

Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment by Lama Atisha

Commentary by Geshe Tenzin Zopa - 26 & 27 Nov 2010

Introduction

In order for us to get the blessing of realisations and continue to receive teachings on the Path, it requires the teacher who provides the commentary as well as the listener to have the altruistic motivation. As stated in the Lines of Experience by Lama Tsongkhapa, “Although there is much merit to be gained from reciting the text by Lama Atisha, which includes the essential points of all scriptures, you are certain to gain great waves of merit from studying the sacred Dharma which contains the profound Graduated Path to Enlightenment, therefore you should consider this point carefully”.

Whether this discourse will bring benefit and blessing or not, is dependent on one’s motivation. How does one set the altruistic motivation? It is establishing the state of mind, generating an expression of the thought which holds that “May the study and receiving of these teachings and gaining realisations on the Path, just like Lama Atisha and ultimately attaining full enlightenment, be solely for the benefit of sentient beings. For this purpose, I must attain full enlightenment. To achieve this, I must gain the unmistakable understanding of the Path. Therefore I must listen attentively to the teaching and may I cultivate it to the point of my actualising it”.

In the tradition of the Buddha and the Nalanda tradition, for the full benefit to arise from this discourse requires 3 factors – (1) ensuring that the teachings being given are pure (2) ensuring that the teacher giving the teachings is pure (3) ensuring the students receiving the teachings are pure. Otherwise, although we may gain knowledge at an intellectual level, it may not become a blessing to one’s mind unless the 3 factors are present.

As for (1) ensuring that the teachings being given are pure, the Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment by Lama Atisha is derived from the lineage of Maitreya Buddha and his text titled “Ornament of Clear Realisations”, which in turn is based on the Prajnaparamita Sutra.

As for (2) The teacher – here, the teacher is Lama Atisha himself who came into this world in 982 AD after the Buddha’s passing and was born as a prince of a Bengali King, who from a young age had the inborn, great altruistic attitude and the clear wisdom understanding both the conventional and ultimate truths. Later, even though he had the full opportunity to rule his kingdom but due to his past karmic imprints from the profound cultivation of Dharma, he was inspired to renounce at an early age and enter into Nalanda University. He studied from great masters such as Dharmarakshita, Lama Serlingpa and his Gurus totalled 557 masters in all. He obtained the entire, unbroken lineage of the Buddhadharma through his direct communication with Buddha Maitreya and Tara. Bearing great hardship to receive and actualise the lineage of bodhicitta, including the Bodhisattva vows, from his master Lama Serlingpa, he accomplished this. Lama Atisha was the crown jewel of Nalanda University and was the one chosen by Tibetan King Yeshe Oe, after thorough investigation, to be invited to Tibet to restore the Buddhadharma which had declined. The rule of King Langdharma had destroyed the Dharma in Tibet. At that time in Tibet, there was the mistaken view that Sutrayana and Tantrayana were contradictory. King Yeshe Oe wanted to

personally invite Lama Atisha to Tibet but himself caught by a warlord, imprisoned and later executed. However, before this happened, King Yeshe Oe managed to instruct this nephew Jangchup Oe to journey to India with great offerings of gold to invite Lama Atisha to Tibet to teach the Dharma. The gold offerings was the symbol of the preciousness of the Golden Dharma and Lama Atisha was invited to restore the Golden Buddhadharma in Tibet (not that the Lama required gold!). Lama Atisha agreed and stayed in Tibet for 17 years. He travelled extensively, giving discourses on sutra and tantra. At that time there was the wrong view that tantra was not part of the Mahayana teachings. Lama Atisha dispelled this view. Arising from this, Lama Atisha concluded that it would be highly beneficial to reveal the entire Buddhadharma in a discourse outlining the Path in graduated stages, thereby giving rise to the Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment (the first of the Lam Rim texts; Lam Rim meaning “Graduated Path to Enlightenment”). So that is a short account of Lama Atisha, the teacher who is providing these instructions. As for the discourse right this moment, the person conducting the talk is also required to be pure. We all know that I am not pure in realisations but despite my lack of wisdom and merit, through the blessings of having received these teachings from my Gurus HH Dalai Lama, Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche, the late Geshe Lama Konchog, Denma Lochoe Rinpoche – who are enlightened beings, whether I know how to explain or not, whether you hear fully or not, whether you feel bored or not, those masters attained realisations and I am the bridge for you to those great ones and their blessings.

As for (3) the listener of the teachings must be pure. This means that the listener needs to be single-minded devotion to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha; be inspired to the Bodhisattva path and be free from damaged samayas through abiding by the advice of Gurus HH Dalai Lama and Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s advice. If one practices the forbidden protector Shugden, that would damage one’s samaya and thus disenable one from receiving the blessings of these teachings. As most of you here are devoted to Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche, you are qualified to receive these teachings.

Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment – Jangchup Lam Gyi Dronme. Jangchup = enlightenment. Jang = Buddha’s qualities in having overcome all the obstructions, negativities and limitations; chup = connotes Buddha’s perfect knowledge and wisdom. These teachings are like a lamp which enables one to see the entire stages of the Path, requiring the 3 aspects (a) the student to have a clear understanding of the Path (b) the students should have the complete points and practices of the Path (c) the practitioner should engage in the practice in the correct sequence.

