



*Essence of  
Refined Gold*

by

*The Third Dalai Lama  
Sonam Gyatso*



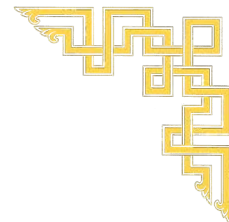
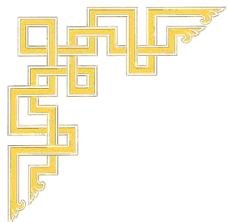


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## The Nature of the Instruction

*To the feet of the venerable lama,  
Embodiment of the Three Jewels,  
Profoundly I turn for refuge;  
Bestow upon me your transforming powers.*

Here, for spiritually inclined beings who wish to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by human life, is a treatise on the *lam rim* tradition of meditation, a tradition known as “stages on the spiritual path leading to enlightenment”.

What is the *lam rim* tradition? It is the essence of all teachings of Buddha, the one path travelled by the high beings of the past, present and future, the legacy of the masters Nagarjuna and Asanga, the religion of supreme people travelling to the ground of omniscience, the unabridged synthesis of all practices included within the three levels of spiritual application. This is the *lam rim* tradition.

*Lam rim* is an especially profound aspect of Dharma, for it is a tradition of practice sound in origin. It has neither fault nor shortcoming, for it is a complete practice perfectly uniting both method and wisdom aspects of the path. It provides all levels and grades of the techniques passed through Nagarjuna and Asanga, from the practices meant for beginners up to and including the final practice before full buddhahood, the stage of non-practice.

This graduated Dharma of taintless origin is like the wish-fulfilling gem, for, through it infinite beings can easily and quickly accomplish their purposes. Combining the rivers of the excellent teaching of both the Theravada Vehicle and Mahayana Vehicle scriptures, it is like a mighty ocean. Revealing the principal points of both the Sutrayana and Vajrayana, it is a complete tradition with complete teachings. Outlining the main techniques for taming the mind, it is easily integrated into any practice, and, being a teaching combining the lineages of Guru Vidyakokila, a sage of the Nagarjuna School, and Lama Serlingpa, a sage of the Asanga School, it is a precious ornament. Therefore, to hear, contemplate, or meditate upon a *lam rim* discourse is fortunate indeed.

Je Rinpoche's *Song of the Stages on the Spiritual Path* says:

*From Nagarjuna and Asanga,  
Banners unto all humankind,  
Ornaments amongst the world's sages,  
Comes the sublime lam rim lineage  
Fulfilling all hopes of practitioners.  
It is a wish-fulfilling gem,  
Combining the streams of a thousand teachings,  
It is an ocean of excellent guidance.*

***The lam rim teaching has four especially great qualities:***

- i. It reveals how all the various doctrines of Buddha are non-contradictory. If you rely upon the *lam rim* teaching, all the words of Buddha will be

effectively comprehensible. You will see that there are root practices and branch practices, and that there are direct and indirect teachings, all of which aim at creating helpful circumstances along the stages of spiritual development for a practitioner like yourself.

ii. You will take all the various teachings as personal advice.

You will see the profound teachings of the sutras and tantras, the treatises and dissertations written by later masters, and all levels and branches of practice as methods to use to overcome negative aspects of the mind. The significance of all the teachings of the Buddha and his successors—from the teachings on how to follow a spiritual guide up to those on how to perceive the most profound aspects of reality—will come into your hand. You will learn how to practise analytical meditation upon the words of the teachings and placement meditation upon the central themes of those words. Thus, you will see all the teachings in perspective to your life and progress.

iii. You will easily find the intent of the Buddha.

Of course, the original words of the Buddha and those of the later commentators are perfect teachings, but for a beginner they are overwhelmingly numerous, and consequently their meaning is difficult to fathom. Hence, although you may study and contemplate them, you probably will not gain experience of their actual essence; or, even if you should gain it, a tremendous effort and extent of time would be required. However, because the *lam rim* tradition has its source in Atisha's *A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, which incorporates all the various oral teachings of the supreme Indian masters, even someone like you can easily and quickly arrive at the Buddha's intent through it.

iv. The great negativity of abandoning a lineage of Dharma will spontaneously be arrested.

When you realise the intent of the Buddha, you will see all his direct and indirect teachings as wise and skillful means for satisfying the diverse spiritual needs of the variety of beings. To say that some lineages of Dharma are perfect methods and should be practised, whereas other lineages are imperfect and should be ignored, is the karma called "abandoning Dharma," a great negativity indeed. However, if you study the *lam rim* you will see how all doctrines of the Buddha and lineages coming from him are non-contradictory. Then the great negativity of abandoning an aspect of Dharma will never occur.

These are the four great qualities of the *lam rim* tradition. Who with any common sense would not benefit from hearing a discourse on it, a thing the fortunate of India and Tibet have long relied upon, a generously high teaching to delight the heart, the tradition known as the "stages on the path for the beings of the three capacities". Regarding these four effects arising from hearing, contemplating, and meditating upon a *lam rim* discourse,

Je Rinpoche said:

*(Through it) one perceives all doctrines as non-contradictory,  
All teachings arise as personal advice,  
The intent of Buddha is easily found  
And you are protected from the cliff of the greatest non-virtue.*

*Therefore the wise and fortunate of India and Tibet  
Have thoroughly relied upon this excellent legacy  
(Known as) the stages in the practices of beings of three capacities;  
Who of powerful mind would not be intrigued by it?*

Possessing such strength and impact, this tradition takes the heart of all the teachings of Buddha and structures it into steps for gradual evolution through the successive experiences of the path, running through the three levels of spiritual capacity. What an approach to Dharma! How can its greatness ever be described?

## Qualities of a Spiritual Teacher and a Student

Consider the beneficial effects of hearing or teaching the *lam rim* even once: an understanding of Buddha and his teachings arises and, by means of pure attitudes and application, the person who is a vessel suitable for Dharma collects benefits equivalent to those gained by having heard all the words of Buddha. Therefore, abandon the three wrong attitudes: likened to a dirty pot; a pot with a hole in its bottom; an upturned pot, and generate the six recognitions. In this way, you will be able to gather the wealth of having approached the subject properly. Whether you are studying or teaching a *lam rim* text, do so purely and with intensity.

Je Rinpoche said:

*One session of hearing or teaching  
This tradition embodying the essence of all Buddha's words,  
Collects waves of merit equivalent  
To hearing or teaching all Buddhadharma.*

However, although merely hearing the *lam rim* teaching with the proper attitude is an extremely dynamic experience, it is important to say something about the qualities of a *lam rim* teacher.

In general, the qualities of the various teachers of the Theravada Vehicle, Mahayana and Vajrayana methods are manifold, and any Buddhist master is a worthy teacher; yet the specific qualities required of one who gives a discourse on the jewel-like *lam rim* tradition are described in *Ornament of Mahayana Sutras*: he should have realisation, i.e., his mindstream should:

- be subdued through realising the higher training in ethical conduct;
- be stilled through the realisation of the higher training in concentration;
- be completely pacified by realising the higher training in wisdom;



- have authoritative scriptural learning, i.e., heard many teachings on the three baskets of scriptures and so forth from authentic teachers;
- have a wisdom realising emptiness;
- have more learning and realisation than the student.

As well as these personal qualifications of a *lam rim* teacher, he should have four altruistic attitudes:

- skill and spontaneous creativity in applying the methods to generate progress within the students, whom he teaches out of a pure motivation free from grasping for wealth, fame or power;
- enthusiasm and joy in giving time and energy to teaching;
- diligence and perseverance in teaching;
- beyond losing patience with students who practise poorly.

If you can find a guru possessing these six personal and four altruistic qualities, request him for teachings and then follow them well.

The student should have three fundamental qualities:

- sincerity;
- intelligence able to discriminate between beneficial and misleading forces on the path;
- intense longing to gain spiritual understanding and experience.

