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INSTITUTE

1

THE PRINCIPAL TEACHINGS OF BUDDHISM
Level One of the Steps to Buddhahood (*Lam Rim*)

DHARMA ESSENTIALS





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Class One Outline

- I. Introduction to the Dharma Essentials Series and to this Course
- II. The Text (*The Three Principal Paths*), the Author (Je Tsongkapa, 1357-1419), and the Commentator (Pabongka Rinpoche, 1878-1941)
- III. The Three Great Divisions of the *Lam Rim* Texts
 - A. Practitioners of lesser scope
 - B. Practitioners of middle scope
 - C. Practitioners of greater scope
- IV. Overview of the Three Principal Paths
 - A. Renunciation
 - B. Bodhicitta
 - C. Correct View
- V. Obtaining the Two Bodies of a Buddha
 - A. The form body
 - 1. based on the “collection of merit” which overcome obstacles of bad thoughts
 - B. The dharma body
 - 1. based on the “collection of wisdom” which overcome obstacles to knowledge
- VI. The Root of the Path: Finding a Teacher
 - A. The ten qualities of a good teacher
 - 1. “controls themselves well”
 - 2. “at peace”
 - 3. “high peace”
 - 4. “spiritual qualities that exceed”

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5. "great efforts"
6. "rich in scripture"
7. "deep realization of suchness"
8. "master instructor"
9. "image of love"
10. "beyond becoming discouraged"

VII. Three Qualities of a Good Student

- A. Free of preconceptions
- B. Intelligent
- C. High spiritual aspirations

VIII. The Three "Problems of a Pot"

IX. The Three Characteristics of an Authentic Dharma Teaching

- A. Taught by a Buddha
- B. Cleaned of any errors
- C. Brought true realizations and passed down in an unbroken lineage

X. Meditation Assignment

Fifteen minutes on the importance for the spiritual life of finding a good teacher and being a good student.

Class Two Outline

- I. Suffering and the “Cycle of Life” (*samsara*)
- II. The Meaning of “Renunciation”
- III. The Relationship between Renunciation and Bodhicitta
- IV. The Steps on the Path Meant to Stop Desire for the Things of This Life
 - A. “Leisure and fortune”
 - B. Impermanence and death
- V. The Eight Worldly Thoughts
 - A. Getting something and not getting something
 - B. Feeling good and not feeling good
 - C. Being well-known and not well-known
 - D. People saying nice things to you and bad things to you
- VI. The Four Principles of Karma
 - A. Actions are certain to produce similar results
 - B. The consequences are greater than the actions
 - C. One cannot meet a consequence if he or she has not committed an action
 - D. Once an action is committed, the consequence cannot be lost
- VII. The Six Sufferings of a Human Life
 - A. The problem that life has no certainty
 - B. The problem that we always want more than we have
 - C. The problem that we have to keep shucking off bodies, over and over again
 - D. The problem that we have to keep going into a new life, over and over again
 - E. The problem that we go up and down in our fortunes in life, over and over again
 - F. The problem that no one can come along with us; ultimately we are alone
- VIII. The Three Sufferings
 - E. Suffering of suffering
 - F. Suffering of change
 - G. Intrinsic suffering

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IX. How to Know When You Have True Renunciation

X. Meditation Assignment

Fifteen minutes on why even the nice things of this life are in the nature of suffering, and how important it is to use the opportunity this kind of life affords to work for spiritual goals.

Class Three Outline

- I. The Meaning of the Term “Bodhicitta”
- II. The Definition of a “Bodhisattva”
- III. The Benefits of Developing the Wish for Enlightenment
 - A. If you have this wish, then all your good deeds become a cause for omniscience
 - B. You become a person worthy of the honor of all beings
 - C. You outshine practitioners of lower paths
 - D. The tiniest good deed you do becomes a spiritual practice of the greater way
 - E. The good deeds you do become the activity of a bodhisattva
 - F. The Buddhas look upon you as their own son or daughter
 - G. All the bodhisattvas then consider you their own brother or sister
 - H. By achieving the wish, you have entered into the “Greater Way” or the “Mahayana”
 - I. If you have the wish, it is possible that you will reach enlightenment in one lifetime
- IV. The Seven Step Cause and Effect Method for Developing the Wish for Enlightenment
 - A. Having developed equanimity, recognize that all beings have been your mother
 - B. Remember the kindness they have shown you
 - C. Decide to repay the kindness
 - D. Love all people with the intensity of a mother for her only child
 - E. Feel great compassion for all living beings
 - F. Decide to help everyone, even if you have to do it all yourself
 - G. Achieve the wish to become enlightened for the sake of every living being
- V. Meditation Assignment

Fifteen minutes on the seven step cause and effect method for developing bodhicitta.

Class Four Outline

- I. The Two Truths or Realities
 - A. Ultimate Truth or Reality
 - B. Deceptive Truth or Reality
- II. Three Views of “Interdependence” or “Dependent Origination”
 - C. Functionalist Group
 - D. Independent Group
 - E. Implication Group
- III. What “No-Self” Does and Does Not Mean
- IV. The Interrelationship Between Karma and Emptiness
- V. Applying Emptiness to Everyday Life
- VI. Meditation Assignment

Spend fifteen minutes each day meditating on the interrelationship between karma and emptiness – how things *do* exist, and how they *do not* exist.

