness
4. Name and form
5. Sources of perception
6. Contact
7. Sensation
8. Craving
9. Grasping
10. Conditioned existence
11. Birth
12. Old age and death

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The Twelve Interdependent Links

The twelve links are not clearly presented in the texts of *The Swift Path* and *The Path of Felicity*. Rather, this part is taken from *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*.

The twelve links are presented here with the thought that by contemplating them, it will be of great benefit to a certain category of individuals. In the *Sutra of the Rice Seedlings*, the Buddha declared:

Bhikshus! He who sees interdependent production, sees the Dharma. He who sees the Dharma, sees the Buddha...

And also:

Thus, because of ignorance, karma is born, etc., i.e. the twelve interdependent links.

The definition of *interdependence* is : *that which is established on the basis of its parts*. Interdependence can be divided into two categories: compositional and non-compositional. Compositional interdependent factors are also of two types: internal and external. Internal compositional interdependent factors are of two types: afflictive and purifying. There are twelve compositional interdependent factors, which are both internal and afflictive:

1. Ignorance

The root cause of Samsara is ignorance. Just as wisdom perceives the non-self of the *person* and *phenomena* when it considers them as objects of observation, ignorance perceives these two elements as having a self and perceives all phenomena as being established according to their own characteristics.

In other words, ignorance has a way of apprehending which is diametrically opposed to that of primordial

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wisdom. It could be described as blind confusion. This confusion has two forms: confusion concerning the law of causality, and confusion as concerns emptiness.

2. Karmic Impulses

Impulses are meritorious, non-meritorious, or immutable actions (or karmas). They can also be classified according to their nature (and the manner in which they are produced): intentional karma (acts of the mind) and the karma of deliberate acts (acts of the body and speech).

3. Consciousness

In the sutras, the Buddha says there are six types of consciousness. In this case however, the principal consciousness is:

- general basic consciousness, upheld by those schools affirming its existence (Chittamatra and the others);
- mental consciousness, for those schools that do not acknowledge the general basic consciousness.

Mental consciousness is divided into the consciousness of the moment of the cause, and that of the moment of the effect. *The consciousness of the moment of the cause* is the consciousness of the moment after the karmic impulse was deposited. *The consciousness of the moment of the effect* is the consciousness that arises immediately after being conceived in the next life.

To illustrate this, let us suppose that motivated by ignorance, you take the life (a karmic impulse) of another sentient being. At the moment of carrying out this act (immediately after the karmic path is completed), a karmic imprint is deposited in the consciousness: this is the consciousness of the moment of the cause. Because of this karma, your next conception takes place in a negative rebirth, and the condition following your conception in this new life is the consciousness of the moment of this result. For example, as ink is absorbed into paper, karmic imprints are deposited in the consciousness. When stimulated by

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desire and craving, this latent potential, i.e. karmic imprints, has the power of producing a new rebirth.

4. Name and Form

In the case of a rebirth from a womb, the name link represents the four aggregates which are neither of the physical nor the material domain: feeling, discrimination, karmic formations, and consciousness. As for the form link, it represents the aggregate of form. If we move from an existence in the realm of form to another in the realm of no-form, the seed of the aggregate of form is present, but not the form as such. The form link only begins when the consciousness enters into the union of the ovum and the sperm. This link can also be called "name and form".

5. The Sources of Perception

This link is activated from the moment of the formation of the six sources of perception¹⁸. It involves the coming together of the corresponding object, faculty, and consciousness, and extends to the moment just preceding the discrimination between objects. The source of the body's perception as well as that of the mind, are present from the first embryonic stage. In the formless realm, the five forms do not exist as sources of perception.

6. Contact

Contact is experiencing an object as agreeable, disagreeable or neutral, once the corresponding object, faculty, and consciousness have come in contact with each other. There are six sorts of contacts (through the eye, ear, nose, mouth, body, and mind) among the different objects, faculties, and corresponding consciousnesses. For example, there is contact between the visual object, the faculty of sight, and visual consciousness.

¹⁸ The sources of perception of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mental consciousness.

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7. Sensation

Contact with one of the three sorts of objects (agreeable, disagreeable or neutral), generates a sensation of happiness, suffering, or neutrality. These three sensations can be generated from the six kinds of contacts.

8. Craving

Craving and desire-attachment have the same meaning. Desire-attachment is a mental factor. When it encounters a contaminated object which it considers agreeable, a strong emotion is generated, making separation from this object very difficult. Its function is to generate suffering. By its very nature then, it is entirely negative. There are various forms of attachment:

- The desire-attachment that wishes to obtain happiness;
- The desire-attachment that wishes to be separated from suffering;
- The desire-attachment that clings to matured karmic aggregates.

We say that sensation is a condition that stimulates craving. We must realize, however, that from the start it is ignorance that causes contact and sensation to provoke craving. Without ignorance, there would be sensation but no craving.

9. Grasping

When craving increases, the mind yearns and attaches itself mentally to the desired object. There are four types of grasping:

- Attachment to the five sensory objects of desire;
- Attachment to wrong views other than the belief that everything is perishable;
- Attachment to an inferior form of discipline or behavior based on any one of the wrong views;
- Attachment to the conception of a self or to the thought of an "I" in the body.

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10. Conditioned Existence

Karmic instincts have already left their karmic imprints in the consciousness. Craving and grasping have nourished this potential which leads to the next existence. Samsara and conditioned existence are synonymous. It can be divided into four parts: the bardo, birth, the "before stage", and death.

11. Birth

This refers to the first moment when the consciousness arrives in one of the four types of rebirth.

12. Old Age and Death

Old age is the maturing and transformation of the aggregates, the gradual changing of their condition. Death is the abandonment of the aggregates.

Briefly, the twelve interdependent links are divided into three categories: karma, afflictive emotions, and suffering. Ignorance (1), craving (8), and grasping (9) are the links of *afflictive emotions*. Karmic impulses (2) and conditioned existence (10) are the links of *karma*. The seven others are the links of *suffering*.

In other words, the twelve interdependent links are included in the Truth of Suffering and the Truth of Origin. Ignorance (1), karmic impulses (2), craving (8), grasping (9), and conditioned existence (10) are the five links of the origin of suffering. The seven others are the links of suffering.

Thus, it is possible to develop a renunciation which aspires to being liberated from the general suffering of Samsara, either by using the method of The Four Noble Truths, or by using the method of the twelve interdependent links. Since these two methods are equivalent, you may use the one that is most convenient.

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The Suffering of Samsara

Developing a renunciation which aspires
to liberation by contemplating the
suffering specific to Samsara

1. Contemplating the suffering of unfavorable rebirths
2. Contemplating the suffering of happy rebirths
 - 1) Human suffering
 - 2) The suffering of the worldly gods
 - 3) The suffering of the demigods

Developing the renunciation that aspires to liberation by contemplating the suffering specific to Samsara

1. Contemplating the suffering of unfavorable rebirths

These have already been discussed in the section on the path shared with the practitioners of the small scope.

2. Contemplating the suffering of happy rebirths

1) Human suffering

There are seven kinds of human suffering: 1) the suffering of birth, 2) the suffering of aging, 3) the suffering of illness, 4) the suffering of death, 5) the suffering of being separated from what we love, 6) the suffering of being in contact with what is unpleasant, and 7) the suffering of not finding what we desire.

In Buddhist philosophy, we mention two categories of gods: worldly and super-worldly¹⁹. Here, we will consider only the worldly gods.

2) The suffering of the gods

The gods are born with the thought, "Wow! I have been born as a god!" And they remain absorbed in one-pointed concentration on the happiness they are experiencing. They forget that they must eventually die and do not give any thought to cultivating their future happiness. They become aware of this only when the signs of impending death become manifest. They also see that they will

¹⁹ The worldly gods are those who are still in Samsara; those who are liberated from Samsara, for example, the Buddhas, are super-worldly gods.

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experience great suffering in their next rebirth, which will last as long as an eon. They experience signs of death, such as: their bodies take on an ugly color; their thrones and clothing exude a foul odor; the flowers they wear fade, etc.

3) The suffering of the demigods

Dominated by impatience, avarice and jealousy before the abundant wealth and possessions of the gods, the demigods go to war against their neighbors. They consequently experience suffering such as mutilation, fractures, etc. The demigods are endowed with a form of wisdom, but the obscurations that accompany this type of rebirth prevent them from seeing the Four Noble Truths.

To simply know that suffering exists is not enough. Having a good understanding of the characteristics of suffering and an awareness of why it is important to know them, will make it easier to generate a taking of refuge which is the gateway to the teachings; a renunciation, the gateway to liberation; and Bodhichitta, the gateway to Mahayana, etc. Shantideva presents the advantages of suffering:

Furthermore, suffering has qualities: It eliminates arrogance by means of sadness; it generates compassion for those imprisoned in Samsara; it makes us avoid immorality and allows us to rejoice in virtue.

These then, are the reasons for meditating on the various general and specific kinds of sufferings. It is very important not to be misled and wrongly believe that we are meant to suffer! The reason for this is quite simple: we all naturally yearn to avoid suffering and its causes.

Why should we consider the different kinds of suffering? Our main goal is to attain Buddhahood. However, Bodhichitta must come first. Moreover, this state of mind depends exclusively on the renunciation we have developed by contemplating our own personal situation, along with the compassion generated by contemplating the situation of others. Therefore, if the principal aspect of the

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path which is renunciation, is not generated in our mind, the most profound Dharmas of the path to enlightenment and the tantric steps of generation and accomplishment will fail to contribute to our attaining liberation or Buddhahood - and this, despite our best efforts.

Therefore, after carefully contemplating the general and specific sufferings of Samsara, we should meditate as often as possible, first on renunciation, then on Bodhichitta and the correct view.