As well, he or she should have a fourth quality: appreciation for the Dharma and the teacher.

Sometimes six qualities are mentioned. Students fit to be led along the sublime path of *lam rim* practice must:

- have great interest in the Dharma;
- during the actual teaching be able to keep their minds alert and well-focused;
- have confidence in and respect for the teacher and teaching;
- abandon wrong attitudes towards the teaching and maintain receptive ones;
- maintain conditions conducive to learning;
- eliminate any unconducive conditions.

If you give a discourse on the *lam rim*, try to maintain the qualities of a teacher described above, and if you listen to a discourse cultivate the above qualities of an ideal student within yourself.



Having listened correctly to the spiritual instructions from a fully qualified spiritual teacher on the stages of the path of the beings of three capacities, here follows the manner in which to train the mind. Arrange an altar having images of your teachers, the Buddha, a stupa and a scripture, as well as pure offerings obtained without deceit. In front of your altar, prepare a comfortable meditation seat, and either four or six times each day sit there in the seven-point meditation posture.

Conjoin your mind with a motivation of thorough trust in the Three Jewels and generate bodhicitta through the refuge prayer and meditating on the four immeasurables.

*“Om Svabhava... All phenomena are empty of inherent existence.*

From within the state of emptiness, in the sky before me, is a vast and expansive jewelled throne being held aloft by eight mighty snow lions upon which is a variegated lotus and moon disk. Seated upon it in the aspect of Buddha Shakyamuni who is inseparable from your lama who teaches you the path. To his right are the lamas of the Lineage of Vast Conduct and to his left, the Lineage of Profound View. Surrounding them are the buddhas, bodhisattvas, hearers, and solitary realisers of the ten directions, and an ocean of dakas, dakinis and dharma protectors.

Invite them to abide by reciting:

*Although the completely pure ultimate nature of all phenomena is unfluctuating  
With immeasurable compassion, you see all migrators in the ten directions.  
Propounding with the enlightened activities of all the conquerors  
Lamas of the three times, together with your entourages, please come here  
And protect all sentient beings without exception.*

“An exceedingly fragrant bath house” means that you and all sentient beings should perform a bath offering, offering ablution, clothing and ornaments to the Buddha, requesting that the merit field should abide, as explained in Shantideva’s *Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*.

The essential points of purification and accumulation are summarised in the seven-limb practise, commencing with:

All the conquerors assemble within a single buddha...,

*The great compassionate Sugata Vajradhara, the supreme all-seeing Tilopa, and...”*  
of the blessed Experiential Lineage.

*Maitreya, Asanga, Vasubandu and Vimuktisena...*  
of the Lineage of Vast Conduct, and  
*The bodhisattva Nagarjuna who eliminated the extremes of existence and non-existence...* of the Lineage of the Profound View.

*Before the Conqueror is Atisha and our virtuous spiritual friends, such as Dromtönpa, and so forth.*

*“Mig.me Tse.we Ter.chen Chen.re.zig...”*

*Lama Tsongkhapa and the teachers of scripture and reasoning, and so forth.*

*Wisdom of immense strength and profound physical strength spreads...*

*Marvellous visual elaboration...*

*Fulfils all needs and wishes...*

*Teaching the above to us...*

*The unsurpassed Teacher, the precious Buddha...*

*With compassionate, skilful means, you took rebirth in the lineage of the Shakyas...*

*Offer as many prostrations as one can.*

After that, offer either a thirty-seven or seven heap mandala, whichever is suitable, and follow that with further offerings:

*To those abiding upon thrones on clouds.*

In the middle part of the practice recite the *General Confession* three times:

*Under the control of attachment, anger, ignorance...*

*until*

*Dedicate to the attainment of enlightenment.*

Thereafter, with a subdued mind melodiously recite the *lam rim* prayer, *Opening the Door to the Supreme Path*.

Following your request that they depart,

*the recipients of your offerings return to their natural abode.*

Whether you are practising in four or six sessions, the request to depart is made in the final session.

This is the preliminary to relying on the spiritual teacher.

## **How to Rely upon a Spiritual Mentor**

The best way to rely on a spiritual teacher is to practise analytical meditation upon his excellent qualities and his beneficial function in your spiritual life.

Consider the countless ways in which he is kind to you: he is the root of all attainment, the source of all goodness in this and future lives, the doctor who eradicates the disease of mental disturbances with the medicine of the Dharma. Although you have wandered in samsara since beginningless time, never before did you meet a spiritual teacher, or if you did meet one you did not correctly follow their teachings, for you are not yet a buddha. Think, “I have now met a spiritual guide and will try to practise as pleases him.”

It is more kind to give a bowl of simple food to someone dying of hunger than to give a handful of golden coins to someone who has every luxury. For this reason, it is said that your personal spiritual mentor is kinder than even Buddha himself. *The Five Stages*

states:

*The self-born Buddha  
Is a being gone to perfection;  
But kinder than Buddha is your own teacher,  
For he personally gives you the oral teachings.*

Contemplate how your guru is kinder than all the buddhas of the past, present and future.

To receive spiritual instructions, Buddha made offerings of possessions, service and practice. For example, in a previous life he offered 100,000 pieces of gold to a teacher to receive the half-verse, “If there is birth there is death; stopping this process is bliss itself.” In another life, as a king he sacrificed his wife and his only child for a single verse of the Dharma. On another occasion, he made his body into a lamp and burned it as an offering to his spiritual mentor. In these and other ways, he abandoned wealth, possessions, and other objects of attachment. Since you are a follower of Buddha, you should do likewise. If you have heard many teachings from your spiritual teacher, is his kindness not immeasurable?

Some people think that a teacher should be revered only if he has many obvious qualities. They say, “I go to him to hear his words on Dharma, not to see him,” and “I can see no great traits in him, so there is no need for reverence.” What fools! For instance, even if your parents have no good qualities, you should appreciate their kindness, for, by so doing great benefits arise, whereas by not appreciating them only pain and confusion result. The same holds true of your attitude toward your spiritual mentor.

You feel that someone who gives you a little wealth is very kind, but the spiritual teacher can give you every goodness of this and future lives. If you contemplate deeply, it becomes obvious that all stages of development—from that of a lay follower to those of a bodhisattva and buddha—depend completely upon pleasing the spiritual mentor. There are many examples of people who have attained full enlightenment in one short lifetime by correctly devoting themselves to a teacher, and if you please him with the offerings of possessions, service, and intensive practice, there is no reason why you cannot do the same. Thus the importance of correctly relying upon an all-kind spiritual teacher cannot be over-emphasised. Meeting with and being cared for in this and future lives by a spiritual mentor with whom you have a Dharma relationship is purely your responsibility, so serve your spiritual guide well.

Without following a qualified teacher, there is no method to actualise enlightenment. This point is stressed in sutras and commentaries. “Please practise as pleases the spiritual guide,” is said repeatedly. Do not regard this as an undesirable task like a prison sentence, for who doesn’t want good fortune? As stated in many sutras, tantras, and treatises, there is no faster or more powerful way to increase your store of merit than by correctly following a spiritual guide.

When training under a spiritual teacher, be sure to maintain a correct attitude.

Whatever happens, do not permit the thought to arise that he has faults or shortcomings. Meditate in this way not with words alone but from the depths of your heart, until the mere sound of his name or a thought of him makes your hair tingle and your eyes fill with tears.

In general, all the buddhas and bodhisattvas have said that you should never see the ordinary failings of a human being in your spiritual mentor. If you see faults in him, consider it as a reflection of your impure attitudes. How are you able to really know what is and is not a fault? Once when Arya Asanga did a retreat on Maitreya Buddha, he perceived Maitreya as a worm-ridden dog. Naropa first saw his teacher Tilopa as a lunatic catching fish and eating them alive. In the *Meeting between Father and Son Sutra*, Buddha manifested as a devil in order to work for the good of the world. In view of these incidents, how can you believe that the faults you see in your guru are real? Generate conviction that he is a manifestation of the Buddha.