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Reading One



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Dharma Essentials Course I: The Principal Teachings of Buddhism

Reading One:
The Preliminaries

The following selections are taken from *The Key that Unlocks the Door to the Noble Path* (*Lam bzang sgo 'byed*) written by Pabongka Rinpoche (1878-1941), a commentary upon the *Three Principal Paths* (*Lam-gtzo rnam-gsum*) of Je Tsongkapa (1357-1419).

So now we ourselves will give just a brief teaching using the Three Principal Paths – the words of this same Lord Tsongkapa – as our basic text.

An Offering of Praise

We'll start by discussing the general outline of the work. This instruction on the three principal paths comes in three basic divisions: the preliminaries that lead into the composition of the text, the main body of the text, and the conclusion of the explanation. The first of these divisions has three sections of its own: an offering of praise, a pledge to compose the work, and then a strong encouragement for the reader to study it well.

What we call the "offering of praise" is contained in the opening line of the work:

I bow to all the high and holy lamas....

How to Take a Lama

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Now a lama is extremely important at the outset of any attempts at a spiritual life. As Geshe Potowa said,

To reach liberation, there is nothing more important than a lama. Even in simple things of this present life, with things that you can learn just by sitting down and watching someone, you can't get anywhere without a person to show you. So how on earth are you going to get anywhere without a lama, when you want to go somewhere you've never gone before, and you've only just arrived from a journey through the lower births?

Therefore you're absolutely going to have to go and learn from a lama; just reading dharma books is not going to work. There has never been a single person in history who gained his spiritual goals without a lama, just by reading books on dharma. And it will never happen in the future either.

Now what kind of lama should he be? It takes a guide who knows every turn of the path just to get you somewhere you can reach in a single day. For a lama who's supposed to lead you on to freedom and the state of knowing all things, you're going to need one who has all the requisite qualities.

It's important to find a really qualified lama; it's not something you shouldn't care much about, because you're going to end up like him – for better or for worse. The student comes out according to the mold, like those little clay tablets with holy images pressed into them.

What are the characteristics that make a lama qualified? According to the teachings on vowed morality he should be, as they say, a "source of all good qualities" and so on. This means that the lama should possess the two good qualities of being steady and wise. According to the secret teachings, he should fit the description that starts with the words "all three gateways well restrained." According to general tradition – that of both the open and the secret teachings – the lama should have ten fine qualities, as mentioned in the verse that begins with "You who have all ten..."

At the very least, your lama must absolutely be a person who has controlled his mind by practicing the three trainings, who possesses a knowledge of the scriptures, and who possesses actual realizations. As the *Jewel of the Sutras* states,

Take yourself to a spiritual guide controlled, at peace,

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High peace, with exceeding qualities and effort, who's rich
In scripture, with a deep realization of suchness, a master instructor
Who's the very image of love, and beyond becoming discouraged.

The prospective disciple on his part should familiarize himself with these descriptions of a proper lama's qualifications, and then seek out a lama who possesses them. Whether the disciple himself turns out to be more or less blessed with virtues depends on the degree to which his lama possesses high personal qualities. If the disciple enjoys a relationship with a lama who is capable of guiding him through the entire range of the open and secret paths, then the disciple will come to be one blessed, in the sense of having heard about and gained some understanding of the paths in their entirety. Even just gaining this general idea of the overall paths represents greater merit than any other good qualities that the student might possess.

Once the disciple does manage to locate a lama with the qualities described above, he must rely on him in the proper way....

A Pledge to Compose the Work

Here we have reached the second of the preliminaries that lead into the composition of the text. This is the pledge to compose the text, and is contained in the very first verse:

(1)

**As far as I am able I'll explain
The essence of all high teachings of the Victors,
The path that all their holy sons commend,
The entry point for the fortunate seeking freedom.**

The principal thing that a person should put to practice – the essence of all the high teachings of the Victors – is the three principal paths, or what we call the "Steps of the Path." This teaching on the Steps of the Path to Buddhahood is the only one where all the high teachings of the Victors have been combined into a single series of Steps that any given person can put into practice himself....

Now about the expression "Steps of the Path"; the royal lama Jangchub Uw once made a petition to Lord Atisha, asking for an instruction that would be of special benefit to keep the teachings of the Buddha in the world. Lord Atisha then spoke the *Lamp on the Path to Buddhahood*, which from that time onwards he referred to as the "Steps of the Path" – and thus the expression began to spread. This

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teaching though is by no means something that Lord Atisha and the great Tsongkapa invented themselves; rather, it is that grand highway along which each and every Buddha has traveled....

You can spend a thousand years struggling to practice some dharma teaching that has no authentic origin, and you still won't get a single sliver of true realization. It's like thrashing water to make butter.

Therefore we can say that the teaching we decide to practice should have three distinguishing features:

- 1) It should have been taught by the Buddha.
- 2) It should have been cleaned of any errors: sages must have brought the teaching to its authentic final form, having examined it to determine whether any wrong ideas crept into it after the Buddha taught it.
- 3) It should have brought true realizations to the hearts of master practitioners, once they have heard, considered, and meditated upon it. And then it must have passed to us through the various generations of an unbroken lineage.