The Actual Text

Verse 1

I pay homage with great respect

To all the Victorious Ones of the three times

To their teaching and to those who aspire to virtue

Urge by the good disciple Jangchup Oe

I shall illumine the lamp for the path to enlightenment

Homage to the Youthful Manjushri. Before Atisha composed the text, in order to clear obstacles to doing so, he pays homage to the Victorious Ones of the past present and future, the Triple Gem, his teachers from whom he received all the instructions and also to disciple Jangchup Oe, who sincerely requested the teachings. In the verse, Lama Atisha promises to reveal the entire stages of the Path to Enlightenment.

This text is divided into 4 divisions, beginning with instructions for beings of different capabilities by giving the method and wisdom teachings and concludes with the ultimate resultant aspect of the Path by introducing tantra.

In order to actualise the teachings on the stages of the Path, it requires a great deal of merit and purification, as well as the undertaking of the preparatory practices.

Verse 2 *Understand there are three kinds of persons*
Because of their small, middling and supreme capabilities
I shall write clearly distinguishing
Their individual characteristics

Understand that there are 3 kinds of persons of varying capability i.e. small capability, middle capability and great capability. When we study this text of Lamp on the Path, it will be noticed that there is a difference between this and other Lam Rim texts. Here, the teachings are expressed in a plain and direct way. Lama Atisha here outlines what he intends to teach, namely the paths of the 3 capability beings i.e. the small, middle and courageous supreme mental-capability beings and he will set out their distinguishing characteristics.

Verse 3 *Know that those who by whatever means*
Seek for themselves no more
Than the pleasures of cyclic existence
Are persons of the least capability.

This verse covers the small capability being. Who is a small capability being? Someone who whilst acknowledging a future life, seeks samsaric happiness, is attached to contaminated happiness, attached to sensual pleasures and hoping that one's next life will have such worldly happiness and wishes to avoid the lower realm. Quite often, although outwardly one may claim to be a Mahayana practitioner and motivate towards liberation and enlightenment, our actual thinking and actions are those of the small capability being!

All 3 capability beings have their respective 3 principle aspects of the path. For the small capability being, renunciation takes the form of renouncing rebirth in 3 lower realms and aspiring for higher rebirth; the path is that of Refuge, abstaining from negative actions and practising virtue in order to obtain higher rebirth or birth in wealthy family; the goal here is just to gain higher rebirth. To determine what capability being we really are, we need to check motivation for practice and the manner of renunciation.

Verse 4 *Those who seek peace for themselves alone,*
Turning away from worldly pleasures
And avoiding destructive actions
Are said to be of middling capability

The definition of the middle capability being is someone who aspires for peace for himself alone. Here one sees the intermediate renunciation i.e. renouncing the lower realms, renouncing higher rebirth (as that too has sufferings) i.e. renounce 6 realm/samsaric existence and to actualise the peace of nirvana for oneself only. For such a person, the path is the 3 higher trainings of morality, concentration and wisdom and abiding by the teachings of the 4 Noble Truths and karma; the goal is to obtain liberation/nirvana.

Verse 5 *Those who, through their personal suffering*
Truly want to end completely
All the suffering of others
Are persons of supreme capacity.

The definition of the great capability being is someone who wants to end suffering of self and all beings. When one has understood how karma operates and sees that all beings are the same by being completely dominated by delusion & karma and wishes all beings and oneself to be free from these, one is a Mahayanic practitioner. The renunciation here is the great renunciation i.e. renouncing samsaric existence and the causes for such an existence, in oneself and all beings; the path is bodhicitta and altruistic wisdom and the goal is full enlightenment.

Verse 6 *For those excellent living beings*
Who desire supreme enlightenment,
I shall explain the perfect methods
Taught by the spiritual teachers.

After introducing the 3 types of beings, Atisha states that he will explain the stages of practice for those who aspire to supreme enlightenment.

V7 *Facing paintings, statues and so forth*
Of the completely enlightened one
Reliquaries and the excellent teaching
Offer flowers, incense – whatever you have

This verse explains the 6 preparatory practices – (1) Cleaning the room where one is going to practice, as well as clean one's mind i.e. rid oneself of deluded thoughts and unclear

motivation in engaging in practice. Even if your altar is very clean, one should still go through the motions of cleaning reciting “dul pang, timapang “ (which means that whilst one is outwardly cleaning dirt, internally one is cleaning one’s delusions) (2) Arrange the holy objects like the Buddha statue, the Dharma text and the stupa. Know about their significance and reason for the placements of the holy objects. If we do not have the physical holy objects, one can visualise and arrange them in one’s heart and remind oneself of one’s pure Buddha nature that is temporarily obscured by the clouds of delusion and negative karma. Similarly, arrange the offerings to the Triple Gem beautifully. Understanding that all things are merely-labelled, one mentally offers vast offerings with such an understanding of emptiness and this will bring about an immense amount of merit. (3) Sitting in the right meditation posture – there is no need to force your body. Sit in a manner which will minimise distraction to your meditation and your generation of the altruistic mind which is determined to achieve enlightenment in order to be able to enlighten all sentient beings. (4) Visualise the merit field – if you have a picture of the merit field, view the picture and have the conviction that all those Buddhas and masters there are personally present with you. Alternatively, visualise in your heart the presence of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. (5) Offering the practice of the 7-Limb prayer (see V8 of this text). (6) Supplication to the Buddhas to remain with oneself until one achieves enlightenment in order to guide and to remind oneself of Dharma, to remind oneself of the right antidotes to apply when delusions arise.