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The Origin of Suffering

Contemplating the stages leading to Samsara: the origin of suffering

1. Karma
2. Afflictive emotions
 - 1) Desire-attachment
 - 2) Anger
 - 3) Pride
 - 4) Ignorance
 - 5) Doubt
 - 6) Wrong views

Contemplating the stages leading to Samsara: the origin of suffering

1. Karma and 2. Afflictive emotions and Karma are the two causes necessary to create Samsara. Of the two, afflictive emotions constitute the principal cause, because without these emotions as the supporting condition, even an infinite number of accumulated karmas could not produce their results. For example, without earth, humidity, water, heat, etc., which are supporting conditions, a seed alone could never become a seedling. Moreover, when afflictive emotions are present, even if no past karma has been accumulated, we would immediately accumulate new karma, and its result would ripen. This is why it is so important that we become experts in how to apply their antidotes. There are six such emotions: 1) desire-attachment, 2) anger, 3) pride, 4) ignorance, 5) doubt, and 6) wrong views.

1) Desire-attachment

Desire-attachment is a mental factor that arouses passion whenever it encounters a contaminated object it desires. The possibility of being separated from this object is even considered very difficult. Its function is to generate suffering. Desire-attachment causes us to desire and mentally cling to objects. It penetrates the mind much like a drop of oil on a piece of cloth and is extremely difficult to remove.

Meditating on the reasons to be detached from the object in question is the antidote to desire-attachment. For example, to detach from a form, a body for example, we should contemplate its repulsive elements. It is full of blood; it decomposes; it disintegrates; it becomes ugly; it emanates nauseous odors; its color is dull; it malfunctions; it is nothing but a skeleton covered with skin. Given its impermanent nature, it will age and die. The mind lodged within it is a slave to the three mental poisons. The body is a bag filled with six different disgusting substances.

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2) Anger

Anger assumes the aspect of a hostile attitude when it takes as its object a phenomenon it considers as a source of suffering. The function of this mental factor is to support negative actions and prevent us from achieving happiness. Anger causes great damage: it destroys root virtues as if they were burnt by fire. So it is very important to apply the antidotes to anger, such as patience. Patience is a state of mind that remains undisturbed by inflicted pain or suffering.

Anger is the most destructive of the non-virtues. It is said that every angry act destroys the results of a thousand eons of accumulated root virtues. Before allowing anger to arise, we must reflect carefully on both its advantages and those of patience. Otherwise, it will cause us and others much unhappiness. Keeping anger alive only brings us suffering and can even lead to suicide. These and many other disadvantages all stem from anger.

By analyzing the possibility of overcoming all our enemies, we will realize that not until a single sentient being remains, there will always be enemies to overcome. In mastering our anger however, no enemy will be left, and it will be as if we have overcome all of them. We must arrive at a perfect understanding of patience and its different aspects, as well as the disadvantages of anger, etc.

For example, in order to develop the patience to remain undisturbed by the meanness of others, we need people whom we find disturbing. This is impossible to do with those who help us. Then, the more people annoy us, the more we have opportunities to practice patience. We should consider those who bother us as our assistants in developing patience. For example, a crazy patient may hit the doctor or a crazy child hit his father, but neither the doctor nor the father would get angry with the patient or the child. Rather, they will energetically try to protect them from their madness. From *The Four Thousand Stanzas*:

The Munis can observe afflictive emotions; those who are afflicted cannot.

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3) Pride

Pride assumes the aspect of an arrogant mind when its object of observation is any one of the bases imputed according to the view that all is perishable. The function of this mental factor is to generate disrespect and produce suffering. When we look down from a mountain top, everyone below appears minuscule, so too, an arrogant mind assumes a sense of superiority that causes it to idealize its own self to the detriment of others.

The great Tibetan sages of the past have said:

It is impossible for those who are full of pride to develop even a single quality.

In the presence of pride, it is very difficult to develop even the smallest quality. Moreover, a Lama could teach the Dharma to someone who is proud, but this person would receive little benefit from it. The antidote to pride is reflecting on those things we know nothing about. For example, consider over and over again all that we do not know about what goes on within our own bodies, on the inside as well as on the outside, starting from the top of the head to the soles of our feet. When we realize just how much we do not know, our pride will diminish.

4) Ignorance

Ignorance cannot realize or correctly understand the two kinds of objects to consider: disruptive phenomena and purifying phenomena. This mental factor favors the development of afflictive emotions. Ignorance is an absence of clarity, a state of blindness, of not knowing, etc. It is a form of confusion that prevents us from seeing the true nature of things. It prevents the practitioner of the small scope from perceiving the law of cause and effect. It keeps the practitioner of the medium scope from understanding the Four Noble Truths that liberate us from Samsara. It prevents the practitioner of the great scope from seeing the importance of cherishing others, etc. Ignorance is the root of all afflictive emotions.

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5) Doubt

Doubt is an undecided state of mind as regards the law of karma, the Four Noble Truths, etc. It is a mental factor that prevents us from committing ourselves to the practice of virtue and right reasoning. Just as a needle with two points cannot be used for sewing, a hesitant mind can accomplish nothing. If we doubt the law of karma, we will fail to attain higher states of being. If we doubt the Four Noble Truths, we will fail to attain nirvana. Doubt is in fact a major obstacle on the path to liberation and other paths. Similarly, a person who refuses to follow the path, who takes a wrong path, or doubts the path, in any of these cases, will fail to reach his/her destination.

6) Wrong views

There are five wrong views:

a) The view equating the self with the perishable aggregates

This view is directed towards the aggregates²⁰ and considers them as *I, me* or *mine*. It is a type of perturbed intelligence which is at the root of all wrong views. *Perishable* means impermanent, and *aggregates* implies that there is a collection of several elements. In fact, taking the aggregates as its base, this view imagines the person to be something *permanent*. This, however, is not the case! We refer to this view for pedagogical purposes.

For example, when someone finds himself in the middle of a very dense forest, and becomes increasingly afraid due to a growing feeling of discomfort, he immediately wants to run away and escape. This is the result of believing that the self and the aggregates are the same.

b) Extreme views

Such views consider the self (the object of the view of equating self with the collection of aggregates) as

²⁰ The aggregates that perpetuate cyclic existence.

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permanent. Or again, they believe that the self will not be reborn and that it will be annihilated after death. This form of perturbed intelligence is not in harmony with the Madhyamika view.

c) Idealizing a view

This perturbed state of intelligence idealizes a wrong view along with the aggregates from which it arises. It generates a strong attachment to wrong views.

d) Idealizing ethical behavior

This perturbed form of intelligence tends to develop an interest in senseless and useless actions, or incites one to become involved in perverse forms of behavior.

e) Wrong views

Wrong views consider the law of causality, the Four Noble Truths, the Three Jewels, reincarnation, etc. as non-existent. This perturbed state of intelligence is an obstacle to the practice of virtue. Furthermore, it destroys the roots of virtue, encourages non-virtue, and prevents the right understanding of what should and should not be practiced.

These five views are called perturbed states of intelligence because in addition to being forms of intelligence, they are wrongly used by the afflictive emotions.

The five afflictive emotions, along with the five wrong views (considered under the one title: wrong views), make up the six afflictive root emotions. We call them afflictive emotions because they totally destroy peace of mind and are causes of suffering.

Now that we are more aware of the cause and origin of the particular and specific sufferings of Samsara, we must determine the path that will liberate us from them.

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Liberation

The nature of the path to liberation

1. The support needed to put an end to Samsara
2. The path that will put an end to Samsara
 - 1) Highest training in ethics
 - 2) Highest training in concentration
 - 3) Highest training in wisdom

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The nature of the path to liberation

1. The support needed to put an end to Samsara

Not every type of support is suitable. Now that we have obtained a precious human rebirth from a womb and are endowed with the six constituents, we must renounce Samsara by practicing the three highest trainings. The six constituents are: From the father come the bones, marrow, and sperm; and from the mother, flesh, skin, and blood. Thus, a human is so-called when he/she is born from a womb on the continent of the south (Jambuvipa) and endowed with the six constituents. In these times of degeneration, a person seeking to attain Buddhahood in a single lifetime must possess such a support. Geshe Potowa has said:

Now is the moment to stop Samsara, now that you have obtained this precious human rebirth.

2. The Path that will bring an end to Samsara

Three elements are necessary:

- 1) Highest training in ethics
- 2) Highest training in concentration
- 3) Highest training in wisdom

In the *Sutra of the Heap of Jewels* requested by Mahakashyapa:

While maintaining ethical behavior, we obtain concentration. Once concentration is obtained, meditate profoundly on wisdom. Thanks to wisdom, you will acquire the pure and perfect primordial wisdom.

Having now obtained this precious support, if we do not cut the root of Samsara, where will we go to find a more fortunate form of life to obtain liberation? The one and only root of Samsara is this confused ignorance that we call the innate conception of a self. In order to be free of this, we need a state of consciousness whose understanding is

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diametrically opposed to this concept. Therefore, to put an end to the root of this innate conception of a self, we need the wisdom that realizes selflessness. Without it, even investing great efforts in acquiring every kind of virtue, we will only reinforce the notion of a self and will remain powerless to oppose it.

Without having initiated our consciousness to the highest training in concentration, it is impossible to properly generate such wisdom. For example, in order to cut down the trunk of the tree of the conception of the self, we need the sharp axe of wisdom and arms strong enough to seize it. Without the sharp axe, we will be unable to chop down the tree. If our arms are not strong and stable, the axe will not be aimed at the tree with precision. Likewise, if we want to properly see a mural at night, we need an oil lamp that is protected from the wind. The oil lamp is like the wisdom that perceives the nature of reality, and the glass globe protecting the flame is like the single-pointed concentration that is free from internal distractions.

In stopping internal distractions, the highest training in concentration brings about a stable single-pointed concentration. However, this must be preceded by the highest training in ethics, which frees the mind of external distractions, be they of a gross or subtle nature. Briefly then, the part of the path shared with practitioners of the medium scope can be summarized as follows:

- 1) *Meditation* considers the disadvantages of Samsara and the advantages of liberation.
- 2) After having generated the desire for liberation, *practice* consists in training in the three highest trainings, the path that unerringly leads to liberation.
- 3) Having *abandoned* all attraction for Samsara, we aim for the peace that is beyond all suffering.

This concludes the part of the path shared with practitioners of the medium scope.