If the dharma we seek to practice has these three characteristics, it is authentic. We from our side still might fail it, through lapses in our effort and daily practice, but we need never fear that the teaching from its side will fail us....

So now we can put the first verse into perspective. Lord Tsongkapa is saying, *"As far as I am able I'll explain the teaching on the three principal paths. It is that excellent path that all the Victors' holy sons commend with their praise, the path on which they travel. It has no error. It goes no mistaken way. It is the highest of all doorways: it is the entry point for those people of good fortune who are seeking freedom."*

The words "as far as I am able" in the verse are in general put there by Lord Tsongkapa as an expression of modesty. More specifically they have the effect of saying, "As far as I am able I will explain something of as great meaning as can be put into the few words here."

There is another way of glossing the verse, according to which the first line of explanation – the one that includes the words "all high teachings of the Victors" – refers to renunciation. As *Chanting the Names* says,

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The renunciation of all three vehicles
Lies in the end in a single vehicle.

The point is that the Buddha, in some of his teachings which should be interpreted rather than taken literally, said that there were three different vehicles or ways. These three though are really only one, from the viewpoint of the ultimate end to which they lead. In a similar sense, all the high teachings of the Victors were enunciated as a means to produce the ultimate "renunciation" – the Buddha's knowledge – within the minds of disciples. And renunciation is what, at the very beginning, urges one to develop a disgust for the cycle of life and set his mind on reaching freedom. This is why the attitude of renunciation is taught here first, in the first line.

The second line of explanation – the one that includes the words "their holy sons" – refers to the wish to achieve enlightenment for every living being. This is the attitude that all the Victors and their sons take as their single most important meditation, and the attitude whose praises they sing. It is like a great center beam that holds up the entire structure of the greater way.

The third line of explanation – the one with the words "the fortunate seeking freedom" – refers to correct view. This perception is the one and only entry point for disciples who seek for freedom. To achieve freedom, you have to cut ignorance – the root of this circle of life. And to cut ignorance, you have to develop the wisdom which realizes no-self. And to develop wisdom, you need a correct view free of all error.

Correct view is the single door to nirvana, to peace. And so it is that the great Tsongkapa, in the closing words of the verse, pledges to compose his work on the three principal paths – which include correct view. His pledge is made in the way prescribed by Master Dandin: he abbreviates within it all the topics to be treated in the work itself – which here would be to say he includes within his pledge every essential point in the entire body of the paths to be explained. In this sense, our Lama concluded, Lord Tsongkapa had in the first verse already taught us the essence of the paths....

Encouragement to Study

We have now reached the third and final of the preliminaries that lead into the composition of the text. This one consists of a strong encouragement for the reader to study the work well, and is contained in the next verse of the root text:

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(2)

**Listen with a pure mind, fortunate ones
Who have no craving for the pleasures of life,
And who to make leisure and fortune meaningful strive
To turn their minds to the path which pleases the Victors.**

Here the great Tsongkapa is urging his readers to study the work: "You, you people who are seeking freedom and *have no* single moment's *craving for the pleasures of life*; you, who want to get the absolute most from the body you've found, *to make your leisure and fortune meaningful*; you now are going to have to train yourself in a path that never errs, a path that never strays, a path that is whole and complete, *the path which pleases* even the Buddhas – the one in the end they advise, a path that is no erring path, a path that is no path that strays, a path that is more than just some piece or part of a path. And if you want to train yourself in a path like that, you're going to have to be a student who has all the requirements of a student; you're going to have to fit the description from the *400 Verses*:

We call someone a proper vessel for study
Who's unbiased, intelligent, and willing to strive.

And *fortunate ones* like you, disciples who have *turned their minds* to the dharma, are going to have to *listen with a pure mind*; avoid in your study those things which are opposed to its success – the three problems of the pot.

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Reading Two:

The First Path: Renunciation

The following selections are taken from *The Key that Unlocks the Door to the Noble Path (Lam bzang sgo 'byed)* written by Pabongka Rinpoche (1878-1941), a commentary upon the *Three Principal Paths (Lam-gtzo rnam-gsum)* of Je Tsongkapa (1357-1419).

Why You Need Renunciation

(3)

**There's no way to end, without pure renunciation,
This striving for pleasant results in the ocean of life.
It's because of their hankering life as well that beings
Are fettered, so seek renunciation first.**

Now for all of us to escape from the cycle of life, we have to want to escape. If we never develop the wish to get out, and we get attached to the good things of this circle of life, then there will never be any way to escape it.

A prisoner can sit in a jail, but if he never really wants to escape, and never really attempts an escape, he never will escape. It's the same for us – if we never try to find some way to escape this cycle of life, the day of our escape will never arrive. If we work to develop the wish to escape, then surely there will come a time when we do.

Here first we have to understand just how we spin around in this life-circle. The "cycle of life" is defined as taking on, again and again, the impure groups of things that make up a normal suffering being – it is their unbroken stream from life to life. What is it that chains us to this cycle? Our own deeds and bad thoughts. And to what exactly are we chained? To those impure parts of our being.