Verse 8

With the seven part offering

From the [Prayer of] Noble Conduct

With the thought never to turn back

Till you gain ultimate enlightenment.

This refers to the 7 limb practice (which is the 5th of the preparatory practices). The 7 limbs are – (1) prostration - this is a great purification practice. Conventionally, it is very good for physical exercise too. I did 3 month retreat on prostrations and became very thin despite eating a lot. Same thing with fat monks, they too lost weight at the end of 3 months. (2) Making actual and mental offerings. This creates a vast amount of merits and yet we often forget to do this. We do not need to rely on physical possessions as offerings. If we see anything of beauty, we can mentally offer that as offerings to the Triple Gem; if we see ordinary things, we can mentally transform them into wish-fulfilling jewels and offer those. (3) Confession – even if we have completed 110,000 Vajrasattva mantras, that will still not be enough to purify all our accumulated negativities. We need to continuously engage in confession and having done the confession, we have to have the conviction that we have completely purified negativities. However, at the end of each session of confession, we need to generate this same conviction. (4) Rejoice – if you see someone with a nice car or a big house or a great project, feel happy for them and not have a sour feeling in the heart. Conventionally, that will create causes for us to have such good things too and ultimately, we accumulate great merit to gain enlightenment. (5) Request the Gurus and Buddha to remain – this is an incredible method to accumulate merit. When you participate in Guru Puja and in Long Life Guru Puja and sincerely request the Buddhas and Gurus to remain, it has the effect of preserving one’s long life. (6) Requesting to Turn the Wheel of Dharma – this will powerfully create the cause for each teaching of Dharma you encounter to strike at your ego and negativities. Whether one meets one’s Guru often or not, one should make

daily supplication for the Guru, Buddhas and Bodhisattva to turn the wheel of Dharma. This will create the cause for one to have the enthusiasm to learn and practice Dharma. Right now, when we go to a party, we feel no body ache but when we come to class, our body aches (laughter). (7) Dedication – whatever act of virtue – whether it a big or small act, remember to dedicate it towards the enlightenment of oneself and all living beings, so that our action will become a cause for enlightenment and not just to fulfil worldly aims. By dedicating with bodhicitta, even worldly goals will be achieved easily.

Verse 9 *And with strong faith in the Three Jewels,*
Kneeling with one knee on the ground
And your hands pressed together,
First of all take refuge three times

This verse teaches one to take Refuge properly and in order to reinforce the protection of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, one should repeatedly take Refuge.

Verse 10 *Next, beginning with an attitude of love for all living creatures*
Consider beings, excluding none
Suffering in the three bad rebirths
Suffering birth, death and so forth.

Generate an attitude of unconditional love towards all living beings as one has seen sufferings including that of birth, aging sickness.

Verse 11 *Then, since you want to free these beings*
From the suffering of pain,
From suffering and the causes of suffering
Arouse immutably the resolve to attain enlightenment

Having seen and understood the sufferings of sentient beings and the causes of sufferings (karma and delusions and how they arise), one should then cultivate compassion by wishing all beings to be free from suffering and causes of suffering and attain peerless happiness. For this, one should learn how to eliminate sufferings and the causes of suffering.

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

Lama Atisha introduces the following verses which express the qualities and benefits of developing bodhicitta .

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

One should learn about Maitreya's teachings in the *Array of Trunks Sutra* and reflect on your teachers' instructions and teachings, as well as their life stories and those of the great pandits and Bodhisattvas, so that one's bodhicitta mind will be steadfast.

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

The Sutra requested by Viradatta explains the merit of the altruistic intention/bodhicitta .

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

If the merit arising from bodhicitta were in solid form, it would exceed the space of the universe.

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

If someone were to fill the entire universe with jewels, that merit would not come close to the merit created by bodhicitta.

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

The generation of bodhicitta is the greatest offering to the Buddhas and sentient beings and is an unsurpassed offering of limitless benefit.

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

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

These two verses speak of two types of bodhicitta = relative and absolute bodhicitta. Within the category of relative bodhicitta, there is aspiring and engaging bodhicitta. Aspiring bodhicitta means wishing to attain bodhicitta; engaging bodhicitta is actually taking and implementing the Bodhisattva vows and 6 Perfection practices. Without embarking upon engaging bodhicitta, one cannot attain bodhicitta (and finally enlightenment).

Re-setting the motivation for studying the Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

Refresh one's bodhicitta motivation and know with joy that one has accumulated merits in the past because without such merit, there would not be the karma nor opportunity to hear this golden Dharma teaching nor relate our lives to it; there will not be any possibility for one to actualise realisation on the stages of the path to enlightenment and eliminate samsaric rebirth.

Therefore, there are hundreds of reasons to feel extremely happy and fortunate to have this opportunity to study this teach and not be interrupted by any inner, outer and secret obstacles to our placing this golden Dharma into one's mindstream. Think that due to oneself having the proper lineage and blessing of the complete path of this golden Dharma, from this day onwards, whatever virtue we practice, whether giving one grain of food to an animal or speaking a single word of Dharma to those struggling in darkness, may that be the complete cause of enlightenment. May one live life in the most meaningful way.