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IV. The Stages of the Path of Practitioners of the Great Scope

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Bodhichitta

How to meditate on the stages of the path of practitioners of the great scope

1. The advantages of Bodhichitta, gateway to the Mahayana, presented in accordance with authentic texts
2. How to develop Bodhichitta or enlightened mind
3. How to train after having developed the enlightened mind

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How to meditate on the stages of the path of practitioners of the great scope

In the *Sutra of the White Lotus of the Sublime Dharma*:

The Buddha has taught the three scopes because he is skilled in the means of guiding others. Even if there is but one vehicle and not two²¹...

Geshe Potowa said:

Do not cross the same river twice!
Enter the Mahayana from the start!

Shantideva said:

I bow down before the body of all those in whom the precious jewel of the spirit is born. I take refuge in these sources of happiness, who bring happiness even to those who harm them.

1. The advantages of Bodhichitta, gateway to the Mahayana, presented in accordance with authentic texts

In the *Sutra of the Teaching of the Two Truths*:

The conventional mind of enlightenment is the gateway to the entire Dharma of the Buddha.

The great vehicle includes the vehicle of perfections (Paramitayana) and that of the secret mantras (Vajrayana). The one and only way to access these two vehicles is through conventional Bodhichitta.

²¹ Even though there is only one vehicle, the Buddha taught the three vehicles (Shravakas, Pratyekabuddhas and Bodhisattvas) or two vehicles (Hinayana and Mahayana), so as to respond to the different needs and capacities of everyone.

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After having developed a certain renunciation, it is most important to enter into the great vehicle (the Mahayana). We train our mind in the path shared with practitioners of the medium scope with the sole purpose of developing renunciation. This, however, is not our final path. The most important part of the path for the practitioners of the great scope is training in Bodhichitta. The small and medium scopes are the preparatory stages of this path, while the general training in the actions of the sons of the Buddhas are its conclusion.

For this reason, we contemplate the ten advantages of Bodhichitta in order to generate the enthusiasm to train in the Mahayana.

1) The enlightened mind is the only gateway to the Mahayana

What determines whether we have joined the ranks of Mahayana practitioners is the development of Bodhichitta in our minds. Dje Tsongkhapa has said:

It is not enough that the Dharma be the Mahayana; the person also must belong to the Mahayana.

As just stated, without Bodhichitta in our stream of consciousness, even if we practice the stages of generation and accomplishment of Gouyasamadja, the King of Tantras, or any of the other secret tantras, it will not be considered a Mahayana Dharma. And even less a cause of Buddhahood! Nagarjuna says in *The Precious Garland*:

If you wish to attain supreme awakening for yourself and the world, know that its root is Bodhichitta.

Although Atisha was versed in all the dharmas, this did not satisfy him. He travelled the great oceans for thirteen months, braving numerous difficulties, to hear the complete oral instructions on Bodhichitta by Lama Souvarnavapi. This became Atisha's main practice. Furthermore, Atisha

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had a greater respect for this particular master than for all his other teachers.

2) To be called a "son of Buddha"

It is this quality alone that makes us a son of Buddha. Without Bodhichitta, even if we are clairvoyant, perform miracles, are versed in the sciences, have direct understanding of emptiness or have eliminated every afflictive emotion, we would still not be a Bodhisattva. We could not enter into the ranks of the Mahayana. If, however, we cherish this thought in our mind, even if we are an animal, we are part of the Mahayana. If we abandon this thought, we are no longer in the Mahayana Dharma.

3) It surpasses all other qualities

If Bodhichitta arises in our mind, this quality alone will surpass all the others. It is said in *The Sutra of the Liberation of Maitreya*:

It is like a young prince who outshines a group of aging ministers, or like a baby garuda²² that eclipses a flock of birds of another species.

4) We become a supreme object of offering

If the thought of Bodhichitta has awakened in our mindstream, not only do we become an excellent object for the respect and offerings of men and worldly gods, but even the Buddhas have the highest respect for this state of mind.

5) We easily accomplish great accumulations

No other thought could surpass Bodhichitta in accumulating merit and wisdom, purifying obscurations, eliminating adverse conditions and obstacles, and completing our accumulation of merits. Without the

²² The garuda is a very powerful mythic animal.

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Bodhichitta mind, even if we showed generosity toward several hundred thousand beings, this act would still not be an action of a son of the Buddha, and would not be a cause for attaining buddhahood.

6) Our veils and misdeeds are rapidly purified

Nothing is better than Bodhichitta to purify negative actions. Very serious misdeeds or veils that could not otherwise be expiated can be purified through Bodhichitta. In a single instant of compassion, which is the root of the Bodhichitta mind, Arya Asanga was able to atone for more negative acts and veils than in twelve years of virtuous practice.

7) All our wishes are fulfilled

With Bodhichitta, the very best of everything can be achieved without effort, such as liberation from all forms of suffering and obtaining happiness for both ourselves and for others.

8) Adverse circumstances and obstacles will not affect us

It is said that when we have Bodhichitta, the sicknesses caused by afflictive emotions do not affect us. Even as we sleep, we continue to receive the blessings of the lamas and deities. Day and night we are protected from negative forces and obstacles by the Dharma protectors. In short, Bodhichitta protects us both on the inside and the outside. For example, Buddha, the perfect teacher, destroyed the army of demons from his mind by the mere force of his Bodhichitta.

9) All stages and paths are quickly achieved

Without relative Bodhichitta, the primordial wisdom which realizes emptiness will not, by itself, complete the accumulation of merits. It is mainly through the power of relative Bodhichitta that it is possible to complete the two

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accumulations and be rid of the two kinds of veils and their imprints. With Bodhichitta mind, it is possible to attain perfect enlightenment in a single lifetime through the secret Tantras. Achieving enlightenment is accessible to everyone regardless of culture or nationality. This depends exclusively on Bodhichitta.

10) We become a fertile source of every happiness for everyone

It is said in *Engaging in the Middle Way*:

The Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas emerge from Buddha, but the Buddhas themselves arise from the Bodhisattvas.

The ground from where all the Victors originate, the essence of all the Dharma teachings, the principal practice of the precious sons of the Victors, the gateway to the Vajrayana, is none other than this Bodhichitta.

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The Method of the Seven Causes and Effects

Methods for developing Bodhichitta

1. Atisha's method of the seven causes and effects
2. Training the mind with Shantideva's method of equality and the interchange of self with others

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Methods for developing Bodhichitta

Bodhichitta can be developed by training in either of the following two methods. Although they must be combined during the practice of training in Bodhichitta, here, they are explained separately.

Training the mind according to Atisha's method of the sevenfold cause-and-effect.

The seven stages are:

- 1) Acknowledging all sentient beings as having been our mothers
- 2) Remembering the kindness of our mothers
- 3) Repaying their kindness
- 4) Universal love
- 5) The Great Compassion
- 6) Altruistic resolution
- 7) Developing Bodhichitta

In order to avoid developing a biased form of love and compassion, it is important to first meditate on immeasurable equanimity.

Burdened with attachment to certain people and aversion to others, and unable to be impartial with friends, enemies and strangers, there is no foundation for love and compassion to arise within us. Without these, access to the Mahayana will be impossible.

Rather than spending our entire life working relentlessly month after month and year after year with the futile goal of carrying out our mundane activities, it would be more profitable to work and meditate toward developing the antidote to the afflictive emotions of attachment and aversion: immeasurable equanimity. In the *Sutra Requested by Subahu*:

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A person may be an enemy and become a friend. A friend can also become an enemy. We may also become indifferent to certain people. These neutral people may also become enemies.

To meditate on immeasurable equanimity, we train the mind by first visualizing very clearly before us a person we consider neutral, for example a stranger. We then do the same with an enemy, a close friend, etc. Or simultaneously, we may visualize clearly before us an enemy, a close parent, and a stranger. We will see that we feel attachment to those closest to us, aversion toward our enemies, and a feeling of indifference toward strangers. When these feelings arise, let us meditate on the passage above from the *Sutra Requested by Subahou*.

Thus, in thinking that today's enemies have been our friends for an incalculable number of times in previous lives, we will put an end to the afflictive emotion of aversion. We must generate its antidote, which is love. In the same way, in considering that our close relatives have already been our enemies an unlimited number of times in the course of our many lifetimes, we will abandon the afflictive emotion of attachment. In this case, the required antidote is detachment. Finally, for those whom we consider as neither close friends nor enemies, that is to say, those toward whom we feel rather indifferent, let us contemplate the fact that they have been our enemies and close relatives an unlimited number of times in former lives. In short, our close relatives, our enemies and those whom we consider neutral have all, at some point, helped us or hurt us.

There is absolutely no difference between the fact that someone has either helped us or hurt us in the *past* or the *present*. In both cases, it was helpful or hurtful, regardless of the moment. The same logic can therefore be applied when thinking of last year or this year, or of yesterday and today.

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Consequently, there is no sense at all in developing attachment, aversion, or indifference. Therefore, let us abide in a state of equanimity.

We may be convinced that those who have assisted us in this lifetime are our friends, and those who have harmed us are our enemies. Yet, this is not always certain nor definitive: we very often see this in our own personal experiences. For example, the friends and enemies at the beginning and at the end of our lives are not always the same. Our friends and enemies can even be different at the beginning and at the end of the same month! It is even possible to see this change occur in a single day! Our enemies can often become our friends and vice versa. We cannot find a friend who will remain a friend forever. The same goes for an enemy. In the *Sutra as Requested by the Girl Such as the Most Sublime Moon*, it is said:

I have already murdered you all, and you also have torn me limb from limb. We have mutually been enemies and we have killed each other time and time again.

Our roles as friends and enemies, or as helpful or harmful, are apt to change in an instant. In contemplating how our minds can change from one instant to the next, let us abandon all attachment and aversion, and meditate in perfect impartiality on boundless equanimity. Let us then progressively extend this sentiment to the point of ultimately feeling perfect equanimity towards all sentient beings. We will then be ready to meditate on the first point of the sevenfold cause-and-effect instruction: acknowledging all these beings as our mothers.

1) Acknowledging all sentient beings as having already been our mothers

This first point is presented in three parts: the authentic texts which introduce it, the logical arguments which verify it, and how to meditate on it. It is first presented in the *Bodhisattvas' Basket*:

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Sharipu, this is how it is. The Bodhisattvas see all sentient beings as already having been their fathers or mothers. Sharipou, if we go way back in time, it is difficult to find a being that has never been our father or mother. All sentient beings have already been our fathers and mothers...