It is taught in the Root Text of the *Guhyasamaja Tantra* and in Ashvagosha's *Fifty Verses on Guru Devotion* that there is no graver negativity than saying or believing that your spiritual teacher has faults. Therefore, practise guru yoga as related in the biography of Lama Dromtönpa—without doubts or wavering. Once you have accepted a spiritual mentor, meditate so as not to give rise to any disrespectful or unworthy thoughts, even if your life is at stake.

Je Rinpoche wrote,

*The root of all causes producing  
Happiness here and hereafter, is the practice  
Of relying in thought and action  
Upon the sacred friend who reveals the path.  
Seeing this, follow him at any cost  
And please him with the offering of practice.  
I, a yogi, did that myself;  
You, O liberation seeker, should do likewise.*

Je Rinpoche gave this advice purely out of great compassion, and not because he wanted his students to honour or to glorify him.

## **The Human Situation**

At this point the question may arise: “If one relies upon a spiritual teacher who points out the path to enlightenment and tries to please him by making him the offering of practising as he teaches, what exactly is meant by ‘offering of practice?’”

Practice means taking upon yourself the responsibility of continually living in accordance with the holy Dharma, the teachings given to you by your spiritual guide. Through working with the teacher and with the laws of cause and effect, you can take advantage of your extremely valuable human life, a life-form hard to find and, once found, very meaningful; a treasure more precious than a wish-fulfilling gem. Other than doing this, there is no offering of practice. Grit your teeth, and do not let the



once-attained opportunity afforded by human life slip away. If you do not utilise this tremendous potentiality, are you not hard-hearted?

However, it is of borderline value to listen to or practise Dharma with a motivation mixed with white, black, or gray aspects of the eight worldly concerns, i.e., the motivation to outdo enemies and protect friends, which is praised by worldly people but actually is shallow; the motivation to obtain material benefit, a universally condemned motivation; and the motivation of impressing others, which some think good and some despise. If you do not meditate upon impermanence, death, and so forth, and thus pass beyond mundane thought patterns, you run the great risk of having negative motivations dominate your mind. On the other hand, if you practise the pure Dharma well and with no pretenses, you quickly and firmly lay the foundations of lasting happiness.

Discard as the husk of a grain essenceless worldly pursuits—works of no positive consequences and spiritually of great peril. Take up the essence of Dharma, so that at the time this essenceless human body is left behind, you will not depart from life with regret.

Furthermore, think to practise immediately. Drink the waters of meditation now and relieve the thirst of wishing to hold life's essence.

Je Rinpoche said,

*Human life, found but this one time,  
More precious than a wish-fulfilling gem,  
So hard to regain and so easily lost,  
Is as brief as a flash of lightning.  
Seeing this, discard worldly activity like the husk of a grain  
And strive day and night to take life's essence.*

## The Three Levels of Spiritual Application

How should you take the essence of the opportunities provided by this human vessel?

It is extremely important to have an understanding of the ways of generating actual experience of the general foundations of the path and practices, and therefore I will briefly explain the process. This explanation has two headings:

### ***I. How the path of the three levels of spiritual application condense all teachings of Buddha***

Buddha himself first developed bodhicitta—the aspiration to attain perfect compassion, wisdom and power as the best means of benefiting all sentient beings. In the end, to benefit all beings he attained full enlightenment. Then, solely to benefit beings he taught the holy Dharma.

The practices he taught fall into two divisions:

1. Those aimed at the temporary benefit of a high rebirth as humans or gods;

2. Those aimed at bringing the two ultimate benefits of liberation from samsara and the attainment of omniscience.

The first group of practices is known as the “practices of the person of initial capacity”. Because they are used as a basis for all higher practices, they are called “practices common with the person of initial capacity.” The nature of the practitioner of initial capacity is outlined in Atisha’s *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*:

*Someone who by the various methods  
Aims at higher samsaric happiness  
With his own interests in mind,  
Is known as the spiritual aspirant of initial capacity.*

That is, the practitioner of initial capacity is one who does not work for the pleasures of this life, but instead sets his or her mind upon the practices leading to rebirth as either a human or a god.

The practices that yield ultimate benefit are of two types:

- i. Those that bring nirvana or liberation that is merely a freedom from samsaric suffering and
- ii. Those that bring liberation with omniscience.

The former is known as the “practices of the person of intermediate capacity” or “practices common with the person of intermediate capacity.”

Atisha’s *Lamp for the Path* says:

*He who with the aim of peace for himself  
Turns his back on samsaric happiness  
And reverses all negative karma  
Is known as the spiritual aspirant of intermediate capacity.*

That is, the intermediate practitioner turns his back on the securities and joys of higher samsaric rebirths and takes up the practices of the Three Higher Trainings: ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom, in order to attain that liberation which is free from all afflicted minds and karma that cause samsara.

Finally, in addition to the Therevada Vehicle practices outlined above, the methods that accomplish buddhahood include all the practices of the Perfection Vehicle and the Vajra Vehicle. These methods are known as “practices exclusive for the person of greater capacity.”

Atisha’s *Lamp for the Path* says:

*He who sees suffering in his own life  
And, realising that others suffer likewise,  
Wishes to put an end to all misery  
Is known as the spiritual aspirant of supreme capacity.*

In other words, the supreme practitioner is one who, empowered by great compassion, takes up methods such as the six perfections and the two stages of tantra in order to attain full buddhahood in order to extinguish the suffering of others. This is how the path of the three capacities of spiritual application condenses all the teachings of the Buddha.

## ***2. The reason for leading aspirants through these three levels***

Although the practices of all three levels of spiritual application are taught in the *lam rim* tradition, this is done only because it is necessary to go through the two lower levels of practice as branches leading to the third and highest capacity. In the *lam rim* tradition you do not take up the practices of lower capacity merely to gain the samsaric comfort of higher rebirth, nor do you take up those of intermediate capacity merely to benefit yourself by gaining nirvana or liberation from cyclic existence. You do both of these purely as preliminaries to the practices of greater capacity. The actual body of *lam rim* practice is that of the highest of the three levels.

Why is so much emphasis placed upon the practices of high capacity? Because there is no door to the Mahayana other than bodhicitta, and bodhicitta is the unique quality of practitioners of highest capacity. You must therefore develop it.

To do this, you begin by contemplating its benefits and thereby generate a longing to attain it. These benefits are of two kinds: temporary and ultimate.

- Temporarily bodhicitta guarantees the joyous fruit of a high rebirth.
- Ultimately it gives rise to the liberated, omniscient wisdom of buddhahood.

Hence it is indispensable.

As a prerequisite for bodhicitta, you must generate great compassion that is unable to tolerate the sufferings of all sentient beings.

- This great compassion for others depends upon an intense awareness of the undesirable experiences and sufferings of your own continuum, so first train in the practices of lower capacity by contemplating the miseries experienced in the lower realms. From contemplating this, arises a mind that longs for liberation from those rebirths.
- Then take up the intermediate practices by contemplating the transient nature of the joys in the heavenly realms. From this arises renunciation of everything in samsara.
- Finally, thinking that all mother beings face the same sufferings as you do, generate compassion (wishing them to be free from suffering), love (wishing them to have happiness), and bodhicitta, the aspiration for full enlightenment as the best means to fulfill that love and compassion.
- Thus, leading aspirants to the highest capacity of practice by first training their minds in the two lower capacities is a supreme, perfect approach to Dharma.

To take the essence of your human life, there are three actual practices, to be accomplished, namely, the practices of the three capacities outlined above.

## **Training the Mind on the Path Shared with the Person of Initial Capacity**

### ***Death and the Lower Realms***

You have attained this precious human form, difficult to gain and extremely meaningful and are now a human being.