We are so fortunate that not only are we Gelug practitioners but we should also rejoice that other Tibetan Buddhist traditions are also following the Nalanda tradition and Lama Atisha's Lamp for the Path. Whatever Lojong and Lam Rim teachings we receive, even if we have receive these from other Tibetan Buddhist traditions, it all flows from the kindness of Lama Atisha's Lamp for the Path. We should regard Lama Atisha as our root guru who is inseparable from the Gurus that one has received the precious Dharma from. Whenever we meditate on the deities, make sure we remember Lama Atisha – this will make it possible for us to actualise the teachings & practices due to his blessings made from his great prayers and efforts to teach the entire Path. In this way, even if death occurs at any moment, we would not have wasted our lives as we have put effort to study these teachings. We should

also meditate on the kindness and compassion of HH Dalai Lama, Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche, the late Geshe Lama Konchog and their gurus like Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche, Kyabje Ling Rinpoche, Dagri Dorje Chang. There was a time where it was very difficult to obtain teachings from this tradition but through the efforts of HH Dalai Lama, the teachings from our lineage Gurus and yogis were not lost but preserved. It has been a critical time as we almost lost this lineage of learning. So there are numerous reasons for us to be inspired to learn this teaching well. Although one may have studied many other texts and commentaries, this text by Lama Atisha “Lamp for the Path” carries a very special blessing. This text is divided into 3 broad stages = preliminary, the main body/causal stage practice of bodhicitta and the resultant stage of the path (tantra).

Verse 20 Those who maintain of the seven kinds

Of individual liberation vow

Have the ideal [prerequisite] for

The Bodhisattva vow, not others.

One of the key ways to actualise bodhicitta is the taking and engaging in the Bodhisattva vows. The qualifying criteria to receive the Bodhisattva vows is for the person to have & maintain any one of the 7 kinds of individual liberation vows. The 7 kinds are lay woman vows, layman vows, probationary nun vows, novice nun vows, novice monks vows, fully ordained nun's vows and fully ordained monk's vows. Lay vows include refuge vows and the 5 lay vows. Based on the Refuge vows, one can receive and cultivate one or more or all 5 of the lay vows. This qualifies one to receive the Bodhisattva vows. Anyone in a relationship should take the vow against sexual misconduct as that will secure one's relationships in life. This is very powerful protection. The force of negative emotions are powerful; our desirous attachments are almost more powerful than wisdom realising emptiness! On top of that, if one feels it possible for one to undertake, there are 300+ probationary nun's vows and one can try this for 1 or 2 months (without becoming a nun). This is a very effective practice to show oneself how wild one is. To obtain the actual novice nun or novice monk vows, that requires one to become a monk or nun. Needless to say, full ordination requires more effort and discipline. The 253 vows of a fully ordained monk are the same as that held by Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. For this, one needs to be thoroughly matured in refuge, lay vows and novice vows to be qualified to take the full ordination vows. One needs to be at least 20 years old before taking full ordination is possible. Mentally, one must be committed to keep these vows for the rest of one's life and to take it from a master who held the vows purely. As a minimum, one can practice holding proper Refuge vows.

Verse 21 The Tathagata spoke of seven kinds

Of individual liberation vows

The best of these is the glorious pure conduct

Said to be the vow of a fully ordained person.

The highest individual liberation vow is that of the fully ordained monk of 253 vows, in the manner held by Shakyamuni Buddha.

Verse 22 *According to the ritual described in*
The chapter on discipline in the Bodhisattva Stages
Take the vow from a good
And well qualified spiritual teacher.

Atisha teaches the need for the Guru to grant the Bodhisattva vows and for us to actualise the Bodhisattva vows. Even though aspirational bodhicitta can be obtained without reliance upon the guru, engaging Bodhisattva vows requires taking them from a qualified master/Guru.

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

The criteria for a good spiritual teacher is one who not only knows the details of the vow granting ceremony but holds the Bodhisattva vows and lives a life in the practice of those vows which are vows to refrain from the 18 root downfalls and the 46 secondary downfalls. Finally the master must be infused with compassion and have full confidence in his practice of the Bodhisattva conduct to be able to grant the vows.

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

If we cannot find such a qualified master, Atisha teaches an alternative solution to taking the Bodhisattva vows in a correct manner. This method is set out in V26 – V31 below. However note that in the case of tantric vows, one needs to receive them from a qualified master.

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

Lama Atisha explains what was written in Manushri's *Ornament of Manjushri's Buddha Land Sutra* i.e. about how Manjushri in a previous life as Ambaraja, gave rise to the bodhicitta intention. The following verses - v26 to v31 – were quoted from Shantideva's *Compendium of Deeds*.

V26

“In the presence of the protectors

I arouse the intention to gain full enlightenment

I invite all beings as my guests

And shall free them cyclic existence. “

In the presence of the Buddhas & Bodhisattvas, Ambaraja (Manjushri in a previous life) gave rise to the wish to attain full enlightenment for the benefit of numberless sentient beings' enlightenment . Both these aspects of wishing to attain enlightenment and for the benefit of sentient beings, need to be mentioned as they are causes to actualise correct bodhicitta.

V27

“From this moment onwards

Until I attain enlightenment

I shall not harbour harmful thoughts

Anger, avarice or envy”

This verse expresses the resolve to fully guard against any harmful thought like anger, attachment, jealousy, pride.

V28

“I shall cultivate pure conduct

Give up wrong-doing and desire

And with joy in the vow of discipline

Train myself to follow the Buddhas”

Here is the determination to cultivate pure conduct, take the Bodhisattva vows and undertake those disciplines joyfully.