To get free of this cycle of life we must recognize that everything about it is, by nature, complete suffering. This brings a disgust for it, a loathing for it, and this then brings renunciation for it. Thus what the verse is saying is: *"Without pure renunciation, there's no way to stop this attitude where one strives for whatever pleasant results he might get here in life. Moreover, it is precisely by force of their feelings of attachment and craving for the pleasant things of life (here 'hankering' is another name for what we usually refer to as 'craving'), that all beings are fettered.* And if all beings are

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fettered, do you imagine that you are not? Of course you are. If you want some day to escape this cycle, *seek then*, at the very *first*, a pure attitude of *renunciation*."....

The point here is that, to develop the wish to achieve enlightenment for all living beings, you must first develop a kind of compassion where you can no longer bear to see these beings tormented by the sufferings of life. To develop this, you must develop renunciation over your own situation; there is no way otherwise you could gain compassion, for it contemplates the situation that others must face....

Stopping Desire for This Life

This brings us to the second section of our explanation of renunciation; that is, a description of how to develop it. First we'll talk about how to stop desire for the present life, and then how to stop it for future lives. Stopping desire for this life is the subject of the next two lines of the root text:

(4a)

**Leisure and fortune are hard to find, life's not long;
Think it constantly, stop desire for this life.**

What we mean by "desire for this life" is this desire for happiness and fame in this life – where you say to yourself, "If only I could get more of the good things of life than anyone in the world – the best food, finest clothes, biggest name, and all the rest." Anyone who hopes to do some spiritual practice must stop his desire for this life.

How to stop it? You must contemplate the two Steps known as (1) the "great importance of this life of leisure and fortune, and the difficulty of finding it," as well as (2) our "impermanence, the fact that we must die." These thoughts then will turn back your desire for this life – in your mind, you will give up on it. The fact that you and I right now never do any spiritual practice – no, worse, the fact that we try and what we do is anything but spiritual practice – is all because of our desire for this life....

Therefore if we want to do any spiritual practice we must quell the eight worldly thoughts – we must stand neutral, free of both members of each of its four pairs. "Eight worldly thoughts" is a name we give to the following eight emotions:

- 1) Being happy when we acquire some thing,
- 2) And unhappy when we don't.
- 3) Being happy when we feel good,
- 4) And unhappy when we don't.

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- 5) Being happy when we become well known,
- 6) And unhappy when we don't.
- 7) Being happy when someone speaks well of us,
- 8) And unhappy when someone speaks ill of us....

The point here is that, to rid yourself of the eight worldly thoughts and undertake a spiritual practice which is truly pure, you must gain two different realizations: first, of how valuable and hard to find one's life of leisure and fortune is; secondly, of one's own impermanence and the fact that he must die...

Now a single expression in the root verse, the one that reads "Leisure and fortune are hard to find," serves to introduce three different concepts: recognizing one's leisure and fortune, contemplating their incredible value, and contemplating how hard they are to find. What we mean by "leisure" is to be free of the eight different ways a person can lack opportunity, and to the opportunity to attempt some spiritual practice. "Fortune" refers to the fact that one is fortunate enough to possess all the inner and outer circumstances that will allow him to undertake his practice. These include having taken birth as a human being, having entered the Buddha's teaching, and so on....

And we must begin this practice now, right now. Little time remains before the inevitable death comes to us. We must constantly bring our death to mind; just some vague awareness that someday death will come, or thinking some about death, is not enough to really keep your coming death in mind. You must train yourself, meticulously, in what it is to die.

In our root text, the instruction on how to keep your mind on death is presented in the words "life's not long." This instruction includes a number of categories: the benefits that come from keeping your mind on death, the problems that come from not keeping your mind on death, and how then actually to keep your mind on death. This last category itself includes the three basic principles, the nine reasons for them, and the three resolves to be made because of them – all ending with the meditation on what it's like to die....

Stopping Desire for Future Lives

This brings us to the teaching on how to stop desire for one's future lives, which is the second step in developing the path known as renunciation.

(4b)

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**Think over and over how deeds and their fruits never fail,
And the cycle's suffering: stop desire for the future.**

Now what we mean by "desire for the future" is the kind of attitude where you think to yourself, "I hope in my future births I can live like some god-like being May I live in some wonderful state of happiness, in the best of places, with the best of things, with a beautiful body and everything I wish for at my fingertips."....

Here in the teaching on the three principal paths ... we are advised to meditate on our leisure and fortune, as well as impermanence, in order to stop our desire for this life; our desire for future lives is to be stopped by a combination of understanding the principles of actions and their consequences and contemplating the various sufferings of cyclic life.

This ... way of making the presentation is meant to convey two important points. The first is that, since the forces of action and consequence are so extremely subtle, the consequences of any misdeed will wheel one back into the circle of life if one fails to make a complete escape from the cycle first. The second is that, in order to defeat this circle, one must stop each and every action he performs which is motivated by ignorance.

Thus we can say that, in order to escape the circle of life, one must take up white actions and abandon black actions. But to do this, he must believe in the law of actions and consequences at all. And to do this, he must contemplate upon actions and consequences.