In these times of degeneration, instructions on the method of causes and effects are difficult to explain. Nevertheless, if we fail to realize that all beings could have been our mothers, we will not have the chance to eventually develop Bodhichitta.

The logical reasoning supporting this thesis is found in *A Commentary on Valid Cognition*:

Once someone has been born, how absurd it would be that his breathing, his organs and his mind should have evolved solely from his body, and not in dependence on things of the same category ...

Since we have experienced an infinite number of rebirths, we have equally had an infinite number of mothers. Therefore every sentient being must already have been our father or mother. There is not one sentient being that has never been our father or mother. Following this logic, not only have all beings already been our father or mother, but they must have been more than once. We continue our analysis in this way, until we reach a definite certainty. Also, in order to see that the mind is without beginning, we proceed as follows: the mind I have today is the continuation of the mind I had yesterday. We can continue going back in time this way, day by day. The mind that entered the womb is the continuation of the one that existed before. Since it is possible to go back in time indefinitely in this manner, we discover that the mind has no starting point.

Finally, here is how to meditate on this point: first, as we clearly visualize our mother before us, we contemplate the fact that she has been our mother not only in this lifetime, but also countless times in past lives. We do this until we become totally convinced. Once this certitude is acquired,

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we do the same thing visualizing our father or any other person close to us. We continue in the same manner until we include all sentient beings. Having done this, the memory of a mother's goodness and other qualities will arise easily.

We must recognize that all sentient beings are our mothers. We could be led to believe, because we do not perceive it as such, that a certain being has never been our mother. Yet, the Buddha was never able to observe that a being had never been his mother. It is very probable that every being has been our mother, even if we cannot recognize it as such. For example, if our present mother were dead, it would be possible that she be reborn as a dog, a cat, or a bird. In such a case, we probably would be unable to recognize our own mother in this present lifetime. The simple fact of not being able to recognize her is not sufficient reason to state that she has never been our mother.

Similarly, if we had been separated from our present mother for twenty years, it is possible that we would not recognize her. Our mother could be dead, but because she has already filled that role for us, we could not say that she is not our mother. Nor can we say that our past mothers are no longer our mothers because this happened in the past. In fact, if those who have been our mothers in the past were no longer our mothers, our mother at the beginning of this present life would no longer be our mother either, because that also would have happened in the past. For the same reason, the mother we had yesterday would not be our mother today.

This is obviously not so. Our tradition affirms that the mind has taken countless rebirths since beginningless time until today. Therefore, we must not think that there is any difference between a being that was good to us during this life, or during a past life. For example, whether a doctor has saved our life last year or this year, in both cases, he saved our life regardless of when it happened.

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The sign indicating that our mind has integrated this conviction that all beings have been our mothers becomes obvious when every time we see a sentient being, however small it may be, we clearly recall having been her child. We also clearly recall having been entirely dependent upon her for all our happiness and needs.

2) Remembering the kindness of our mothers

By visualizing our mother clearly before us, we remember that she showed us immense kindness from the very beginning of our life, and will do so until the end of her life. At first, when she carried us in her womb, she was careful about everything she did, ate, drank, etc., so that we would not suffer. After we were born, she did not abandon us, and kept us warm with her own body. She nursed us while using endearing names. She smiled at us with affection and contemplated us with love. She covered us tenderly and washed us with her own hands. In other words, she cherished us as her most precious treasure.

She taught us everything from the smallest things to the most significant: how to walk, sit, talk, etc. With heartfelt devotion, she protected us from sickness and death without giving a thought to herself, and risked becoming sick and even dying in order to keep us safe. In recalling that all the good things we now enjoy were generated by our mother's kindness, let us meditate on this until it moves us to tears.

Once this sensation arises in us, we choose our father, family members, etc. as objects of meditation, until we include all sentient beings. Just like our mother took care of us with great kindness in this present life, all sentient beings have already cared for us in a similar way. It goes without saying then, that we must repay all the goodness that we have received. Not returning this kindness is obviously contrary to the Dharma; even people in general would consider such behavior inappropriate.

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3) Repaying their kindness

After having acknowledged all sentient beings as our mothers and having generated a deep sense of gratitude for their kindness, there is no further need for a different meditation to develop the wish to repay this kindness: this will happen spontaneously. Our thinking should be as follows: "All sentient beings are without refuge and protection. They, and more particularly those of unfortunate births, have fallen into the immense depths of suffering of Samsara. If I do not save them, who will?" We should meditate in this manner until there is a change in our mind.

Let us take the example of a mother who, in a moment of madness, would attempt to kill her own son with a knife. The son should not be angry with his mother; rather, he should try by every means to reason with her, or to cure her of her madness. We should have the same attitude with all sentient beings.

4) Meditating on universal love

This subject too is not separate from the ones previously mentioned. Love will develop naturally after having meditated on and experienced these stages: seeing all beings as our mothers, remembering their kindness and wishing to repay this kindness. We should think: "How wonderful it would be, if all sentient beings found happiness! May they obtain it! I will bring them such happiness!" Let us meditate in this manner with all our heart.

5) Meditating on the Great Compassion

a) The object of the Great Compassion

It includes all sentient beings afflicted by the three kinds of suffering.

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b) The aspect of the Great Compassion

It consists in the wish to see all beings liberated from this suffering, with the subsequent thought: "May they be freed from this suffering!"

c) How to train in the Great Compassion

Having contemplated in detail how sentient beings are tormented by suffering, we then think: "How marvelous it would be if all beings were relieved of suffering and all the causes of suffering. May they be liberated!" Over and over again, let us meditate wholeheartedly in this way until this Great Compassion arises in us.

This Compassion is the primary cause enabling us to become a truly authentic person. In order to generate a harvest, we must start with a seed, then water and fertilizer, and the maturing process will follow. In the same way, the Great Compassion is important at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the harvest of Buddhahood. The glorious Chandrakirti said in *Engaging in the Middle Way*:

Only Compassion can be considered as the seed of the excellent harvest of a benevolent Victor. Like water, Compassion causes the seed to grow, and helps it mature into the state of everlasting bliss. Consequently, I praise Compassion first.

When the sight of sentient beings tormented by suffering becomes so intolerable, it is then that a strong, determined, altruistic resolution to free them from their suffering will arise in us.

6) Meditating on altruism

While contemplating how beings are deprived of happiness and tormented by suffering, with a determined, altruistic intention imbued with an immense love coming from the depths of our heart, we meditate: "I shall quickly attain precious Buddhahood so as to bring happiness to all beings, and free them from their suffering."

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7) Developing Mahayana Bodhichitta

The Venerable Protector, Maitreya, said:

The development of Bodhichitta is the desire to attain perfect enlightenment for the benefit of others.

Generating the Bodhichitta mind that aspires to perfect enlightenment to benefit others is twofold: the foundation stage, and the generation stage as such. Acknowledging others to be our mothers, recalling their goodness, and wishing to repay them, constitute the foundations conducive to the generation of the Bodhichitta mind. Love, compassion, and altruistic intention cause this mind to actually become manifest. After we have progressively developed a sincere and authentic desire to attain full enlightenment for the sake of others, the Mahayana Bodhichitta emerges.

The complete and authentic Bodhichitta of the Mahayana is generated when we realize that we have not yet attained Buddhahood for the sake of other sentient beings. It is not only for our own personal benefit. In the same way that we have developed universal love, the Great Compassion, and the altruistic intention of benefiting others, Bodhichitta becomes manifest when we experience the extraordinary desire to attain perfect and full enlightenment for the sake of others.

Certain signs allow us to recognize the birth of Bodhichitta in our mindstream. If, after training in developing Bodhichitta according to one of the two methods, a natural, well-integrated experience occurs in our mind, then Bodhichitta is born. At that moment, Bodhichitta is similar to the sweet taste of the heart of the sugar cane. However, if this experience does not occur naturally, but is still at the level of the thought of wishing to attain Buddhahood for the good of others, its taste resembles that of the bark, rather than that of the sugar cane itself. In the *Sutra Urging One to Practice Altruism*:

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The essence of the sugar cane is not found in its bark; its delicious taste is found within.

This method of causes and effects can also be described as follows:

- The first four points are the causes
- The fifth is the root
- The last two are the effects

Mahayana Bodhichitta can be manifested in any of the six types of sentient beings.

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Equality and the interchange of self with others

Seven-point mind training using the method of equality and the interchange of self with others

1. Contemplating the preliminaries for this teaching
2. Actual training in the two types of Bodhichitta
3. Transforming adverse circumstances into the path to enlightenment
4. A condensed practice for everyday life
5. Criteria for measuring mind-training
6. The commitments of mind-training
7. Advice for mind-training

Seven-point mind training using the method of equality and the interchange of self with others

1. Contemplating the preliminaries for this teaching

This preamble consists in what was already explained in the path shared with the practitioners of the small and medium scopes. Therefore, there is no need to repeat it here.

2. Actual training in the two types of Bodhichitta: ultimate and relative Bodhichitta

a. Ultimate Bodhichitta

Traditionally, ultimate Bodhichitta was explained first, while keeping in mind the sharp-witted person. However, it would be difficult for us to understand the wisdom part of the path before considering its method. Consequently, we will not discuss training in ultimate Bodhichitta at this time. This topic will be addressed later in the section on the perfection of wisdom. The masters of the past found this to be an excellent method.

b. Relative Bodhichitta

We will now introduce five points related to training in relative Bodhichitta:

- 1) Equality between self and others
- 2) Contemplating the drawbacks of an egocentric attitude
- 3) Contemplating the advantages of an altruistic attitude
- 4) Contemplating the interchanging of self with others
- 5) Based on the above, how to meditate on giving and taking (tonglen)

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1) Equality between self and others

We should develop the thought such as the one expressed in *Offering to a Lama*:

None of us desires the least suffering, and we never have enough happiness. Seeing that there is no difference between myself and others, may I be inspired so as to rejoice in the happiness of others.

From the bottom of our hearts, we presently cherish what we call "me", while not considering others in the same way. This shows that we do not consider ourselves on an equal footing with others. We should develop the thought: "It is illogical to make such a great distinction between myself and others. We are identical in all aspects because we all wish to obtain happiness and avoid suffering."