V29

“I shall not be eager to reach

Enlightenment in the quickest way

But shall stay behind till the very end

For the sake of a single being”.

The quote goes on to advise that one should not be eager to reach enlightenment for oneself alone, in the quickest way and that even if it takes a long time, for the sake of even a single being, one will remain in samsara for the sake of that being until every single living being is fully enlightened.

V30

“I shall purify limitless

Inconceivable lands

And remain in the ten directions

For all those who call my name”

I shall make pure the impure realms of all sentient beings i.e. I shall eliminate ignorance karma and delusion in every sentient being and also work for eliminating the external contaminated environmental conditions. Whoever sees me, touches me, scolds me, criticises me, even at the cost of my life, may I only be the cause of eradication of impurity and the cause of actualising purity up to enlightenment.

*V31 "I shall purify all my body
And my verbal forms of activity
My mental activities too, I shall purify
And do nothing that is non-virtuous"*

One should engage in the purification of negativities of body, speech and mind including all negative imprints.

So verses 27-31 set out how Manjushri in a previous life had raised the bodhicitta intention. Now we go back to verse 26 to formulate for ourselves a daily practice by reflecting from V27 to 31. Start by visualising the presence of the B&B (as in V26) and generate the thought to attain enlightenment and inviting all sentient beings as one's guest to bring them to peerless happiness of full enlightenment and generate the thought to free them cyclic existence; I shall not have any harmful thoughts towards sentient beings nor indulge in anger, attachment, jealousy (V27) etc..up to V31.

*V32 When those observing the vow
Of the active altruistic intention have trained well
In the three forms of discipline, their respect
For these three forms of discipline grows
Which causes purify of body, speech and mind.*

In order for those engaging in bodhicitta to be successful, we need to have the foundation of the 3 sets of vows – the pratimoksha vows (the 7 kinds of individual liberation vows mentioned earlier), Bodhisattva vows and tantric vows (upholding the pledges of the 5 Dhyani Buddhas). This will enable us to attain the perfection of Body, Speech and Mind of the Buddha. Just taking Refuge vow immediately enables one to be free from lower realm rebirth for immediate rebirth. In order for us to obtain these 3 disciplines requires much merit, so we can begin by practice of generosity – of material possessions, protection and Dharma (keeping in mind always the sources of the teachings being the Buddha, Shantideva or Lama Tsongkhapa and such great beings). We also need to be skilful to observe whether the person is ready to listen and if not, we need to find an alternative way of sharing the wisdom and if the person displays the small capability attitude, then one should speak accordingly).

The 3 moral disciplines can be interpreted in another way, namely refraining from negative actions; accumulating virtues and working for the welfare of sentient beings (which includes serving the Centre to enable many people to benefit). Mindfulness and carrying out these 3 disciplines also constitute our cultivating the Bodhisattva conduct.

By those who possess higher perception

Cannot be gained even in a hundred lifetimes

By one without such higher perception.

If one has clairvoyance, one will know how to accumulate merit in the most effective way. Engaging in calm abiding meditation is one of the best methods to actualise clairvoyance.

V37 *Those who want to swiftly to complete*

The collections for full enlightenment

Will accomplish higher perception

Through effort, not through laziness.

Those who want to gain full enlightenment will accomplish clairvoyance through effort and not through laziness. Effort here is not about forcing oneself, it is about joyous perseverance in practice.

V38 *Without the attainment of calm abiding*

Higher perception will not occur

Therefore make repeated effort

To accomplish clam abiding

In order for us to actualise clairvoyance, we need to achieve calm abiding (samatha). Repeatedly put effort into calm abiding meditation through eliminating the 5 faults and the 8 antidotes. The 8 antidotes are faith, aspiration, joyous perseverance, pliancy, recollection, vigilance application and equanimity. The 5 faults are excitement, laziness/laxity, forgetting the meditation object, non application and over application.

V39 *While the conditions for calm abiding*

Are incomplete, meditative stabilisation

Will not be accomplished, even if one meditates

Strenuously for thousands of years

In order to be successful at samatha meditation, we must ensure that we have all the right conditions. Otherwise, we will not achieve it even if we meditate for a 1000 years. What are the right conditions? HHDL outlines the 5 conditions as the meditator having (1) the discipline of not being distracted by the 5 senses and live an ethical life (2) have few needs and as few mundane activities as possible. Be contented. (3) Have good understanding of all the key points and stages of the practice (e.g. know the 5 faults and the 8 antidotes; know the techniques and the 9 stages of calm abiding meditation). (4) Adopt the appropriate diet and avoid excessive eating. Avoid heavy foods like meat and black foods which enhance laxity; have nutritious food but not those which lead to the destruction of the body like being high in cholesterol, oil, sugar; consume less food at night which helps to make one's early

To liberation and omniscience

The practitioner should continually cultivate

The perfection of wisdom with skilful means

Skilful means refers to the Method teachings namely those on bodhicitta; the Wisdom teachings refer to the emptiness teachings. If we only cultivate the perfection of wisdom, we will attain only nirvana. However, if we wish to attain enlightenment, we need to cultivate both bodhicitta and wisdom.

V43 Wisdom without skilful means

And skilful means too without wisdom

Are referred to as bondage

Therefore do not give up either

Wisdom without skilful means (bodhicitta) is referred to as the bondage of nirvana; skilful means without wisdom results in the bondage of samsara. Therefore we must not give up either. We need to cultivate both. We cannot practice partially.