However,

- This life will not last forever, and
- It is definite that you will eventually die.
- Moreover, you do not know how long death will wait before striking.

Therefore, immediately exert effort to take life's essence. You have had infinite previous lives in higher, lower, and intermediate realms, but the Lord of Death, like a thief in a rich market place, has stolen them all indiscriminately. How fortunate that he has let you live this long! Generate a mind so filled with the awareness of death that you sit like a man hunted by an intent assassin.

At the time of death, money, possessions, friends, and servants will not be able to follow you. However, the traces of negative karma created for their sake will pursue you like a shadow. That is how you must go from life. Think it over. At this moment, you are content to eat, drink, and consume, yet life, wealth, sensual objects, and food just burn on and on, and you accomplish nothing of value. Fully direct whatever remains of your life to genuine Dharma practice. Do this from today onward, not from tomorrow, for death may strike tonight.

You may ask: "If, with the exception of Dharma, nothing helps at the time of death, then how does Dharma help, and how does non-Dharma harm?"

At death you do not simply evaporate. Death is followed by rebirth, and whether your rebirth is happy or miserable, high or low, is determined by the state of your mind at the time of death. Thus except for the power of karma, ordinary people are powerless. They take the rebirth propelled by the force of their positive and negative karmas—the karmic seeds left by previous deeds of body, speech, and mind. If at the time of death a positive thought predominates, a happy rebirth will follow. If a negative thought predominates, one is born into one of the three lower realms where one suffers intensely. What are the torments of the three lower realms? To quote Acharya Nagarjuna,

*Remember that in the lower hells,  
One burns like a sun  
In the upper hells one freezes.  
Remember that pretas and spirits*



*Suffer from hunger, thirst, and climate.  
Remember that animals suffer  
The consequences of stupidity.  
Abandon the karmic causes of such misery  
And cultivate the causes of joy.  
Human life is rare and precious;  
Do not make it a cause of pain.  
Take heed; use it well.*

As Nagarjuna implies:

- i. The sufferings of the hot and cold hells are unendurable,
- ii. The sufferings of hungry ghosts are horrendous,
- iii. The sufferings of animals: eating one another, being domesticated and ruled by humans, being unintelligent, and so forth—are overwhelming.

Right now you cannot hold your hand in fire for even a few seconds. You cannot sit naked on ice in the winter for more than a few minutes. To pass even a single day without eating or drinking anything brings great difficulty, and merely a tiny bee sting seems terrible. How then will you be able to bear the heat or cold of the hells, the anguish of the pretas, or the horrors of animal existence? Meditate on the sufferings of the lower realms until you are filled with dread and apprehension. Now that you have gained an auspicious human form, abandon the causes of lower rebirth and cultivate the causes of a happy rebirth. Determine to apply yourself to the methods that cut off the path to the lower realms.

### ***Taking Refuge***

What are the methods to cut off the path to lower rebirth?

These are:

- Awareness of the danger of the sufferings of lower rebirth, as explained above;
- Recognition that Buddha, Dharma and Sangha have power to protect you from such rebirth;
- Generate awareness of danger by means of meditation and then take refuge in the Three Jewels from the depths of your heart.

How do the Three Jewels have the power to protect you from the terrors of the lower realms? The Buddha Jewel is free from all fear. Being omniscient, he is a master of ways that protect from every fear. As he abides in great compassion that sees all sentient beings with equanimity, he is a worthy object of refuge for both those who benefit him and those who do not. Because he himself has these qualities, it follows that his teachings, the Dharma and the Sangha established by him are also worthy. This cannot be said of the founders of many religious schools, few of whom were transcendental; or of many doctrines, most of which are filled with logical faults; or of many religious

traditions, most of which are fragmented. Because Buddha, Dharma and Sangha possess these sublime qualities, they indeed are worthy.

How do you take refuge in the Three Jewels?

Chant three times,

*I take refuge in the perfect Buddha. Please show me how to free myself from samsaric sufferings in general and from the lower realms in particular.*

*I take refuge in the Dharma, the supreme abandonment of attachment. Please be my actual refuge and lead me to freedom from the terrors of samsara in general and in the lower realms in particular.*

*I take refuge in the supreme Sangha, the Spiritual Community. Please protect me from the misery of samsara and especially from the lower realms.*

While reciting these lines, generate an actual sense of taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha from the depths of your heart.

However, taking refuge but then not observing the refuge precepts is of very little benefit, and the power of having taken it is soon lost. Therefore, always be mindful of the precepts.

- i. Having taken refuge in the Buddha, no longer rely upon worldly gods such as Shiva and Vishnu, and see all statues and images of Buddha as actual manifestations of Buddha himself.
- ii. Having taken refuge in the Dharma, do not harm any sentient being or be disrespectful toward the holy scriptures.
- iii. Having taken refuge in the Sangha, do not waste your time with false teachers or with unhelpful or misleading friends, and do not disrespect saffron or maroon cloth.
- iv. Also, understanding that all temporary and ultimate happiness is a result of the kindness of the Three Jewels, offer your food and drink to them at every meal and rely upon them rather than upon politicians or fortunetellers for all of your immediate and ultimate needs.
- v. According to your spiritual capacity, show others the significance of refuge in the Three Jewels and do not ever forsake your own refuge, not even in jest or to save your life.

With awareness of the need to avoid wasting time on mere words, recite the following refuge formula three times each day and three times each night:

*Namo Gurubhyah,  
Namo Buddhaya,  
Namo Dharmaya,  
Namo Sanghaya.*

While doing so, maintain awareness of the unsurpassed qualities of the Three Jewels, and of their individual uniqueness and commitments.

### *The Law of Karma and Its Results*

One may wonder: “Granted, taking refuge in the Three Jewels can protect me from the misery of lower rebirth; but how can I create the causes that bring about a higher rebirth?”

For this, we must consider the four aspects of karmic law:

- i. Positive and negative deeds plant seeds that will bear respective fruit, i.e., goodness produces future happiness and unwholesome deeds produces future suffering;
- ii. One seed produces many results, each of which has many seeds of a like nature;
- iii. A deed not done produces no result;
- iv. Every deed you do with your body, speech or mind leaves a karmic seed on your continuum that is never exhausted (unless experienced or neutralised by purification).

When you have contemplated these four aspects of karmic law, the importance of living in accordance with the teachings of abandoning harm and cultivating good becomes obvious.

To prove the laws of karma by mere force of logic is an extremely difficult and lengthy process, and only one well versed in logical reasoning could follow the process. So instead, I will quote a verse from the *King of Concentration Sutra*,

*Moon and stars may fall to earth,  
Mountains and valleys may crumble  
And even the sky may disappear,  
But you, O Buddha, speak nothing false.*

Bearing these words in mind we can consider the following teaching from Buddha himself,

*From non-virtue comes suffering;  
Therefore day and night  
You should think and re-think  
How to escape from suffering forever.*

And also,

*The roots of all goodness lie  
In the soil of appreciation for goodness.  
Constantly meditate upon how to ripen  
The fruits that can grow therefrom.*

As explained here, abandon all negative activity in general and contemplate the four unpleasant aspects of the ten non-virtues of body, speech and mind in particular:

- Killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct;
- Lying, slandering others, speaking harshly, and indulging in meaningless talk;
- Covetousness, ill-will, and holding distorted views.

To show the four unpleasant aspects of karma by the example of the results of killing:

- i. The main effect is lower rebirth;
- ii. The causally concordant experiential effect is that in a future rebirth you will be killed or will see many dear ones killed;
- iii. The causally concordant behavioral effect is that you will have the tendency to kill again in future lives and thus multiply the negative karma; and
- iv. The effect on the environment is that even if you gain a good rebirth the environment around you will be violent.