In the previous meditation on boundless equanimity in the method of the sevenfold cause-and-effect instruction, and in this meditation on the equality of self and others, the objects of meditation are different. In the first form of meditation, our goal is to consider friends, enemies, and strangers on an equal footing. In this case, however, we ourselves and others become the objects of meditation. Before proceeding to the exchange of self with others, we must have contemplated the disadvantages of an attitude centered on self and the advantages of an altruistic attitude.

2) Contemplating the many disadvantages of an egocentric attitude

In *Offering to a Lama*:

Understanding that the chronic illness of self-cherishing is the cause of all undesired suffering, may I be inspired so as to conquer this monstrous demon of self-cherishing after realizing all the harm that it causes.

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In *The Way of the Bodhisattvas*:

All the suffering in the world comes from desiring happiness only for oneself.

Several other classical texts also mention the many disadvantages of a self-centered attitude. It becomes obvious that all unwanted suffering, ours as well as that of others, is the result of self-cherishing. For example, even if this is not our wish, we must still experience the suffering of the pain of being in Samsara. Even though we do not want to grow old and die, it is beyond our control. Even though we do not want to be sick, diseases continuously arise. Disputes and conflicts in our relationships with lovers, family members and friends are also the consequences of an egocentric attitude. In the hope of finding greater happiness, certain people go so far as to commit such negative acts as suicide. Even the uncomfortable emotions experienced when our house is infested with mice, ants, etc., are linked to our egocentric attitude.

Or again, being wrongly accused of stealing from someone without actually being guilty, is the karmic result of having hindered others in the past under the influence of self-cherishing. Lama Tsongkapa explains in his *Great Treatise of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*:

An action that is not complete cannot be experienced; a completed action does not disappear.

In *The Transmission of the Vinaya*:

A completed karma will produce a result of the same type.

It is wise to keep these thoughts in mind. Here now are some of the main characteristics of egocentricity. It makes us arrogant when complimented, and angry when criticized. It makes us jealous of those who defeat us in competition, and snobbish with our inferiors. When an egocentric person is stubborn, he lacks respect, dignity and consideration for others, even to the point of rejecting

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and abandoning close friends, family, and those dear to him.

Our only enemy resides in the centre of our heart. If we must go to war, let us lead our army against the enemy of our self-centeredness. It is a grievous mistake to project our hatred outwardly and to engage in conflicts with people of another country, another region, another group, ethnic group or religion. Moreover, it is this self-centeredness that sows the seeds of negative karma, the very cause of all the suffering we have been experiencing for countless eons. In *The Way of the Bodhisattvas*:

Despite our greatest efforts to attain happiness over countless eons, when thoughts are centred solely on our own happiness, the only outcome will be suffering.

Our self-cherishing is the single cause of all our suffering in unending Samsara. In short, if we are unable to overcome self-cherishing, it will be impossible for us to obtain even an ounce of happiness. From now on we must consider self-cherishing as our enemy, and practice the techniques aimed at abandoning it.

3) Contemplating the many advantages of an altruistic attitude

In *The Way of the Bodhisattvas*:

All happiness in the world comes from the desire for the happiness of others.

Langritangpa says:

In contemplating how all sentient beings accomplish what is excellent, may I constantly cherish them, even more than a wish-fulfilling jewel

In *Offering to a Lama*:

Realizing that the attitude of cherishing all beings, our mothers, and of establishing them in felicity is the door leading to unlimited virtue, may I be blessed so as to cherish

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them even more than my own life, should they even rise up against me as enemies!

Sentient beings are of greater benefit and of greater kindness for us than a wish-fulfilling jewel, because even if this jewel could grant our every wish during this lifetime, it would be of no help at all in our future lives. In fact, should we possess a hundred thousand such jewels, we still could not take a single one with us at the moment of death. At that moment, only our consciousness will leave for another existence in Samsara, and the wish-fulfilling jewel would be of no help whatsoever.

Sentient beings are the objects of our compassion and it is because of them that we can develop Bodhichitta. They are the objects of our generosity, the foundations of our code of ethics, the means for developing our patience. Without them, we would have no employment, no friendships, etc. Moreover, the Buddhas have appeared in this world exclusively for the sake of sentient beings. We could not find greater goodness than that of sentient beings.

If we had acted as the Compassionate Teacher, all our suffering would now be gone. We would undoubtedly have attained supreme happiness and would be able to splendidly fulfill the needs of others. Because we have not acted as he did, we must again experience this painful situation in Samsara.

The Compassionate Teacher had previously cherished others as well. When he was born as King Padmaka, he took another rebirth as Rohita, the fish, so as to cure beings of the plague. He then offered his flesh in order to heal many sentient beings that were afflicted with the plague. Furthermore, when he took rebirth as a turtle, he saved five hundred merchants who had fallen into the sea. He then offered his body to eighty thousand flies, etc.

Similarly, Prince Sattva offered his body to a tigress who was so hungry that she was about to devour her own kittens. Likewise, King Chandraprabha offered his head to an enemy. Many more examples of this can be found in the

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Jatakas²³. These are all actions accomplished by the Compassionate Teacher and the Bodhisattvas. Because we think only of ourselves, such actions appear difficult to do, but if we pray to attain such a state by contemplating the benefits of altruism, our mind will become accustomed to this attitude.

4) Contemplating the interchanging of self with others

In Offering to a Lama:

Cherishing oneself opens the door to all torments, and cherishing our mothers is the foundation of all that is good. Bless me then, that I may make the yoga of exchanging myself with others the very heart of my practice.

After contemplating their respective advantages and disadvantages, reversing our thoughts of self-cherishing and indifference to the needs of others, constitutes the exchange of self with others. This does not mean we must think that the self has become others and that others have become the self. We must rather reverse the attitudes we have developed concerning the self and others. The cherishing previously felt for the self, and now transferred to others, is what constitutes this exchange. Similarly, the indifference we have felt toward others is now transferred to ourselves. Let us train ourselves then to reverse these two attitudes; namely, to cherish others and become indifferent to ourselves. For example, this is like living on one side of the mountain and seeing the other side as being far away. However, once we change sides, the other side appears far away.

5) Based on the above, how to meditate on giving and taking (tonglen)

In Offering to a Lama:

²³ Stories of the past lives of Buddha Shakyamuni and the Bodhisattvas.

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Consequently, oh venerable and compassionate masters, bless me so that all the wrong-doings, obscurations, and sufferings of these migrant beings, my mothers, ripen in me now; and may I give my joys and virtues to others that they may abide in perfect happiness.

The verses inciting us to take on suffering, serve to develop compassion; the verses where we give happiness, serve to develop love. Certain texts speak first of giving, and then of taking on, but in actual practice it is best to start with taking on. In fact, it would be quite appropriate only to take on and omit the giving altogether. However, it would not be very helpful to share happiness before having first taken on the suffering.

In order to generate compassion, let us then think: "I must liberate sentient beings from their sufferings." Afterwards, just as a razor blade would, imagine that all their suffering is cut out of them as swirls of black smoke dissolving in the selfishness of our own heart.

Or again, in contemplating that we take upon ourselves all suffering and its causes, i.e. the karmas, and afflictive emotions of all sentient beings in good and bad rebirths up to the Bodhisattvas of the tenth level, we pray that all this ripens on us. However, we need not do this for the Buddhas or for our masters.

Certain beginners may find themselves incapable of meditating on tonglen. In this case, we should begin by taking on our own suffering. For example, in the morning, let us meditate that we take on the suffering to be experienced in the evening. Next, we move on to taking on the suffering of the next day, then that of the next month, the next year, the next life, and that of all our future lives. We then move on to include the suffering of our parents, our family, our friends, strangers, enemies, etc., to eventually include all sentient beings. Let us train in the first steps so as to move on to the next ones, by taking on all sufferings, karmas, veils, etc.

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In other words, we take the smallest difficulty experienced by the tiniest of sentient beings, on our own body, speech and mind. Let us not simply make the difficulties disappear or put them aside. We must think that we take this suffering upon ourselves, in the very center of our heart. Even if we cannot really accomplish this, it will nonetheless greatly strengthen our accumulation of merit. If our mind becomes accustomed to this process, we actually will become able to take on this suffering.

We are then told to combine these two actions, i.e. the giving and the taking-on, with our breathing (energy winds). Once we have acquired some experience in giving and taking, we should combine the giving with breathing out, and the taking-on with breathing in. At first, we may not be able to combine the giving and taking on with the energy winds, but this will come with perseverance and practice. Moreover, since the mind and these energy winds go hand in hand, this method of exchanging self with others will help to develop our Bodhichitta very quickly.

3. How to transform adverse circumstances into the path to enlightenment

In Offering to a Lama:

Even if the world and beings are filled with the fruit of negativity, and unwanted suffering rains down abundantly upon me, bless me so that I may consider this suffering as the many means to exhaust the results of my negative karma, and that I take these miserable conditions as the path.

In these degenerate times, what little virtue we attempt to practice often encounters several obstacles and adverse conditions. It is therefore important that we be able to transform them into favorable conditions. Otherwise, favorable and unfavorable conditions alike will be detrimental to our practice. Certain practitioners of the Dharma become arrogant when they acquire a good position, and subsequently abandon their practice of virtue.

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Others forget to practice virtue because they are too busy with their work or their many material possessions. Some, when confronted with illness or other adverse conditions, lose confidence and abandon their daily practice. Still others meet up with bad friends and give up their Dharma practice to become exclusively involved in worldly activities.

In short, it is very difficult for us in these degenerate times to perform actions that are perfectly pure. Nothing could be more foolish than to abandon what little semblance of virtue we accomplish as soon as we are faced with unfavorable circumstances. Shantideva says:

Nothing could be more disappointing; nothing could be more ignorant.

The essence of the instruction on training the mind is as follows: despite the favorable or unfavorable circumstances that may arise, it is very important not to abandon our daily practice, and to be able to transform these same circumstances into occasions which contribute to our happiness.

There are different ways of integrating these two instructions on training in Bodhichitta into our practice. These explanations involve different stages, divisions, and sequences, but briefly, here is how to proceed using the following eleven meditation steps:

First, we begin by meditating on these four topics:

- 1) equanimity;
- 2) remembering that all sentient beings have been our mothers;
- 3) remembering their kindness;
- 4) repaying their kindness.