V44 To eliminate doubts concerning

What is wisdom and what is skilful means

I shall make clear the difference

Between skilful means and wisdom

What is wisdom and what are the skilful means? Buddha has taught the 6 Perfections which consist of the practices of wisdom and method which are Generosity, Morality, Patience, Perseverance, Concentration and Wisdom. The first 5 Perfections are all Method and last of the Perfections is Wisdom. We can distinguish between the activities the practices of method and wisdom in that way. When we refer to engaging in the “method practices” it refers to those related to the first 5 Perfections. When we refer to unifying method (thap) and wisdom (sherab), it refers to engaging in all 6.

V45 Apart from the perfection of wisdom

All virtuous practices such as

The perfection of giving are described

As skilful means by the Victorious Ones

Buddha defined all virtues which are apart from the category of the perfection of wisdom, as in the category of method.

V46 Whomever, under the influence of familiarity

With skilful means, cultivate wisdom

Will quickly attain enlightenment

Not just by meditating on sefllessness

Whoever practices the highest scope teachings (the Mahayana) with the motivation of bodhicitta and cultivates wisdom realising selflessness of person and of phenomena, will quickly attain enlightenment.

V47 Understanding emptiness of inherent existence

Through realising that the aggregates, constituents

And sources are not produced

Is described as wisdom

How should we describe the characteristics of wisdom? It is understanding the emptiness of inherent existence through realising that the 5 aggregates, the 18 constituents and 12 sources are not produced by truly-existent causes and conditions, or in other words, are not produced by independently-existing causes and conditions.

V48 Something existence cannot be produced

Nor something non-existent, like a sky flower.

These errors are both absurd and thus

Both of the [other] two will not occur either.

This verse presents one form of logic which negates the production of existing and non-existent phenomena. The analysis of emptiness that is able to refute the object to be negated begins with acknowledging that things are either existent or non-existent, that (a) There is no such thing as the production of true existence (b) there is no such thing as a production of non-existence; (c) there is no production of both true existence and non-existence.

V49 A thing is not produced from itself

Nor from another, also not from both

Nor causelessly either, thus it does not

Exist inherently by way of its own identity

This is another statement of logic negating the production of existence. Self and things are non truly existent by a truly existent self-cause, nor truly existent due to some other cause nor truly existent due to both. Nothing is truly existent. It can be also discovered through the 4th line of reasoning. The self for instance, it either exists as one with the 5 aggregates or different from the 5 aggregates. If the self is one with the aggregates, then 5 will be one (which cannot be); and if the self is different from the aggregates [then if something injures our leg, we should not feel anything]. One should reflect on this and the contemplation can be exciting to the point that as you put your key into the door lock whilst engaging deeply into that contemplation, you discover that it is already the morning!

V50 *Moreover, when all phenomena are examined*
As to whether they are one or many
They are not seen to exist by way of their own entity
And thus are ascertained as not inherently existent.

The verse states that things exist conventionally (through cause and effect) but are ultimately lacking in inherent existence and are thus empty. The two truths is referred to here and the 4 point analysis is referred to in this verse.

V51 *The reasoning of the Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness*
The Treatise on the Middle Way and so forth
Explain that the nature of all things
Is established as emptiness

The nature of all things is emptiness or shunyata. The Seventy Stanzas was composed by Nagarjuna and there it stated that the nature of all things is emptiness. Due to that, conventionally, there is the attainment of enlightenment. To have full conviction that there is enlightenment is through understanding the two truths. Until we have thorough understanding of these two, we may feel unsure that freedom from samsara and enlightenment is possible and thus genuine renunciation will be difficult.

V52 *Since there are a great many passages*
I have not cited them here
But have explained just their conclusions
For the purpose of meditation

Atisha explains that there are many sutras on emptiness but he has cited the above quotes in this text for purposes of meditation.

V53 *Thus whatever is meditation*
On selflessness, in that it does not observe
An inherent nature in phenomena
Is the cultivation of wisdom

When we talk about meditating on emptiness, it is about the inner realisation of the lack of inherent existence, including the very wisdom which realises emptiness.

V54 *Just as wisdom does not see*
An inherent nature in phenomena
Having analysed wisdom itself by reasoning

Non-conceptually meditate on that

How do we upgrade ourselves from a beginner meditator to a practitioner of the 10th Ground? It is through meditating on the wisdom of emptiness but also meditating on the mind itself to the point of non conceptual mind; realising the emptiness of the wisdom itself and remaining in that meditation will develop higher levels of wisdom realising emptiness and become increasingly effective tool to eliminate defilements including subtle defilements. Upon entering the 3rd of the 5 Paths, namely the Path of Seeing, one enters the first of the 10 Grounds. Within the 10 Grounds are 9 level of defilements with the corresponding antidotes. The mind operating at those levels are non conceptual minds. The intensity of wisdom during this period is divided into 9 stages – the more intense the wisdom, the more effective it will be to eliminate the subtle defilements.

How do we intensify the non conceptual mind? Practice to the point where one realises there is no difference between the lack of inherent phenomena externally and that of one's mind itself; one realises that mind and the wisdom itself are empty. When the wisdom realising emptiness analyses the subject and object, it cannot discover self existence in either of those or elsewhere. It does not find self-existence in the wisdom of emptiness, ie. we realise the emptiness of even the wisdom of emptiness.