The effect is also graded into minor, medium and heavy degrees, depending upon the object. For example, killing a human, results in rebirth in hell. Killing an animal results in rebirth as a preta, and killing an insect results in animal rebirth. Keep in mind these words from *Chapter of the Truthful One*:

*O King, do not kill,  
For all that lives cherishes life.  
If you wish to live long yourself, respect life  
And do not even think of killing.*

As said here, rely upon an attitude resolved not to entertain thoughts of any harmful action such as killing and the other non-virtues. Abandon all forms of non-virtue and strive with all your might to actualise goodness.

Je Rinpoche said:

*There is no certainty that after death lower rebirth does not await you,  
But there is certainty that the Three Jewels have power to protect you from it.  
Therefore, base yourself upon refuge  
And let not the refuge precepts degenerate.  
Also, consider the working of constructive and destructive actions.  
Practising correctly is your own responsibility.*

By guarding the ethical conduct of avoiding the ten non-virtues you will have a good rebirth. But if you wish to go beyond that and gain the eight qualities conducive to continuing along the supreme path to omniscience, qualities such as good rebirth, a good family, a strong mind and a harmonious body, then also create their causes:

- Abandon harming any living beings;



- Make offerings of light and so forth to the Three Jewels; give clothes, etc., to the needy;
- By overcoming pride, have respect for all that lives;
- Take the responsibility of these practices into your own hands through the forces of conscientiousness and mindfulness.

However, if occasionally strong mental afflictions overpower you, and you commit a breach of practice, do not be apathetic but confess the unwanted karmic obstacle at the proper time and place and, by means of the four opponent powers, cleanse all stains of body, speech and mind. These four are:

- Contemplating the shortcomings of non-virtue in order to develop remorse for having committed negativity;
- Relying upon the objects of refuge and bodhicitta as forces with the power to purify the mind of karmic stains;
- Generating strong determination to turn away from such negative courses of action in the future;
- Applying positive antidotes, such as the Vajrasattva mantra and so forth.

Je Rinpoche wrote:

*Should you not find a suitable rebirth,  
It will not be possible to progress along the path.  
Cultivate the causes of a high rebirth,  
Appreciate the importance of purifying  
The three doors from stains of non-virtue.  
Cherish the force of the four opponent powers.*

By meditating in this manner, the mind will turn away from the transient things of this life and take genuine interest in more lasting things. When this effect has been realised, you will be known as a spiritual aspirant of initial capacity.

## **Training the Mind on the Path Common to the Person of Intermediate Capacity**

Although by avoiding the ten non-virtues and practising their opposites, the ten virtues, you can attain a special rebirth in the higher realms, you will not pass beyond the frustrations of cyclic existence. For this reason seek to attain nirvana, liberation beyond all suffering.

What is the nature of the shortcomings of cyclic existence? Those of the lower realms have been explained above. Meditate upon them well, for when you have done so you will realise that you would not enjoy such long and intense misery, and you will automatically generate an intention to work by any possible means to remain free of such unsatisfactory modes of existence. However, even the higher realms are not

beyond the reaches of suffering, and to progress along the path you must eventually face this truth.

### *The Eight Sufferings*

Human beings, for example, are wrapped in suffering. While in the womb, they suffer from darkness, constriction, and immersion in filthy substances. When, during the last months of the mother's pregnancy the downward pushing wind comes, the unborn baby feels like a small piece of wood crushed in a giant vise, or like a sesame seed pounded for its oil. After he emerges from the womb, he feels as though he fell into a pit of thorns, even if he was wrapped in soft garments and placed in a feathery bed. Such is the agony of birth.

The baby gradually grows into a youth, and soon he is old. His back bends like a bow, his hair turns white as a dried flower, and his forehead fills with wrinkles until he looks like a strip of sliced leather. Sitting down is like dropping a heavy load, and standing up is like uprooting a tree. If he tries to speak, his tongue will not obey, and if he tries to walk, he staggers. His sensory powers, such as sight and hearing, begin to fail him. His body loses its luster and resembles a corpse. His memory degenerates and he can remember nothing. The powers of digestion fail and he can no longer eat properly, no matter how much he craves food. At this point, his life is almost finished and death is rapidly approaching. Such are the sufferings of ageing.

As well as the sufferings of birth and age, throughout life he must continually confront the sufferings of illness. When the elements of his body fall out of harmony, his skin dries and his flesh sags. Food and drink, usually so appealing, seem repulsive, and instead he must ingest bitter medicines and undergo unpleasant treatments like operations, moxibustion, acupuncture, and so forth. Should the disease be incurable, he experiences immeasurable suffering from fear, worry, and apprehension, and if the disease is fatal, he lives with death in front of his eyes. Thoughts of harmful deeds he committed during his lifetime cause his heart to fill with regret, and he recollects all that he has left undone. He understands that he soon must leave his body, friends, relatives, associates, and possessions; his mouth dries, his lips shrivel, his nose sinks, his eyes fade, and his breath passes in gasps. Tremendous fear of the lower realms arises within him and, though does not wish it, he dies.

Human beings suffer in many specific ways too. Some meet with bandits and thieves and lose all their wealth. Their bodies are pierced by weapons or beaten with clubs and so forth. Some suffer heavy punishments at the hands of legal authorities for having committed crimes. Others hear dreadful news or rumors of distant family or friends and suffer terribly, or they fear the loss of their wealth and possessions and are sick with worry. Others suffer from encountering people and situations that they do not wish to encounter, and still others suffer through not getting what they want. For example, although someone may try to farm a piece of land, drought, frost or hail may destroy his crop. He may work as a sailor or fisherman, but a sudden gust of wind may result in his ruin. If he goes into business, he may lose his investment or, after much effort, make no profit. He may become a monk, but one day he may have to face the

sorrow of having broken his vows.

In short, having taken a samsaric human form under the force of karma and afflictions, you must face the sufferings of birth, sickness, old age, death, and so forth. As well, you use your precious human life largely as an instrument to produce more causes of lower rebirth and for greater misery in the future.

### *The Three Sufferings*

A samsaric form is merely a vessel holding the suffering of mental and physical pain, the suffering of transient pleasure, and the all-pervasive suffering. Because cyclic existence is by nature all-pervasive suffering, you never know any joy or happiness not coated or embraced by misery and frustration.

In the realm of the demi-gods, beings suffer from constant fighting, killing and wounding each other. Above that, in the realm of the desire gods, when the five signs of oncoming death manifests, the beings suffer more than do the hell denizens. As their splendour fades and they are shunned by the other gods, they know boundless mental anguish. Still higher in samsara are the gods of the form and formless realms, and although they do not experience the suffering of immediate pain, those of the first three levels have the suffering of transient pleasure, and those of the fourth level and of the formless levels must endure all-pervasive suffering, which is likened to an unruptured boil.

Think about these general and specific sufferings of the various realms of samsara and then strive in every possible way to attain nirvana, that is liberation, from them all. Such a state is not without causes and conditions, so train in the practices that bring the actual attainment of liberation, i.e., the practices of the Three Higher Trainings—ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom. Furthermore, as the higher trainings of concentration and wisdom depend and are based upon the higher training in ethical conduct, first train in it. Because ethical conduct is easily broken when introspection and such forces degenerate, maintain clear thoughts firmly supported by introspection and mindfulness and thus guard against all possible downfalls. If you ever breach your ethical conduct, don't waste a moment but immediately confess and resolve to proceed correctly in the future. When an affliction such as attachment, anger or jealousy arises, meditate upon its antidote, such as non-attachment, love or equanimity. Be your own judge in practice, and do not fall short of your aims. Let nothing you think, say, or do contradict the advice of your teacher.

Je Rinpoche said:

*If you do not contemplate the noble truth or suffering, the fallacy of samsara,  
The wish to be free from samsara will not arise.  
If you do not contemplate the source of suffering, the door to samsara,  
You will never discover the means of cutting the root of samsara.  
Base yourself on renunciation of cyclic existence; be tired of it.  
Cherish knowledge of the chains that bind you to the wheel of cyclic existence.*

When the thought wishing to be free from samsara arises within you as strongly as the

thought of finding an escape exit would arise in a person caught in a burning house, you have become a spiritual aspirant of intermediate capacity.