They are followed by:

- 5) equality between self and others;
- 6) contemplating the many inconveniences of a self-centered attitude;

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7) contemplating the many benefits of an attitude turned toward others.

Then comes the actual contemplation on interchanging self and others:

8) in taking on suffering while visualizing the objects of our compassion;

9) in giving happiness to others, using the visualization that wishes to bring happiness to the objects of our love.

At the end, comes not only a simple wish, but a real sense of responsibility by:

10) developing the firm resolution to act in an altruistic way.

Finally, there develops:

11) the real wish to attain full enlightenment for the sake of others.

This meditation technique combines both methods of developing Bodhichitta (*i.e.* the sevenfold cause-and-effect method, and the method of the interchange of self with others). It is possible to develop Bodhichitta by training in either the first method or the second. However, the second method of interchanging self with others includes all the elements of the first.

4. Instructions for a daily practice

In *Offering to a Lama*:

Briefly, whatever may appear, good or bad, bless me so that it may be integrated into the path that increases both Bodhichittas. And with the help of the practice of the five powers - the essence of all the Dharma - may I be content with a happy mind.

These five powers are: 1) the power of determination, 2) the power of familiarity, 3) the power of the white seed, 4) the power of repudiation, and 5) the power of prayer.

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1) The power of determination

This power is the most important. As soon as we get up in the morning, we must clear our mind and decide with a strong, determined resolution: "From this moment on, so as to attain the essence of enlightenment in my life in general, in this present lifetime, this year, this month, and more particularly today, I will avoid committing any negative act; I will also subdue the real enemy which is my self-cherishing. I will meditate with all my strength only on precious Bodhichitta." Let us cultivate our determination in this manner again and again.

2) The power of familiarity

This precious Bodhichitta must not only be developed during our meditation sessions as such, but also between sessions (while walking, sleeping, sitting, etc.) so that it develops and increases without interruption. Any undertaking is difficult when we are not accustomed to it. After becoming a habit, everything is easier. The holy masters of the past have said:

Everything becomes easier with habit.

3) The power of the white seed

We must complete our accumulations and purify our obscurations using the six preliminary practices and other methods from the Lamrim, so as to create Bodhichitta if it is not already present, or to make it grow if it is. This is a very profound method that prevents our practice of virtue from being misdirected to this life and its worldly ambitions.

4) The power of repudiation

In one life after another, our self-cherishing has caused us to endure suffering after suffering, and caused our happiness to degenerate. To end this, we must be extremely determined to prevent self-cherishing from manifesting itself for even a single instant.

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5) The power of prayer

Let us protect all our daily positive acts with heartfelt prayer and dedications. At the end of every meditation session, or at least before going to sleep, let us dedicate our virtuous acts so as to increase both types of Bodhichitta.

5. Knowing when mind-training has been integrated

Geshe Chekawa has said:

All Dharmas can be condensed into a single thought.

The eighty-four thousand sutras taught by the Victor are methods aimed solely at enabling us to abandon self-cherishing and its imprints in order to attain Buddhahood. If a practice is not an antidote to self-cherishing, it is not a practice of the path. If all our practices become antidotes to self-cherishing and subsequently the causes of Buddhahood, it is the sign that our mind-training has been integrated in our mindstream.

6. The commitments of mind-training

Geshe Chekawa has said:

Always train in accordance with the three general points.

The first point, "Never transgress our commitments", means to never use mind-training as an excuse to belittle basic vows such as those of the Vinaya. The second, "Avoid giving in to immoral behavior", means not to use mind-training as an excuse to hurt humans, other creatures, destroy the environment, etc., while claiming not to be egocentric. The third, "Avoid becoming partial", consists in being patient not only with our friends but with our enemies as well, nor of being tolerant only of humans, while being intolerant of other creatures. We must constantly train ourselves in accordance with these three general points.

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7. Advice for training the mind

Geshe Chekawa has said:

All yogas are practiced by means of a single one.

This means that as practitioners, we are not required to accomplish a large variety of virtuous practices. In fact, they are all included in the thought of equality and the interchange of self with others. While eating, let us think: "I have already given my body to serve sentient beings. Consequently, I must nourish it well, so that I can work for their well-being." We must think in this manner and perform every act with the intention of benefiting all sentient beings, our mothers.

The Six Perfections

How to train in the six perfections after
developing Bodhichitta

1. How to train in the six perfections in order to ripen our own mindstream

- 1) The general way to train in the actions of the sons of the Buddhas
 - a) The perfection of generosity
 - b) The perfection of ethical behavior
 - c) The perfection of patience
 - d) The perfection of joyful perseverance
 - e) The perfection of concentration
 - f) The perfection of wisdom
- 2) How to train, particularly in the last two perfections
- 3) How to train in the uncommon Vajrayana

2. How to train in gathering others in order to ripen their mind streams

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How to train after developing Bodhichitta

1. How to train in the six perfections in order to ripen our own mindstream

1) The general method of training in the actions of the sons of the Buddhas

These actions are the six perfections:

1. Generosity
2. Ethical behavior
3. Patience
4. Joyful perseverance
5. Concentration
6. Wisdom

In Maitreya's *Ornament to the Sutras*:

The many actions of the sons of the Victors are all included in the six perfections.

All that is beneficial, for us as much as for others, can be accomplished by means of the six perfections. For example, all of a person's aspirations can be condensed into the following two objectives: higher conditions and ultimate states. These can be realized through the six perfections.

Moreover, all the excellent words are included in the three baskets (or volumes) and all the topics discussed therein can be condensed into the three higher trainings. Upon close verification, we can see that all three higher trainings are included in the six perfections.

Also, to attain the two bodies of a Buddha, we must have completed the two accumulations of merit and wisdom simultaneously. To achieve this, we must train simultaneously in skillful means and wisdom. The first five

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perfections refer to the skillful means, and the last, to the perfection of wisdom which serves to develop special insight. After developing Bodhichitta, we then train in the actions of the Victorious Ones, namely, the six perfections.

1. How to train in the perfection of generosity

Taken from *Offering to a Lama*:

Bless me so that I may transform my body, possessions, and my virtues of the three times into objects desired by every sentient being and that, thanks to the instruction strengthening my intention to offer these without attachment, I may attain the perfection of generosity.

The nature of generosity is the intention to offer our body, possessions, and root virtues. There are three kinds of generosity: 1) the generosity of sharing the Dharma, 2) the generosity of protecting from fear, and 3) the generosity with material objects.

1) Being generous with the Dharma

Teaching a simple phrase from the Dharma to someone who wishes to listen, or giving advice with the intention of helping a friend or family member are all means of being generous with the Dharma. To do this, we do not necessarily have to be called "Lama" or teach from a throne. Being generous with the Dharma is the best form of generosity and surpasses all others.

2) The generosity of protecting from fear

This form of generosity can include saving sentient beings from the natural elements such as fire, drowning, tornadoes or earthquakes, or freeing certain beings from the suffering of imprisonment. We can protect animals from death. The size of the animal is irrelevant. Saving other beings can also mean providing them with the favorable conditions they are missing: food, medication, etc. During the summer and winter, it can also involve protecting insects against the heat or the cold.

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3) Being generous with material objects

Being generous with material objects does not mean searching for things we do not have to simply give them away. It is no more acceptable to give something with the thought: "Oh! I should not have given this away. I regret it now." It is very important that our generosity be free of any afflictive emotion. As a beginner, it is not fitting to offer our body. In fact, it is not advisable to offer our body when we are not yet familiar with the concept of generosity, and are still at the stage of strengthening our intention.

At times, generosity may even be inappropriate. For example, we should not offer food that is impure, such as garlic and onions to those people who have taken vows of purity, Brahmins for example. We should not teach the secret Tantras to those who are ill-prepared, nor should we protect a criminal from the law when we know that he will surely harm other sentient beings or the world. Thus generosity may be inappropriate in certain specific situations, at certain particular moments, involving certain people, etc. Some objects may also be inappropriate as offerings.

2. How to train in the perfection of ethics

In *The Way of the Bodhisattvas*:

It is said that the perfection of ethics is attained when certain thoughts have been abandoned.

Abandoning the intention of harming others, as well as the root of this thought, constitutes the perfection of ethics. There are three types of ethics: 1) the ethic of refraining from misdeeds, 2) the ethic of cultivating virtue, and 3) the ethic of acting for the good of sentient beings.

1) The ethic of refraining from misdeeds

The first type of ethic has three divisions: 1) the vows of individual liberation, 2) Bodhisattva vows, and 3) tantric

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vows. The first vows are described as follows in *The Essence of an Ocean of Discipline*:

The eight classes of vows of individual liberation are: one-day lay vows, lay vows for men and women, vows for novice monks and nuns, additional vows for nuns, and the vows of fully ordained nuns and monks.

More specifically, the Bodhisattva vows can be summarized firstly, in the six perfections so as to ripen one's own mind, and secondly, in the four ways to gather followers so as to ripen the mind of others. In fact, these two elements alone include all the actions of the Bodhisattvas. The tantric vows are not presented here, but are explained verbally to those persons who travel the path of the Vajrayana, the vehicle of secret mantras.

2) The ethic of cultivating virtue

This ethic includes the actions of presenting offerings and performing prostrations before those beings who have attained a high karmic potential, paying respect, practicing the three aspects (listening, reflecting, meditating), teaching or listening to the Dharma, etc. In short, it consists of all the actions carried out by the three doors (body, speech, mind) with the objective of enthusiastically cultivating virtue while keeping the Bodhisattva vows.

3) The ethic of working for the good of sentient beings

Briefly, this ethic includes all the actions of the three doors when such actions are motivated by the thought of being of benefit to others.

All the actions of the sons of the Victors are included in the three types of ethic. In general, all the stages of the path serve to enhance these three forms of ethic.

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3. How to train in the perfection of patience

The nature of patience is the state of mind that remains calm in the face of wrongdoing, or when inflicted with suffering. In *The Way of the Bodhisattvas*:

How could we find enough leather to cover the entire earth?
Whereas having leather on the soles of our feet is the same
as covering the entire earth.