V55

The nature of this worldly existence

Which has come from conceptualisation

Is conceptuality. Thus the elimination of

Conceptuality is the highest state of nirvana.

Buddha says that superstition keeps us in samsara. All forms of conceptual mind is superstition. Other than the mind realising emptiness, is a superstitious mind. So if we cling to the conceptual analysis of emptiness, that also becomes a cause of samsara. The nature of worldly existence comes from conceptualisation/the superstitious mind. If we can free ourselves from this, we are free from samsara.

V56

The great ignorance of conceptuality

Makes us fall into the ocean of cyclic existence

Resting in non-conceptual stabilisation

Space-like non-conceptuality manifests clearly

How to free oneself from conceptual perceptions? Train to overcome them by dividing all our activities, thoughts, perceptions into two aspects – (i) as a meditation on emptiness and (ii) as a post-meditation. During meditation, we should cultivate understanding that the self, aggregate and all phenomena exists in a manner similar to that which is empty like space e.g. you see something, yet you realises that there is nothing to grasp at. During the post-meditation session, reflect and remind oneself that all activities and thoughts etc.. are in the manner of illusion. They are not illusions but LIKE illusions. Everything is a dance of your mind.

V57 *When Bodhisattvas non-conceptually contemplate*

This excellent teaching, they will transcend

Conceptuality, so hard to overcome

And eventually reach the non-conceptual state

Bodhisattvas practice to avoid conceptual contemplations and in so doing, they achieve nirvana. Bodhisattvas practice generosity and the 6 Perfections to purify the conceptual mind.

V58 *Having ascertained through scripture*

And through reasoning that phenomena

Are not produced nor inherently existence

Meditate without conceptuality

We need to put effort on study and reasoning to arrive at the stage where we know that nothing is produced through truly-existent causes & conditions nor do they inherently exist. Meditate on that. Through this we can achieve the wisdom of shunyata (emptiness).

V59 *Having thus meditated on suchness*

Eventually, after teaching “heat” and so forth,

The “very joyful” and the others are attained.

And before long, the enlightened state of Buddhahood.

Having meditated on emptiness as above, through training via meditation sessions and post-meditation sessions, with the help of genuine Mahayanic renunciation, we will be able to enter the 5 Paths (the Path of Accumulation, the Path of Preparation, the Path of seeing, the Path of Meditation and the Path of No More Learning). We start with Path of Accumulation where one accumulates the first great aeon of merit (3 great aeons of merit are needed to become a Buddha). From that point to 8th Ground, the 2nd aeon of merits is accumulated and the 3rd aeon of merits is gathered from the 8th to the 10th Ground). Next we come to the Path of Preparation – there are 4 categories here – the “heat” is the 1st level of the Path of Preparation; 2nd level is called the “peak”, the 3rd level is “patience” (this patience is not the patience referred to in the 6 Perfections), 4th level is “supreme Dharma”. The “very joyful” refers to entry into the 3rd Path, the Path of Seeing where one sees emptiness directly (here the 1st of the 10 Grounds begin, where the realisation of emptiness becomes increasingly intense through the power of bodhicitta. The stronger the bodhicitta, the stronger the realisation of emptiness). Soon, one will gain the Path of Meditation and the final Path of No More Learning which is Buddhahood.

V60 *If you wish to create with tease*

The collections for enlightenment

Through activities of pacification

Increase and so forth, gained by the power of mantra

Lama Atisha advises that if we regard 3 countless aeons of ascetic practices too long a period to accumulate the merit needed to attain enlightenment and we wish to expedite this, one should then engage into tantra practice. There are 4 powers of mantra - pacification (purifying negativities), increase (one's potential and merits) , controlling (controlling knowledge/abilities) and wrathfulness (overcome intense negativities, eliminate the 4 maras). Reciting mantras activates these powers. Through tantra, one can gain the merits of 3 countless aeons in a shorter time, even in this very lifetime.

V61

And also through the force of the eight

And other great attainments like the "good pot" –

If you want to practice secret mantra

As explained in the action and performance tantras.

In the Action and Performance tantras, it is explained that great attainments can be obtained including that of the "good pot" – which is a stage where having done retreat earnestly, by merely holding a pot with your mouth and expressing your wish, your wish can be fulfilled immediately. Nyung Nay practice is also highly beneficial to enhance one's practices. Look at our Gurus, their pockets are empty yet they have huge Dharma projects which get actualised easily. There was once an astrologer from Hong Kong, a Mr Hung I think, who upon receiving teaching from the late Geshe Lama Konchog gained renunciation and became a monk. He wanted to offer a Japanese (Suzuki) jeep (in Nepal, Japanese cars are highly valued) but Geshe Lama Konchog (GLK) refused to accept it. He came up with an idea to buy a car by saying it was for his own use when he visited Nepal and sent the money to buy the jeep. Geshela and Ven Tenpa Choden tried to persuade GKL to accept the jeep but GLK refused. Nevertheless we went ahead to purchase the jeep. Due to that incident, I was forced to learn driving. When the jeep arrived, GLK stopped using Kopan jeep to go down to Boudha and walked to Boudha Stupa and for 1 year, I was the only one driving the jeep. Finally, I requested Geshela to please sit in the jeep just once – he had many comments to make about my driving ! (laughter) and I got into an accident. It was very costly to maintain the jeep. Eventually, the jeep was sold and the proceeds used for Tara statues and for the building of the kitchen. On another occasion, a devoted Indian family built the house for him but as he was leaving to go to the cave, he declined it but they begged him to stay in it. GLK always held the view that consuming any offerings made to him without offering it to the Triple Gem was inappropriate. Similarly with KLZR, outwardly a simple Lama, yet in truth a highly realised being who is a pure total bodhicitta practitioner. This is just one example of how merits come about; how the great beings accumulate them.