## Training the Mind on the Path of the Person of Greatest Capacity

### *Generating Bodhicitta*

Although through the higher trainings in ethical conduct, concentration and wisdom, you can attain nirvana, or liberation from cyclic existence, this attainment in itself is not sufficient. Although one who has gained nirvana no more wanders in samsara, because only a part of his faults have been overcome and only a portion of perfection has been attained, he has not fulfilled his own purposes. Also, because he lacks omniscience, he has not fulfilled others' purposes.

So look to the goal of complete buddhahood, the ultimate fulfillment of both your own and others' purposes. Moreover, do not think to gain buddhahood merely for your own benefit. Aspire for it purely to be able to benefit all sentient beings more extensively and effectively. Just as you have fallen into the ocean of samsara, so have all others; they, like you, know only its misery. There is no one who has not repeatedly been your father and mother and who has not shown you unimaginable kindness. It is only fair that if you gain liberation and omniscience, you should free them from anguish too. To benefit them, you must reach the state of peerless, non-abiding nirvana. Thus generate supreme bodhicitta, the enlightened attitude. The best method to generate bodhicitta is the oral tradition known as the "six causes and one effect." I will explain this first briefly and then in detail.

### *A brief explanation*

The first cause is the awareness that all sentient beings have been your mother. From this arises the second cause—recollection of the all-embracing kindness of each and every one of them. This gives rise to the third cause—the wish to repay their kindness. This wish transforms into the fourth cause—love—and the fifth cause—compassion. Love and compassion are the forces from which spring the sixth cause—special intention which is characterised by a sense of universal responsibility. This eventually ripens as the effect, bodhicitta. This is the seven-spoked wheel that rolls on to the omniscient state of enlightenment.

As a preliminary to all seven of these meditations, make your mind level by means of meditating on impartiality towards all sentient beings.

- If the mind sees some beings as dear, is hostile towards some and indifferent towards others, it is not sufficiently mature to be able to meditate upon all beings as having been your mother. If the mind has no equanimity, any love or compassion generated will be biased and unbalanced. Therefore, first practise equanimity, or impartiality meditation.

Begin this by visualising various "neutral" people—those who have neither harmed nor helped you in this life. From their side, each of them wants only



happiness and does not want suffering. From your side, each one of them is like a member of your family and has been your father and mother in many previous lives. Think, “In some lives I have held them dear and have helped them, whereas in others I have held them as adversaries and have harmed them. This is hardly correct. I should meditate now in order to generate an attitude of impartiality towards them all.”

Once you have meditated like this upon neutral people, then consider those who have helped you in this life and whom you therefore hold as dear, and those who have harmed you in this life and whom you consequently hold as adversaries. Develop impartiality towards them both. Finally, generate impartiality towards all sentient beings of all six realms.

### *A more detailed explanation*

- i. Recognise that all beings have been your mother.

Because there is no findable beginning to sentient life and cyclic existence, you must have had an infinite number of previous lives, as have all other beings. Thus, there is no place where you have not taken birth, and there is no sentient being who has not been your parent. In fact, each sentient being has been your parent countless times. If you search throughout the endless round of birth, death and rebirth, you cannot find a being who has not been your mother. All sentient beings have shown kindness towards us equal to the kindness of our mother of this life. Consequently, see them as being only kind.

- ii. Be mindful of the kindness of the infinite sentient beings.

How has the mother of this life shown you kindness? When you were in her womb, she thought only about how to protect and care for you. After you were born, she took you and wrapped you in soft garments, held you in her arms, gazed on you with eyes of love, smiled on you affectionately, out of mercy gave you milk from her breasts, and held you to her body to keep you warm. Then for year after year she prepared food for you and cleaned the mucus and excrement from your body. Even if she were gravely ill and you contracted a minor disease, she would think solely about you. She shielded and protected you from every difficulty, gave you whatever she could to help you accomplish your wishes, and anything you could not do by yourself she did for you. In fact, she protected your life and person in every possible manner. In this way, repeatedly contemplate that your mother has helped you greatly and has been extremely kind to you.

Then visualise simultaneously the three categories of being: those close to you, such as your family and friends of this life, neutral people with whom you have had no real contact and adversaries, or those who have harmed you in this life. Consider how each of them has been your mother uncountable times in the past. Uncountable times have they given you a human rebirth, protecting you

as much as has the mother of this life, showing you immeasurable kindness, and helping you limitlessly again and again.

iii. The wish to repay them.

However, the mother sentient beings who have nurtured you with kindness so many times are disturbed by the demons of the mental afflictions. Their minds are uncontrolled, as if they were insane. Their wisdom-eye blinded with the smoke of ignorance, and they have no way to see the paths leading to higher rebirth, liberation, or omniscience. Most of them lack a spiritual teacher who can lead them to the city of freedom and thus are like blind beggars with no guide. Every day they further divorce themselves from happiness because of unwholesome actions of body, speech and mind. Like members of a drunken procession staggering towards a cliff, they are stumbling over the precipice of unwholesome deeds into the sufferings of cyclic existence and the lower realms. Think, “If I do not do something for these pathetic, feeble beings, who will? If responsibility for them does not fall upon my shoulders, upon whose will it fall? If I ignored these kind beings and worked only for my own liberation from samsara, what lack of conscience and consideration! Furthermore, if they attained the various pleasurable states of samsara, such as those of Brahma or Indra, their peace would not be eternal. From now on, I will think less of myself and more of mitigating the samsaric suffering of the living beings as vast as space, and by every possible means I will work for enlightenment in order to be able to place them in the joy of peerless liberation.”

iv. Love.

Think, “Why should these mother beings, bereft of happiness, not have happiness? May they be happy. In every way possible, may I contribute to their happiness.

v. Compassion

Why shouldn’t mother beings who are aching from suffering be separated from suffering? May they be separated from it. May I contribute to their being separated from it.”

vi. The special intention, and the one effect, bodhicitta.

Think, “However, do I have the power to accomplish these two wishes? Not to mention all sentient beings, I don’t have power to free even one from suffering nor place even one in perfect happiness. For that very reason, I resolve to attain complete buddhahood, and if I give up that resolve, surely I will fall into the lower realms? Yet I can do nothing to free beings from suffering and place them in peerless happiness until I have attained full buddhahood myself. Therefore, with the wish to be able to free sentient beings from even

the deepest suffering and bring them to ultimate joy, I will immediately start working in every conceivable way to realise the state of complete, perfect enlightenment.”

However, merely meditating upon bodhicitta is not enough. You must also maintain the following four trainings:

- i. Recollect the beneficial effects of bodhicitta. This generates enthusiasm for developing aspiring bodhicitta and ensures that the resolve you have made does not degenerate in this life.
- ii. Generate bodhicitta six times a day. This strengthens your bodhicitta.
- iii. Do not mentally abandon any sentient being or give up working for their benefit.
- iv. Accumulate merit continuously.

To go into these in greater detail:

- i. Recollecting the benefits of bodhicitta means maintaining continuous awareness of the following teaching (condensed) from Shantideva’s *A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*.
  - The moment you develop the mind of enlightenment, bodhicitta, you become an object of reverence for both humans and gods.
  - By means of fundamental nature, you surpass the brilliance of the hearer and solitary realiser arhats.
  - You will not be harmed by diseases and evil spirits.
  - The tantric accomplishments—the powers to pacify, increase, subjugate, and wrath—are attained without difficulty.
  - You will no longer be born into the three lower realms, as a hell being, preta or animal.
  - Even if you do not attain enlightenment in this lifetime but are reborn in samsara, you will quickly gain freedom.
  - The karmic seeds of even the gravest of your past negative actions will be quickly purified.
  - Were the beneficial effects of developing bodhicitta to take form, the sky could not contain them.