And again:

There is no greater offense than hatred.
There no greater austerity than patience.

There are three types of patience: 1) the patience of remaining indifferent when being harmed by others, 2) the patience of accepting suffering, and 3) the patience to gain assurance in the Dharma. First, let us take the time to reflect on the advantages of patience as well as on the disadvantages of anger, and let us meditate on patience with a joyful heart.

Here now is a presentation of the advantages of patience. This particular happy rebirth which we have temporarily received, an attractive body, a good job, good friends and relations, a positive environment, the swift accomplishment of grounds and paths, all the pleasures and magnificence of higher conditions, are almost all exclusively the marvelous results of patience. Finally, we will obtain the ultimate result which is the body of a perfect Buddha endowed with its marks and signs, a body of incredible beauty, without a single flaw, and that we could contemplate forever without tiring. All this is a product of the power of patience. Without the practice of patience, there will be no way of bringing the splendid actions of the sons of the Buddhas to their full accomplishment.

The disadvantages of anger are the following: Under the influence of intense anger, we are apt to become sick or crazy. It results in a shortened life span, a lessening of our merits, suicide, etc. Under its power, certain people will hit

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a family member, such as a sister or a child. But the worst is that, because of it, we will be destined to a painful negative rebirth. Furthermore, love, compassion, and precious Bodhichitta will degenerate in our mind. Anger entails such disadvantages.

Following these reflections, we must meditate on patience because it is one of the indispensable causes required to achieve Buddhahood. With immense joy and the thought that even if all sentient beings of the three worlds were to become our enemies, we will never give in to anger, even for an instant. So that the great pleasure we experience in developing love, compassion, and Bodhichitta for every sentient being does not degenerate, we must avoid being angry when confronted with suffering or the small wrongs inflicted upon us. We must also put an end to any anger whatsoever, and meditate on tolerance with a sincere heart.

1) The patience of remaining indifferent when harmed by others

From the master, Chandrakirti:

The fault lies not with sentient beings, it lies in afflictive emotions.

For example, a mad patient may hit the doctor or a mad son hit his father, but they should not be angry with the patient or the son, but rather attempt to calm their madness. Similarly, those who hurt us are no longer in control of themselves and have become mad because of the power of afflictive emotions. Therefore, we should not be angry with them, but instead try to free them from their afflictions.

If for example we burn our hand in the fire, we should not be angry with the fire, because we are at fault for having touched it, and it is in the nature of fire to produce heat and burn. In the same way, the difficult conditions we experience are the result of negative karma accumulated from having hurt others in the past. Why should we be

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angry if this ripened karma is the result of an action we ourselves committed in the past? We must also consider that the wrong we endure now may contribute to increasing our patience!

2) The patience of accepting suffering

In *The Way of the Bodhisattvas*:

Moreover, suffering has its qualities. It replaces arrogance with sadness, it awakens compassion for beings in Samsara, and it causes us to avoid misdeeds and appreciate virtue.

Not only should we not be attached to happiness, but after having observed the benefits of suffering, we should consider it as a medication. When we are afflicted with suffering such as illness, undesirable circumstances, or even nightmares, let us use these as supports for our practice.

3) The patience to gain assurance in the Dharma

This consists in developing the aspiration to obtain the qualities of the Three Jewels, the marvelous powers of the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas, and an excellent understanding of the law of cause and effect. In other words, let us not allow small difficulties to discourage us in our daily practice. Being able to endure difficulties is very important.

4. How to train in the perfection of perseverance

The nature of perseverance is joy in the practice of virtue. It is said in *Engaging in the Middle Way*:

All qualities come from joyful perseverance.

All qualities are the result of joyful perseverance. To the contrary, laziness will keep us from realizing any of our objectives in this life and the next.

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Three kinds of laziness are obstacles to joyful perseverance:

1) *Procrastination* consists in being unwilling to perform a positive act immediately, and putting it off until tomorrow, next week, next year, etc. Its antidote is to meditate on impermanence and the difficulty of acquiring a precious human life, etc.

2) The *pursuit of negative activities* consists in actively participating in mundane activities and various other distractions. This is stubbornness, not perseverance. Its antidote consists in contemplating the fact that the activities of Samsara are meaningless, and are the causes of suffering.

3) The *laziness of defeatism* is saying to yourself, for example: "How could a person like me ever attain Buddhahood?" Or again, "How could I ever accomplish the good of all sentient beings?" The antidote is mentioned in *The Way of the Bodhisattvas*, where it is said that if even a fly can attain enlightenment, then how could we, having been born human, being able to talk and having the power of understanding, not attain enlightenment? We can! This is how we should think. We could also say: "It will be difficult for me to take a rebirth in negative circumstances with the purpose of helping all sentient beings". This is what is said on this subject in *The Way of the Bodhisattvas*:

Because wrongdoing has been abandoned, there will be no suffering. Because we will be wise, we will not be unhappy.

Even if we remain in Samsara, if we have abandoned misdeeds, we will not suffer nor will we be unhappy, because it is impossible to receive a karmic result that we have not created. Therefore we should think: "I will not be unhappy: it will be like being in a pure land."

There are three types of joyful perseverance: 1) armor-like perseverance, 2) perseverance in cultivating virtue, and 3) perseverance to act for the good of sentient beings.

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1) Armor-like perseverance

Armor-like perseverance is the happy mind that Bodhisattvas started to develop a very long time ago, and that they now wear as an armor for the mind. It is based on the following thought: "I will remain for eon after eon to eliminate all the suffering of sentient beings, until not a single suffering being remains".

2) Perseverance in cultivating virtue

It consists in the accumulation of merits and purification. In short, it refers to being perseverant in the practice of the six perfections.

3) Perseverance to act for the good of sentient beings

It consists in the effort devoted to the four ways of gathering followers.

5. The three aspects of concentration

Concentration oriented toward: 1) calm-abiding, 2) special insight, and 3) the combination of the two. Or again, depending on its function: 1) concentration that stabilizes the body and mind in a state of bliss in this life, 2) concentration as the basis for qualities, and 3) concentration that allows us to act for the good of sentient beings.

6. The three aspects of wisdom

The three aspects of wisdom are: 1) the wisdom that realizes the ultimate nature of reality, 2) the wisdom that realizes the five classes of conventional sciences, and 3) the wisdom that understands how to act for the good of all beings.

To summarize, the six perfections are practicing generosity, protecting ethics, developing patience, being perseverant, meditating on concentration, and developing wisdom.

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Concentration and Wisdom

How to train in the last two perfections

1. How to train in calm-abiding, the essence of concentration
2. How to train in special insight, the essence of wisdom

How to train in the last two perfections

1. How to train in calm-abiding, the essence of concentration

Shantideva explains:

Having realized that special insight, fully endowed with calm-abiding, completely annihilates afflictive emotions, let us seek calm-abiding from the start.

The explanation of calm-abiding includes six topics:

- 1) The conditions required for attaining calm-abiding
- 2) How to attain calm-abiding as such
- 3) Based on this, how to advance through the nine stages
- 4) How to work with the six powers
- 5) How to use the four kinds of application
- 6) How calm-abiding develops

Using the training in ethics as a base, we can now introduce the training in concentration. Renunciation acts as the cause of liberation, while taking refuge and Bodhichitta are the gateway to the Dharma. Without these qualities, neither the meditative realizations concerning emptiness as explained in the sutras, nor the stages of tantric generation and achievement can be generated.

Similarly, in order to awaken in the mind any of the qualities resulting from the concentration practices explained in the sutras or the tantras, it is crucial to first obtain stability in calm-abiding. It is comparable to having a good container to hold water.

2. How to attain special insight, the essence of wisdom

Moreover, just to cut through the root of Samsara and attain liberation, we must develop the special insight that realizes emptiness. Calm-abiding must come before this. If we attain calm-abiding, the stages of meditation of the Lamrim will easily arise in the mind, beginning with the meditation on precious human rebirth and the ensuing ones. Calm-abiding can be attained before or after Bodhichitta. Therefore, let us sit comfortably, with the body poised in the seven or eight points of Vairochana, and after having carefully generated an exceptionally virtuous state of mind, meditate on calm-abiding and special insight²⁴.

²⁴ For more information on how to meditate on calm-abiding and special insight, refer to *How to meditate: Essential Instructions on Calm-abiding and Special Insight*. Centre Paramita ed., 2015.

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The Vajrayana

How to enter the uncommon path
specific to the secret mantras:
the Vajrayana

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How to enter the uncommon path specific to the secret mantras: the Vajrayana

Panchen Lobsang Tcheugyen states in *Offering to a Lama*:

Having crossed the ocean of the Tantras thanks to the kindness of my helmsman, the Vajra master, bless me that I may cherish the vows and commitments, the roots of all realizations, even more than my own life.

After having adequately trained our mind in the small and medium scopes, here is how to enter the Anuttarayoga Tantra of the Vajrayana. So as to plant the seeds of the four bodies of a Buddha firmly within us, we must receive the four initiations in a pure way from a qualified Vajra master. To begin practicing the profound secret tantras by yourself without proper initiation is a mistake. This is often mentioned in several tantras and authentic texts of the great masters. Therefore, in order to receive a pure initiation, we must search perseveringly for a Vajra master possessing all the necessary qualifications. For example, when we search for a job that will cater to our temporary needs, we must verify and reflect carefully in order to find the one most suitable for us. Therefore, need it be said that the Lama who could definitely free us from the many dangers of conditioned existence and guide us toward attaining Buddhahood, should not be someone chosen haphazardly.

For example, to set out in search of a treasure in a vast ocean, we need an able and experienced helmsman who is trustworthy and courageous. In the same way, if we dive into the immense ocean of the secret tantras to find the jewel that fulfills our wishes of unification, we will need a Vajra master whose blessings have not degenerated and who has experience in the tantras. This master must also possess the instructions and be imbued with great compassion. We must also ascertain the authenticity of his qualities and his trustworthiness.

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Since many have not received an initiation in the Anuttarayoga Tantra, this text serves only as an introduction to training in the Vajrayana path. For more details, we must refer to the works of Nagarjuna, Lama Tsongkhapa, and their spiritual sons.