This contemplation is done by considering, very carefully, the four principles of action which the Buddha enunciated:

- 1) Actions are certain to produce similar consequences.
- 2) The consequences are greater than the actions.
- 3) One cannot meet a consequence if he has not committed an action.
- 4) Once an action is committed, the consequence cannot be lost.

Once a person has gained a well-founded belief in these principles, he will automatically in his daily life avoid doing wrong things and begin doing right things...

Generally speaking, contemplation upon the principles of actions and their consequences is enough to stop desire for the future life. But really the main way is to contemplate the many sufferings of this cyclic life. In a broad sense, we can say that

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renunciation has just begun to sprout in a person's heart once he has meditated on the torments of "Revive" (the lightest hell) and feels a sense of terror. But complete proficiency in renunciation comes only when one feels a total disgust even for the supposed good things of this revolving life....

Here then we'll speak some of how to do the contemplation on the six sufferings.

These six are as follows:

- 1) The problem that life has no certainty.
- 2) The problem that we always want more than we have.
- 3) The problem that we have to keep shucking off bodies, over and over again.
- 4) The problem that we have to keep going into a new life, over and over again.
- 5) The problem that we go up and down in our fortunes in life, over and over again.
- 6) The problem that no one can come along with us; ultimately we are alone....

Since the three types of suffering are mentioned later on in our root text, we'll describe them briefly. All impure feelings of pain constitute the first type of suffering: the "suffering of suffering."

All impure feelings of pleasure constitute the second type of suffering: the "suffering of change." We can explain this suffering as follows. When you're in a place that's very hot, then something cool seems like pleasure. When you're in a place that's very cold, then something warm seems like pleasure. The same is true when you've had to walk a long way (sitting would seem a pleasure), or had to sit for a long time (walking would seem a pleasure).

None of these things that seem to be pleasure though is pleasure by nature, or pleasure in its very essence. If they were, then you would feel more pleasant the more you had of them. But this is not the case, for as you get more and more of them they too start to give you pain. When this happens we can understand that they are not pleasure by nature. They are, in fact, suffering – they are what we call the "suffering of change."

The third type of suffering is known as the "pervasive suffering, which brings in more." The point here is that, regardless which one of the six kinds of birth we take, we take on a body which, by its very existence, comes complete with its own particular sufferings built in. From the first moment we take the various impure parts of our being on, from the first moment of their existence, they provide a basis for all the sufferings we have to look forward to in life: birth, aging, sickness, death, and all

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the rest. The impure parts of ourselves are like a big pot, sucking in the suffering of suffering, sucking in the suffering of change, in both this and our future lives. We must find a way to stop taking births, to stop taking on all the impure parts we're made of. Until we do, our existence will be like lying on a bed of upright needles – never a thing but pain....

How to Know When You've Found Renunciation

The third and final section of our explanation of renunciation describes the point at which we can say a person has succeeded in developing it; as the next verse of the root text reads,

(5)

**When you've meditated thus and feel not even
A moment's wish for the goods things of cyclic life,
And when you begin to think both night and day
Of achieving freedom, you've found renunciation.**

Reading Three:

The Second Path: The Wish to Achieve Enlightenment for Every Living Being

The following selections are taken from the *The Key that Unlocks the Door to the Noble Path (Lam bzang sgo 'byed)* written by Pabongka Rinpoche (1878-1941), a commentary upon the *Three Principal Paths (Lam-gtzo rnam-gsum)* of Je Tsongkapa (1357-1419).

Why You Need the Wish for Enlightenment

We have now reached the second of the four parts in the actual body of the text. This is an explanation of the wish to achieve enlightenment for the sake of every living being. This explanation itself will include three sections: why you need the wish for enlightenment, how to go about developing this wish, and how to know when you've finally developed it. The next verse of the root text tells us why we need this great wish:

(6)

**Renunciation though can never bring
The total bliss of matchless Buddhahood
Unless it's bound by the purest wish; and so,
The wise seek the high wish for enlightenment.**

You may be able to gain some fierce feelings of renunciation as we described it above; any good deeds you do under their influence though can only bring you an ordinary nirvana – they alone can never serve to bring you to omniscient enlightenment....

If you do gain this great wish, you become a person who truly deserves to have the entire world – with all its different kinds of beings up to humans and gods – bow down at your feet, just as holy books like *The Bodhisattva's Life*, and *Entering the Middle Way*, and *The Rare Stack* describe it. You find yourself in a different class of being, and then you completely outshine listeners and self-made victors – practitioners of the lower paths. Every virtuous act you do, even down to throwing a scrap of food to some wild bird, becomes a practice of the greater way; becomes a cause for your future Buddhahood; becomes the way of life of a bodhisattva.

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If a person possesses this holy wish to achieve enlightenment for the sake of every living being, then all the countless Buddhas in all the ten directions of space look upon him as their son. And all the great bodhisattvas look upon him as their brother.

But that's not all; the whole question of whether you have reached the greater way, and the whole question of whether you will be able to achieve Buddhahood in this one short life, depend on whether you have truly gained this wish. So if you want enlightenment, our Lama concluded, you must train your thoughts in the wish....