Make a determination not to degenerate the bodhicitta you have already developed, and to increase it evermore.

- ii. Giving up bodhicitta towards even a stranger has heavier negative karmic consequences than a monk breaking one of his four root vows—not to kill,

steal, have sexual intercourse, or feign spiritual qualities. Do not give up bodhicitta until you actualise buddhahood. Until then, recite the following verse three times each day and three times each night:

*I take refuge until I am enlightened  
In the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.  
By the merit I create by practising generosity and the other perfections,  
May I attain buddhahood in order to benefit all sentient beings.*

- iii. We are developing bodhicitta in order to be able to benefit all sentient beings. Therefore, no matter how any of them relates to you, from your side never abandon seeking enlightenment in order to benefit them.
- iv. If you develop a spark of bodhicitta even once, try to prevent it from degenerating. Also, try to further it by accumulating merit by contemplating the qualities of the Three Jewels, making offerings, meditating, and so forth.

The cause of not losing the power of bodhicitta in future lives arises from the practice of abandoning the four harmful dharmas and relying upon the four constructive dharmas. The four harmful dharmas are:

- i. Lying to or deceiving your abbot, teacher or any worthy being.  
Do not lie to them or deceive them. The opponent force to this harmful dharma is not to speak falsely to any sentient being whatsoever, neither in jest nor even to save your life.
- ii. Causing others to regret the virtuous actions they have done.  
The opponent force to this harmful dharma is to direct anyone to whom one gives spiritual instructions towards the Mahayana.
- iii. Speaking harshly and angrily to someone who is a bodhisattva.  
The opponent force to this harmful dharma is to recognise all Mahayana practitioners as teachers and, when the occasion presents itself, to praise their good qualities. Also train yourself to see all living beings as pure and noble.
- iv. Being hypocritical and false with sentient beings.  
Avoid this and be sincere with everyone.

Je Rinpoche said:

*Development of bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment,  
Is the central pillar of Mahayana practice,  
The foundation of the bodhisattva activities,  
An elixir producing the gold of merit and wisdom,  
A mine holding the infinite varieties of goodness.  
Knowing this, the courageous children of the buddhas  
Hold it tightly at the centre of their hearts.*

The above is the training known as aspiring bodhicitta. Someone may ask, “Is this discipline sufficient?” The answer is “no”. You should also practise engaging bodhicitta,

take the bodhisattva vows, and train in the vast activities of a bodhisattva: the six perfections to ripen your own continuum, and the four ways of positively influencing others so as to ripen their minds.

## Practising the Six Perfections

### *How to train in the perfection of generosity*

Based on the motivation to attain buddhahood in order to be of benefit to all sentient beings, practise:

- i. Giving correct teachings to those destitute of Dharma instruction;
- ii. Giving protection to those oppressed by the wrath of kings, soldiers, etc., those frightened by sentient beings such as spirits, demons, wild animals and snakes, and those frightened by inanimate forces such as burning, crushing, drowning and suffocation;
- iii. Giving food, drink, healing medicine, and so forth to those in need.

In brief, with a free heart give your body, possessions, and your merit of the past, present, and future in order to attain enlightenment for the good of the world.

Je Rinpoche said:

*The perfection of generosity is the wishfulfilling gem to fulfill the hopes of the world,  
The best tool with which to cut the knot of miserliness constricting the heart,  
The bodhisattva deed giving birth to unfailing powers of the spirit,  
The foundation of beneficial reputation.  
Knowing this, the wise rely upon the practice  
Of giving their body, possessions, and merit.*

### *How to train in the perfection of ethical conduct*

You must attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. In order to do so, maintain an attitude having the qualities of mindfulness, introspection, conscientiousness, humility, modesty, and so forth, and practise the three types of ethical conduct:

- i. The ethical conduct of abandoning destructive actions, with which, even under the fear of death, you do not commit unwholesome deeds;
- ii. The ethical conduct of practising virtue, which is the basis of furthering your practice of the six perfections;
- iii. Founded upon the above two, the ethical conduct of working for the benefit of sentient beings.

Je Rinpoche said,

*Ethical conduct is water to clean away the stains of non-virtue,*



*Moonlight to cool the heat of afflictions,  
Radiance towering like a mountain in the midst of sentient beings,  
The peaceful force to unite humankind.  
Knowing this, spiritual practitioners guard it  
As they would their very eyes.*

### ***How to train in the perfection of patience***

- i. When someone harms you, anger is not a worthwhile response,
  - The harm that he does to you is just the karmic result of harm that you previously inflicted upon another.
  - Also, as he has no mental control and is helplessly overpowered by anger, becoming angry and hurting him would be inappropriate.
  - Because one moment of anger destroys the roots of the three bases of merit accumulated over many aeons, do not allow thoughts of anger to arise.

This is the practice of patience unmoved by harm.

- When you experience pain and suffering because someone inflicts harm on you, it dispels negative attitudes like pride and arrogance, and strengthens the mind renouncing samsara.
- Remember that the experience of this unwanted harm comes from your previous negative actions and that if you respond with unwholesome actions based on anger, you are creating the conditions for further violent karmic patterns. Remember that without a cause, an effect does not arise, and that if you meet this harm with patience, not only will the previous negative deed that caused this difficulty be depleted, but also you will create a positive karmic pattern by the skillful practice of patience.
- By avoiding the non-virtue of anger, you prevent future suffering for yourself. Furthermore, by meditating upon patience when others harm you, your practice of the other perfections develops and matures.

For these and many other valid reasons, the spiritual teachers have advised us to face harm with meditation upon patience. Remember their teachings and practise the patience that views suffering delivered by others with great kindness.

- ii. Finally, recognising that the power of the Three Jewels and the buddhas and bodhisattvas is inconceivable, appreciate the value of bodhisattvas' activities and appreciate meditation upon emptiness. Practise the patience that is certain of Dharma and wishes to train to be a bodhisattva.

Je Rinpoche said:

*Patience is the best ornament of real heroes,*

*A supreme hardship to overcome afflictions,  
The garuda bird to destroy the snake of anger,  
Armour to protect you from the arrows of criticism.  
Knowing this, in every way familiarise yourself  
With the armour of patience supreme.*

### ***How to train in the perfection of joyous perseverance***

If you do not meditate upon disenchantment with samsara and with the desire for low-quality happiness such as that gained by lethargy, indulgence, sleep, and so forth, you will continue to be overcome by laziness.

Abandon all causes of laziness and devote yourself solely to noble works of body, speech and mind. In order to alleviate the suffering of even one living being, practise the three types of joyous perseverance:

- i. Armour-like joyous perseverance, which does not abandon difficult practices for any reason whatsoever; based on that,
- ii. Joyous perseverance which rests in wholesome Dharma and furthers your practice of the six perfections; and by means of the above two,
- iii. The joyous perseverance which works for others' welfare by striving for the goal of enlightenment of all sentient beings.

Je Rinpoche said:

*If one wears the armour of unrelenting joyous perseverance,  
Qualities of learning and insight will increase like the waxing moon,  
All activities will become meaningful,  
And all works begun will reach completion.  
Knowing this, the bodhisattvas apply themselves  
To vast joyous perseverance, dispeller of laziness.*

### ***How to train in the perfection of concentration***

- With a bodhicitta motivation, separate your mind from excitement and laxity and train in mundane and supramundane concentrations.
- Or, from the viewpoint of direction, train in the various calm abiding concentrations, special insight concentrations, and concentrations combining calm abiding and special insight.
- Or, from the viewpoint of function, train in:
  - i. Meditative stabilisations which abide in physical and mental joy realised and experienced in this very life,
  - ii. Concentrations which actualise higher qualities such as clairvoyance, supramundane abilities, etc., and

- iii. Concentrations which accomplish the needs of the world.