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2. The four ways to gather followers so as to ripen the mindstream of others

The Bodhisattvas work tirelessly for the good of other sentient beings in four ways: 1) by being *generous with material things* through gifts that will attract others to them; 2) by *speaking in a pleasing way* while teaching the meaning of the six perfections to people close to them; 3) by *working for the well-being of others*, not only through teaching, but by encouraging people to begin practicing; 4) by *practicing what they teach*, and putting their words into practice. This can be found in the *Ornament of the Sutras*:

Be generous, so that they receive the teachings; speak warmly so that they follow us; work for their well-being and practice what we teach.

In short, the path of the practitioners of the great scope can be summarized as follows:

1) *Meditation* concerns conventional and ultimate Bodhichitta.

2) After having cultivated Bodhichitta, *practice* consists in training in the six perfections and in the four ways of gathering followers.

3) Having *abandoned* self-cherishing, we *commit* ourselves to working for the benefit of all sentient beings. For those having received tantric empowerment in the Annutarayoga Tantra, training involves the two stages of yoga.

This concludes the part concerning the path of the practitioners of the great scope.

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Dedication

May the virtuous effort devoted to composing this text ensure the enduring presence of his Holiness the Dalai Lama and other precious masters in this world for hundreds of eons. May their wishes be accomplished instantaneously. May all problems disappear from the world and may happiness, joy, and peace quickly shine forth! May the essence of the teachings spread across all times and places!

Written in Quebec, Canada

By Lama Samten,
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Glossary

Abhidharma: Teachings concerning metaphysics or phenomenology as explained by the Buddha. The master Vasubandhu summarized them in his *Treasury of Phenomenology* as well as in his self-commentary.

Aggregate: (Skt. skandha) The five psychosomatic constituents of our being according to the Abhidharma. They are the aggregates of form, sensations, discrimination, compositional factors, and consciousness.

Arhat: (Skt.) Destroyer of the enemy'. Such a person has destroyed the enemy within, his disruptive emotions, and has attained liberation from cyclic existence.

Arya: (Skt.) Noble, ultimate, superior. Someone who has directly realized the wisdom of emptiness.

Auditor: See *Shravaka*

Awakening/Enlightenment: See *bodhichitta*, *buddhahood*.

Bhikshu: (Skt.) A fully ordained monk.

Bodhichitta: The spirit/mind of enlightenment, namely, the wish to attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.

Bodhisattva: Someone who has developed the spirit of enlightenment or *Bodhichitta*.

Body of Enjoyment: See *Samboghakaya*.

Buddha: Someone who is fully awakened or enlightened, who has freed his mind of obscurations/veils to omniscience and has attained perfect wisdom, compassion, and power.

Buddhahood: The state of someone who is fully enlightened or awakened, who is a perfect Buddha.

Chittamatra: *School of mind-only*, one of the four Buddhist schools. A Mahayana school believing in the autonomous nature of the mind on the basis of which all illusory phenomena arise.

Dharma: Literally, the teaching of the Buddha. It represents the nature of phenomena, the path leading to the liberation from suffering.

Dharmakaya: One of the four bodies of a Buddha. The omniscient mind of a fully enlightened being who, free of all obscurations and veils, remains totally absorbed in the realization of emptiness, and yet is perfectly aware of every phenomenon.

Dhyani: The four levels of concentration of the realm of form.

Emanation body: See *Nirmanakaya*.

Eon: (Skt. kalpa) A very long period of time according to Buddhist cosmology which states that the universe is subject to a process alternating between formation and dissolution. The duration of one world to the next is referred to as a great eon, which includes four immeasurable periods of time (phases of formation, duration, dissolution, and chaos), each involving twenty "antara-kalpas".

Form body: See *Rupakaya*.

Great Treatise of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment: See *Tsongkhapa*.

Hinayana: Literally, small vehicle. That part of the Buddha's teaching which aims for each person to attain his own personal liberation or Nirvana. It is the foundation of the great vehicle or Mahayana.

Karma: Action of the body, speech, or mind. It refers to the law of cause and effect that governs the world, according to which an act performed with either a good or ill intention, will create a result of the same type. It is the motor of Samsaric existence.

Lama: Master, spiritual friend (Skt. *guru*).

Lama Tsongkhapa: Great master and pioneer of Buddhism in Tibet who was prophesied by the Buddha. He founded the Gelug school, from which the Dalai Lamas originate. He is the author of *The Great Treatise of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* (Lamrim Chenmo).

Madhyamaka: *School of the middle way*, presenting the ultimate and final thought of the Buddha, founded by the great Indian master, Nagarjuna. It contends that all phenomena are produced interdependently, thereby refuting the two extreme views of intrinsic existence (Eternalism) and of non-existence (Nihilism). The Madhyamaka school is divided in two branches: Svatantrika and Prasanguika.

Madhyamika: Adjective designating a follower of the Madhyamaka school; also qualifies what pertains to this school.

Mahayana: Literally, great vehicle. The teaching of the Buddha based on the small vehicle or *Hinayana* and meant to show the way to perfect enlightenment. It aims at developing Bodhichitta, the wish to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. It is divided in two: the vehicle of perfections (*Paramitayana*) and the vehicle of Tantras (*Vajrayana*).

Mantrayana: Vehicle of Mantras. Synonym of Vajrayana.

Milarepa: One of the greatest lay yogis of Tibet who lived during the eleventh century. He attained enlightenment very quickly through his exceptional devotion to his spiritual

master, Marpa.

Nirmanakaya: The awakened mind of a Buddha appearing to ordinary beings in the form of an emanation body.

Nirvana: Liberation from the suffering and cycle of rebirths, i.e. *Samsara*.

Paramita: Sanskrit for perfection or transcendence. Bodhisattvas practice the six perfections in a gradual manner so as to attain full enlightenment.

Paramitayana: Vehicle of perfections, one of the divisions of the *Mahayana*.

Prasangika: Consequentialist branch of the *Madhyamaka* school.

Pratimoksha (vows): Vows of individual liberation.

Pratyekabuddha: Solitary realizer or 'Buddha on his own'. The solitary realizer practices the Hinayana vehicle and lives alone without the guidance of a master.

Rupakaya: The form body of a Buddha, resulting from the complete and perfect accumulation of merits. It includes the *Sambhogakaya* and the *Nirmanakaya*.

Samboghakaya: The awakened mind of a Buddha that appears in the form of the *enjoyment body* only to high level Bodhisattvas.

Samsara: The cycle of existence. The state of the continuum of consciousness that unceasingly takes rebirth in the contaminated aggregates of the six realms.

Sangha: In the conventional sense, the spiritual community or a group of monks or nuns. In the ultimate sense, it refers to the *Aryas*.

Shakyamuni: Literally, 'Sage of the Shakya clan'. Name of the historical Buddha, approximately 556 BC, also called Siddhartha Gautama.

Shantideva: Great Indian Bodhisattva of the eighth century who practiced and taught the *Mahayana*. He is the author of *Engaging in the Deeds of Bodhisattvas*.

Shravaka: Auditors, practitioners of the *Hinayana* who rely on listening to the teaching and practicing the Four Noble Truths to attain *Nirvana* or the state of Arhat.

Solitary realizer: See *Pratyekabuddha*.

Son of Buddha: See *Bodhisattva*.

Stupa: A monument erected after the death of a spiritual master and representing the absolute body of the Buddhas. It usually holds the relic of the saint.

Suchness: The very nature of things or reality as it is. Synonym of 'emptiness'.

Sutra: Texts of the *Hinayana* and *Mahayana* discourses of Buddha Shakyamuni.

Svatantrika: Autonomist branch of the *Madhyamaka* school.

Tantra: Texts or teachings of the *Vajrayana*.

Tathagata: Skt. 'a being gone beyond'. Another name attributed to the Buddha meaning that he has realized suchness or the emptiness of phenomena.

Thangka: Painting on cloth inspired by the Tibetan tradition and adorned with brocades.

The Way of the Bodhisattvas: (Skt. Bodhisattvacharyavatara) A Mahayana work written in poetical form by the great Bodhisattva, Shantideva.

Three baskets: Treasury (or volumes) of teachings dealing with ethics, concentration, and wisdom.

Truth body: See *Dharmakaya*.

Tsongkhapa: See *Lama Tsongkhapa*.

Vajrayana: One of the two vehicles of the *Mahayana*. Literally, 'adamantine vehicle'. It enables those working in the vehicle of perfections to attain enlightenment more rapidly due to subtle techniques of meditation. Synonym of mantrayana.

Vehicule: (Skt. yana) Path permitting, through its practice, the attainment of its associated result.

Victor: Another name for the Buddha.

Vinaya: Code of ethics.

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Lama Samten's photography on back cover
by Diane Cameron

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To this day, the *Lamrim* or *Stages of the path to enlightenment* is the name associated with Atisha's famous text written during his stay in Tibet during the twelfth century. This text, which presents the entire path as taught by the Buddha, was later explained in depth by the Tibetan master, Lama Tsongkhapa. Far from being a simple collection of Buddhist teachings, it consists in an ordered and detailed sequence of all the stages of meditation which are necessary for attaining perfect enlightenment.

Always relying on Atisha's text, several great masters and sages have composed different Lamrim, taking care to adapt the teaching to the cultural context of their time. This is what Lama Samten sets out to do in this work. By adapting the teaching to our modern age, he hopes to help those who wish to travel the path to enlightenment. This second edition is specifically written to assist students in their understanding of the Lamrim. It is recommended to receive the verbal instructions of a guide as a support in reading this book.



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Lama Samten is a native of Tibet. He began his monastic studies in 1980 at Ganden monastery near Lhasa. So as to avoid cultural and religious repression, he sought refuge in India, where he was able to complete his studies in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy.

He obtained the title of geshe (the equivalent of a doctorate in Buddhist philosophy) at a monastery of the same name reconstructed in southern India at the initiative of the Dalai-Lama. While visiting Quebec in 1998, and in response to those whom he had met, he decided to stay. Since then, he has been generously sharing this ancient philosophy of more than two thousand years with all who make the request. May this second edition of *The Essence of the Path to Enlightenment* be of use to sentient beings, and contribute to peace in our world!