How to Develop the Wish for Enlightenment

The second section in our explanation of the wish to achieve enlightenment for every living being describes how to develop this wish. As the next two verses say,

(7,8)

**They're swept along on four fierce river currents,
Chained up tight in past deeds, hard to undo,
Stuffed in a steel cage of grasping "self,"
Smothered in the pitch-black ignorance.**

**In a limitless round they're born, and in their births
Are tortured by three sufferings without a break;
Think how your mothers feel, think of what's happening
To them: try to develop this highest wish.**

We may begin with another pair of verses, from *The Bodhisattva's Life*:

Even just wishing you could stop
A headache another person has
Can bring you merit without measure
Because of the helpful intent you feel.

What need then to mention the wish
That you could stop the immeasurable pain
Of every being, and put every one
In a state of measureless happiness?....

The benefits of this wish to achieve enlightenment for all living beings are thus described, in these and other texts, as limitless. And so here are the mass of living beings, all of them our mothers, *swept along* the flow of *four river currents*, all *fierce*

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suffering. From one viewpoint, while they are acting as causes, these four are the torrent of desire, the torrent of views, the torrent of the ripe force of deeds, and the torrent of ignorance. Later, when they serve as results, they are the four torrents of birth, and aging, and illness, and death.

And these mother beings are not just hurtling along in these four great rivers; it's just as if their hands and feet too were bound fast – they are *chained up tight*, they are snared, *in their own past deeds, hard to undo*.

But that's not all; the bonds which hold them tight are no regular ties, like our twined ropes of yak-skin or hair. It's more like our mothers are clasped in fetters of iron, ever so hard to sever, ever so hard to unshackle – for while they are swept along they are *stuffed in a steel cage of grasping* to some non-existent "self."

And there's more. If there were some daylight, these mother beings would have some glimmer of hope – they could at least cry out, and try to get some help. But it is night, and the darkest hour of the night, and in pitch-black dark they are swept downstream the mighty river: they are *smothered* completely in *pitch-black ignorance*.

In a limitless round, in an endless round, *they are born* into the ocean of life, *and in these births they are tortured by three* different kinds of *suffering*: the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change, and the all-pervading suffering. And their torture comes to them *without a break* – it is always there.

This is *what's happening to them*, to our mother beings, this is their situation: unbearable pain. There's nothing they can do like this to help themselves; the son though has a chance at hand to pull his mother free. He must find a way, and find it now, to grasp her hand and draw her out. And the way he must *try* is *to develop this jewel wish* for enlightenment: he must do so first by *thinking how his mothers feel*, tortured by pain; then by deciding to take personal responsibility, the duty of freeing them, upon himself; and so on, all in the proper stages....

Here we'll give just a brief summary of how one trains himself in the wish to achieve enlightenment for every living being. The start-off is to practice feelings of neutrality towards all beings; after that, one begins meditation on each of the steps from "mother recognition" on up. The first three steps are to recognize all beings as one's mothers, to feel gratitude for their kindness, and to wish to repay that kindness. These three act as a cause for what we call "beautiful" loving-kindness. This type of loving-kindness is itself the fourth step; it is both an effect brought about by the first three, and a cause for the fifth: great compassion....

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Once you develop great compassion, then you can develop the extraordinary form of personal responsibility, where you take upon yourself the load of working for others' benefit. And the wish to achieve enlightenment for every living being comes from this...

How to Know When You've Found the Wish for Enlightenment

This brings us to the third and final section in our explanation of the wish for enlightenment: how to know when you've finally developed it. This point is covered with great detail in various works, including both the more extensive and the briefer presentations on the Steps of the path to enlightenment, which at this point employ material from the first of the Stages of Meditation. To put it briefly, suppose a mother has watched her beloved child slip down into a pit of red-hot coals. The fire is searing his body. She cannot stand to see it go on for a single second. She throws herself forward to pull the child out.

All the living creatures of the universe, all our dear mothers, are burning in the same way, in the unbearable pain of the three lower realms, and the circle of life in general. When we cannot stand to see it go on for a single second more, when we finally feel the true wish to reach total enlightenment, immediately, for the sake of every living being, well then – our Lama concluded – you can say you have gained the wish for enlightenment.

Reading Four: The Third Path: Correct View

The following selections are taken from the *The Key that Unlocks the Door to the Noble Path (Lam bzang sgo 'byed)* written by Pabongka Rinpoche (1878-1941), a commentary upon the *Three Principal Paths (Lam-gtzo rnam-gsum)* of Je Tsongkapa (1357-1419).

Why You Need Correct View

We have now reached the third of the four parts of the body of the text: the explanation of correct view. Here there are five sections; the first, which explains why you need to meditate on correct view, is expressed in the next verse of the root text:

(9)

**You may master renunciation and the wish,
But unless you have the wisdom perceiving reality
You cannot cut the root of cyclic life.
Make efforts in ways then to perceive interdependence.**

What the verse is saying is this: "Unless you have that very profound correct view about suchness – unless you have the wisdom that perceives reality, or ultimate truth – you can strive to perfect renunciation and the wish for enlightenment (along with all the other 'method' practices) as much as you please; but you cannot cut the root of cyclic life, grasping to a 'self,' since these practices alone do not act as a direct antidote for your grasping."....