Je Rinpoche said:

*Concentration is the king to rule the mind.  
When stabilised, it sits like a mountain,  
When directed, it can enter all virtuous meditations.  
It leads to every physical and mental joy.  
Knowing this, great yogis always rely upon it,  
The destroyer of the enemy, distractions.*

### ***How to train in the perfection of wisdom***

With bodhicitta as the motivation, train in the following three types of wisdom:

- i. Wisdom which realises the ultimate mode of existence—suchness, emptiness—and uproots samsara;
- ii. Wisdom which understands conventional realities; and, by means of the previous two wisdoms,
- iii. The wisdom which accomplishes the needs of sentient beings.

Je Rinpoche said:

*Wisdom is the eye to see thatness,  
The practice that eradicates the root of samsara,  
The treasure of excellence praised in all scriptures,  
The supreme lamp to dispel the darkness of ignorance.  
Knowing this, the wise, seeking freedom  
Dedicate every effort to generate it.*

### **The Four Ways of Positively Influencing Others**

With the motivation to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings,

- i. Make offerings in order to assemble an entourage of students;
- ii. Show them a pleasant expression and speak to them gently;
- iii. Teach them the Dharma—the six perfections and so forth—and teach them how actually to practise it;
- iv. Live and practise in accordance with the teachings you give.

In every possible way, develop these four profound methods of benefiting others.

### **Combining Calm Abiding and Special Insight**

Moreover, because self-grasping is the root of samsara, a single-pointed concentration which does not contradict that grasping does not have the ability to sever the root of

samsara. Alternatively, a wisdom cognising non-true existence but lacking the calm abiding that dwells unwaveringly and single-pointedly on objects of meditation, will never eliminate the afflictions, no matter how much it searches. In order to attain liberation forever free from afflictions, mount the horse of placement meditation that does not waver when placed on the view that realises emptiness, the ultimate and unmistakable nature of existence. Riding this horse and brandishing the sharp weapon of the four great methods of Madhyamaka reasoning free from the extremes of eternalism and nihilism, generate the wisdom that understands the actual mode of existence, the force that destroys all grasping at extremes, and forever expand the clear mind able to perceive the ultimate.

Je Rinpoche said:

*But the power to cut the root of samsara  
Lies not in single-pointed concentration alone.  
Wisdom divorced from the path of calm abiding  
Does not reverse afflictions, though it may try.  
Wisdom searching for ultimate truth  
Rides the horse of unwavering concentration  
And with the sharp weapon of Madhyamaka reasoning  
Destroys grasping at extremes.  
With vast wisdom that searches  
Thus expand the mind understanding suchness.*

As stated, merely accomplishing the concentration that abides calmly when placed unwaveringly upon its object is not sufficient. A mind that rests in single-pointed concentration and analyses with wisdom that distinguishes the various levels of reality—i.e. discerns the mode of suchness—gives birth to a concentration resting firmly and unwaveringly in the meaning of emptiness, the way things are. Seeing this, appreciate how wonderful is the effort made to accomplish concentration combined with wisdom. Make a sublime wish toward this end, and then plant its seed forever.

Je Rinpoche said:

*Single-pointed meditation brings a concentration fantastic beyond description;  
Yet do not stop there; for that, combined with distinguishing awareness  
Able to discern the modes of being,  
Gives birth to a concentration that rests firmly and unwaveringly upon the ultimate.  
Understanding that, see as wondrous  
Efforts made in calm abiding conjoined with special insight.*

During meditation sessions, place the mind evenly in concentration and special insight, and focus single-pointedly upon emptiness, which is as free of extremes as the sky is of tangible hindrances. Between sessions, watch how things, while not inherently existent, manifest like a magician's creations. In this way, take up the practices of wisdom and method combined—true meditation upon emptiness, held by great compassion and bodhicitta—and transcend a bodhisattva's practices. Understanding this path worthy of praise, do not be satisfied by training in only method or wisdom, but combine the two

in a balanced way. Such training is the spiritual legacy of people of good fortune. Apply yourself to it.

Je Rinpoche said:

*Meditate single-pointedly upon space-like emptiness.  
After meditation, see life as a magician's creation.  
Through familiarity with these practices,  
Method and wisdom are perfectly united,  
And you go to the end of the bodhisattva's ways.  
Understanding this, be not satisfied by  
A path exaggerating either method or wisdom,  
But stay on the road of the fortunate.*

## Vajrayana, the Esoteric Mahayana

These are the practices common to the sutra and tantra vehicles. Once you have gained solid experiences of them, cast aside all doubts and enter into the way of secret mantra, Vajrayana.

The gateway to this secret path is an appropriate initiation, gained from a fully qualified tantric master in order to ripen your mindstream. At the time of initiation, one pledges to do certain practices and to avoid certain modes of conduct that contradict tantric attainment; honour these pledges.

If you gain initiation into any of the three lower classes of tantra: Kriya, Charya, or Yoga, practise their systems of yoga with signs and then yoga without signs. If you are initiated into the Highest Yoga Tantra, Mahanuttarayoga Tantra, first master the generation stage practices and then those of the completion stage.

## A Summary of the Path

This is how to approach the complete body of the path that condenses all the principal points of the sutras and tantras and how to make meaningful the opportunities afforded by your human rebirth. By practising in this graduated way, use the precious Buddhadharma most effectively for your own and others' benefit. Je Rinpoche took the experience of these practices into his heart and he advises that those who follow him do likewise.

Keeping this in mind, visualise that Je Rinpoche is sitting before you, exhorting you with a calm, powerful, penetrating voice to practise as described here and to accomplish his words by means of actually using his teachings to tame your mindstream.

Je Rinpoche said:

*Having generated experiences in these practices common  
And fundamental to the two Mahayana vehicles—  
Sutrayana's causal vehicle and Tantrayana's result vehicle—*



*Rely upon a wise guide, a tantric adept,  
And enter into the ocean of tantras.  
Then, basing yourself upon the complete oral teachings,  
Give meaning to the human birth you have gained.  
I, a yogi, practised like that;  
You, O liberation seeker, should do likewise.*

Je Rinpoche then concludes his *Song of the Stages on the Spiritual Path* as follows:

*In order further to acquaint my mind with the paths  
And also to benefit others of good fortune,  
I have herein explained in simple terms  
All stages of the practices pleasing to the buddhas,  
And have made the prayer that any merit thus created  
May cause all beings never to be separated  
From sublime ways always pure.  
I, a yogi, have made this prayer.  
You, O liberation seeker, should do likewise.*

Bearing in mind these teachings of Je Rinpoche (conclude each session with these dedications):

*From now onward, in this and future lives,  
I will prostrate at your lotus feet  
And apply myself to your teachings.  
Bestow upon me your transforming powers*

*That I may practise only as pleases you  
With all actions of my body, speech, and mind.*

*By the power of mighty Tsongkhapa  
As well as of the lamas from whom I have received teachings  
May I never be parted even for a moment  
From the sublime path pleasing to the buddhas.*

Gyalwa Sonam Gyatso concludes his commentary with the following verse:

*By any merits of my having written this text  
Condensing without error the principal points  
Of the stages on the path leading to enlightenment—  
The essence of the teachings of Dipamkara Atisha and Lama Tsongkhapa—  
May all beings progress in the practices pleasing to the past, present, and future buddhas.*

Colophon: This concludes the *Essence of Refined Gold*, an exposition of the stages of practice of the three levels of spiritual application. Based upon Je Rinpoche's *Song of the Stages on the Spiritual Path* and arranged in a format easy to follow, it is in the tradition of clarified doctrine and therefore is worthy of admiration and interest. It was written at the repeated request of Dochö Chöje from the eminent abode of Omniscient Sherab Palzang, by the Buddhist monk and teacher Gyalwa Sonam Gyatso at the Great Site of Dharma Activity, the mighty Drepung