Doing retreat is the main factor in enhancing one's practice of Highest Yoga Tantra (HYT). In the Yamantaka practice, doing the commitment retreat complete with fire puja is very important. It is not about ritual. It's a powerful yoga. It makes the practitioner's life more complete, without which even though one receive the initiation, one remains fragile and insecure in utilising the practice. A lot of obstacles may come when preparing for the Yamantaka retreat, hence the advice to do the Lama Tsongkhapa Guruyoga retreat

beforehand. After completing the Yamantaka retreat, self-initiation practice can be embarked upon and is a great enhancement of your tantric practice. However, note that even if one completes 110,000 mantra, without the fire puja, one cannot do self-initiation.

V62

Then to receive the preceptor initiation

You must please an excellent spiritual teacher

Through service, valuable gift and the like

As well as through obedience

One should receive Initiations from a qualified master. It is best if he is holding full ordination vows, is completely renounced, completely compassionate. Initiation is the doorway to tantra. Although one can get information from the Internet, there will not be much benefit because when one receives teachings from a qualified master, there is the blessing of the lineage, the vows, the teachings which are oral transmissions.

One should devote to the Guru through making offerings, performing service and following his advice which is Dharma. It's not about physical closeness and giving material things; it is about developing the mind and heart in accordance with Dharma and thereby please the Guru. If you only relate to the Guru at physical level, when the Guru departs, you're lost. We cannot cultivate in this way. Whatever happens, we must be able to carry on our practice in a stable way. We should have non attachment to Guru at the physical level but merge one's heart with the Guru in one's effort towards Buddhahood. Whether one's Guru is present or not, one needs to be fully confident in one's practice, as well as the increasing of one's devotion to him. We are very fortunate to have a Guru such as KLZR and to receive teachings from him.

If we are not careful about one's physical closeness with the Guru, one will not be able to distinguish between desirous attachment towards the Guru and proper devotion to him with the aspiration towards enlightenment. KLZR handles this in the best way by rarely appearing to us but when he is present, he fills our lives with Lam Rim and the entire Dharma and teaches us to be detached. Understand that each realisation we gain is an offering to one's Guru.

When one has received a HYT Initiation, one can then engage in the two stages of the path = generation stage and completion stage practices. Take for example the Yamantaka practice. The Yamantaka long sadhana is a more detailed teaching on the generation and completion stage practices. But this can only be done after one receives the Commentary on the Long Sadhana. Otherwise, the Yamantaka retreat will not be complete. So I encourage everyone to participate in the upcoming 2011 teachings from Dagri Rinpoche, who is the reincarnation of one of the 16 Arhats and Lama Serlingpa; who is totally devoted to HH Dalai Lama and closest to KLZR. KLZR has previously advised that it is suitable for Dagri Rinpoche to give Yamantaka Initiation and related teachings.

V63

Through the full bestowing of the preceptor initiation

By a spiritual teacher who is pleased

You are purified of all wrong-doing

And become fit to gain powerful attainments

Pleasing the Guru (through abiding by the Dharma) is the greatest purification of negativity. Make sure we don't misunderstand this point. Pleasing the Guru refers to one gaining realisations on the Path; keeping the Guru in one's heart is solely to inspire one to actualise one's realisations on the Path. If we do this, we are fit to gain powerful attainments.

Verse 64 *Because the Great Tantra of the Primordial Buddha*

Forbids it emphatically

Those observing pure conduct

Should not take the secret and wisdom initiation

Verse 65 *Those observing the austere practice of pure conduct*

Were to hold these initiations

Their vow of austerity would be impaired

Through doing that which is proscribed.

Verse 66 *This creates transgressions which are a defeat*

For those observing discipline

Since they are certain to fall to a bad rebirth

They will never gain accomplishments.

In order to receive the full, 4 stages of initiations, fully ordained monks and nuns should not receive the stages of the secret and wisdom initiations because there are elements which can only be declared to non-ordained, ripened disciples. If one is ordained with high realisations, then it would be possible to receive these particular secret and wisdom initiations. These particular initiations affect the ordination vows. Strictly speaking, an ordinary ordained person should offer back to the master the ordination vows during these 2 stages of initiation and take back the ordination vows after them.

V67 *There is no fault if one who has received*

The preceptor initiation and has knowledge

Of suchness listens to or explains the tantras

And performs burnt offering rituals

Or makes offerings of gifts and so forth.

After receiving the Initiations from a qualified master and gaining the knowledge and ability, one should integrate it into one's practice including retreat and concluding with the fire puja to accomplish the full aspect of the practice.

V68

I, the Elder Dipamkarashri, having seen it

Explained in sutra and in other teachings

Have made thus concise explanation

At the request of Jangchup Oe

Lama Atisha describes himself as Elder (fully ordained monk) Dipamkarashri and whatever teachings in this text is none other than the Buddha's teachings that he has learned, that he has taught those teachings, no less and no more, with the pure preservation of the vows without any transgressions.

The End