Here in the verses of the *Three Principal Paths* our gentle protector, the great Tsongkapa, has urged us to try to perceive interdependence; as the line goes, "Make efforts in ways then to perceive interdependence." This he does instead of telling us to "Make efforts in ways to perceive emptiness," and for an extremely important reason.

Different schools have different ways of explaining "interdependence." The "Functionalist" group says that when something is "interdependent," it's because it has come about through various causes and conditions. This doesn't allow them to

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establish interdependence for those objects which are unchanging, and have no causes.

The "Independent" group has a way of describing interdependence that's a little bit better. They say that something is interdependent whenever it exists in dependence upon its parts. They then can establish interdependence with both changing and unchanging objects: for those with causes and without.

The way the last group, the one we call "Implication," decides that something is interdependent is subtler than all the rest. They say that something is interdependent when we have taken two things – a reasonable basis to be given a name and a reasonable idea to give it a name – and come out with an object we gave a name.

This subtle form of interdependence is not itself the way to perceive emptiness, but there is a good reason why we present interdependence – in the cause-and-effect interpretation accepted by all the schools – here at the very outset. First of all it prevents students from swinging to the opposite extreme where they believe that, if all things are empty, they can have no existence at all. Secondly, a correct understanding of interdependence does lead one to the way of perceiving emptiness. And so, concluded our Lama, there is crucial significance to presenting the instructions on interdependence first – as the first step on the way to perceiving emptiness....

What is Correct View?

The second of the five points in our discussion of the third principal path addresses the question: what is correct view? The answer appears in the next verse of the root text.

(10)

**A person's entered the path that pleases the Buddhas
When for all objects, in the cycle or beyond,
He sees that cause and effect can never fail,
And when for him they lose all solid appearance.**

The line here about "when for all objects" gives us the subject under consideration: what we will see is empty. The line with the words "cause and effect" is meant to give us the classic logical reason for proving things are empty: "because they are

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interdependent." The line with "they lose all solid appearance" presents us the premise that the reason is meant to prove.

The expression "all objects" refers to each and every object from basic physical matter on up to the omniscience of a Buddha. They all exist in dependence upon their parts, so in a manner of speaking their "cause and effect can never fail." The antithesis, which we seek to disprove, is that these objects could have the solid existence they appear to have: that they could exist naturally. "When they lose all solid appearance" – that is, when we perceive that there is not a single thing in the universe which has any true or natural existence – then we have found "the path that pleases the Buddhas."....

Now every existent object is a product of something to be given a name and something else to give it a name. There is not a single atom of anything in the universe which does not rely on this process – there is nothing which exists from its own side. I too then am a product: someone has taken two things together, my body and my mind, and called it "me." I am nothing more than that. There is no "me" which exists from its own side; there is no "me" which does not rely on someone taking my body and mind together and granting it the name. Neither in fact do my body or my mind themselves exist from their own sides....

Let's talk then about the thing we will see does not exist, in terms of the object we grasp. When we start to examine whether it exists or not, the image that comes to our mind is not the "me" that we have created with our labels, but rather some "me" that looks like it exists out there, on his own. The object we grasp therefore consists not of the "me" which is nothing but a label applied to our body and mind, but rather of the "me" which seems to exist out there on its own, on top of the body and the mind together....

Any person who really understands interdependence in the sense that we've just described it begins to develop a strong recognition of the laws of actions and their consequences – they become more and more important for him.

And this is why. First of all, good deeds lead to pleasure and bad deeds lead to pain; each cause is connected to its own result – it can never go wrong somehow and produce the other result. This invariable relationship comes from interdependence.

Once you understand the sense in which "interdependence" refers to lack of any natural existence, then you understand by implication that interdependence in the form of cause and effect is, in a merely conventional way, entirely proper or infallible. This then allows you to gain a total conviction towards the laws that

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govern all actions and consequences – whether they be those within the circle of life or those that are beyond it....

How to Know When Your Analysis is Still Incomplete

The third of the five sections in our treatment of correct view explains how to know when the analysis you are conducting with the view you have is still incomplete. This point is brought out in the next verse of the root text:

(11)

**You've yet to realize the thought of the Able
As long as two ideas seem to you disparate:
The appearance of things – infallible interdependence;
And emptiness – beyond taking any position.**

Let's say you've meditated on the instructions we've given above. You are directing your view to analyze all phenomena. If your analysis is really complete, then interdependence and emptiness must appear to you to go hand in hand, supporting each other.

How to Know When Your Analysis is Complete

This brings us to the fourth section: how to know when the analysis you are performing with the view you've developed is complete. This is explained in the next verse of the root text:

(12)

**At some point they no longer alternate, come together;
Just seeing that interdependence never fails
Brings realization that destroys how you hold to objects,
And then your analysis with view is complete.**

Now here's what we mean when we say that "at some point they no longer alternate." We take two things: first, the fact that everything about the way things work, and about good deeds and bad deeds, is perfectly proper, despite the fact that no single object is anything more than labels, just names. Secondly there is the fact that, when we try to seek out the thing that got the name, we find only emptiness: that there is not a single atom of natural existence in whatever object we have chosen.

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At some point you gain an ability to explain these two facts so that *they come together, and no longer alternate*. That is, you come to realize how both emptiness and interdependence can apply to one and the same object, with no contradiction at all.

You see then that interdependence is infallible, that it is nothing but using a concept to label the collection of parts that serve as the basis to take our label. *Just seeing* this fact, *that interdependence never fails, brings* you a *realization* that completely obviates *the way* that your tendency to grasp to true existence *holds its objects*. And then when you think of emptiness, you see interdependence; when you think of interdependence, you see emptiness....

A Unique Teaching of the "Implication" School

The fifth and final section in our explanation of correct view concerns a unique teaching followed by the "Implication" group of the Middle Way school. This instruction is contained in the following verse of the root text.

(13)

**In addition, the appearance prevents the existence extreme;
Emptiness that of non-existence, and if
You see how emptiness shows in cause and effect
You'll never be stolen off by extreme views.**

Now all the schools except for the members of the "Implication" group hold that an understanding of the appearance of things prevents you from falling into what we call the "extreme of thinking things do not exist," while an understanding of emptiness prevents you from falling into what is known as the "extreme of thinking things do exist."

The position of the Implication group though is that no particular object you can choose has any true existence, aside from merely appearing this way; and understanding this prevents you from going to the extreme of thinking things exist – that is, exist in an ultimate way. And because this mere appearance itself cannot exist on its own, an understanding of emptiness prevents your falling into the extreme of thinking things do not exist – that is, do not exist in a conventional way.

Once something is interdependent there is no possibility for it to be anything else but something which does not exist naturally – something which cannot stand on its

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own. This is because it must then occur in dependence on the collection of parts which serve as the basis that receives our label....

Put Into Practice What You Have Learned

We have now reached the last, the fourth part to our overall explanation of the actual body of the text. It consists of some strong words of encouragement – that the reader should try to recognize the truth of these instructions and then actually go and practice them. As the final verse of the root text says,

(14)

**When you've grasped as well as I the essential points
Of each of the three principal paths explained,
Then go into isolation, my son, make mighty
Efforts, and quickly win your ultimate wish.**

This verse is a very personal instruction that Lord Tsongkapa, out of deepest feelings of love, has granted to all of us who hope to follow him. He is saying to us, "Go first and try to grasp the essential points of the three principal paths as I have explained them above; do so by listening to teachings on them over and over again.

"Then use contemplation to gain a recognition of the truth of these points; do this in retreat, staying in a state of isolation where you cut all ties to this life, and live according to the principle of having few material wants and being satisfied with whatever you have – keep your concerns and activities few. Make mighty efforts at this practice; act quickly, never lose yourself to putting off your practice; and then win, my son, the ultimate wish of all your many lifetimes."

THE THREE PRINCIPAL PATHS

Written by Tsongkapa the Great, King of the Dharma

I bow to all the high and holy lamas.

As far as I am able I'll explain
The essence of all high teachings of the Victors,
The path that all their holy sons commend,
The entry point for the fortunate seeking freedom.

Listen with a pure mind, fortunate ones
Who have no craving for the pleasures of life,
And who, to make leisure and fortune meaningful, strive
To turn their minds to the path which pleases the Victors.

There's no way to end, without pure renunciation,
This striving for pleasant results in the ocean of life.
It's because of their hankering life as well that beings
Are fettered, so seek renunciation first.

Leisure and fortune are hard to find, life's not long;
Think it constantly, stop desire for this life.
Think over and over how deeds and their fruits never fail,
And the cycle's suffering: stop desire for the future.

When you've meditated thus and feel not even
A moment's wish for the goods things of cyclic life,
And when you begin to think both night and day
Of achieving freedom, you've found renunciation.

Renunciation though, can never bring
The total bliss of matchless Buddhahood
Unless it's bound by the purest wish; and so,
The wise seek the high wish for enlightenment.

They're swept along on four fierce river currents,
Chained up tight in past deeds, hard to undo,
Stuffed in a steel cage of grasping "self,"
Smothered in the pitch-black ignorance.

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In a limitless round they're born, and in their births
Are tortured by three sufferings without a break;
Think how your mothers feel, think of what's happening
To them: try to develop this highest wish.

You may master renunciation and the wish,
But unless you have the wisdom perceiving reality
You cannot cut the root of cyclic life.
Make efforts in ways then to perceive interdependence.

A person's entered the path that pleases the Buddhas
When for all objects, in the cycle or beyond,
He sees that cause and effect can never fail,
And when for him they lose all solid appearance.

You've yet to realize the thought of the Able
As long as two ideas seem to you disparate:
The appearance of things – infallible interdependence;
And emptiness – beyond taking any position.

At some point they no longer alternate, come together;
Just seeing that interdependence never fails
Brings realization that destroys how you hold to objects,
And then your analysis with view is complete.

In addition, the appearance prevents the existence extreme;
Emptiness that of non-existence, and if
You see how emptiness shows in cause and effect
You'll never be stolen off by extreme views.

When you've grasped as well as I the essential points
Of each of the three principal paths explained,
Then go into isolation, my son, make mighty
Efforts, and quickly win your ultimate wish.

*These instructions were imparted to Ngawang Drakpa, a friar from the Tsako district, by
that very learned Buddhist monk, the glorious Lobsang Drakpa.*