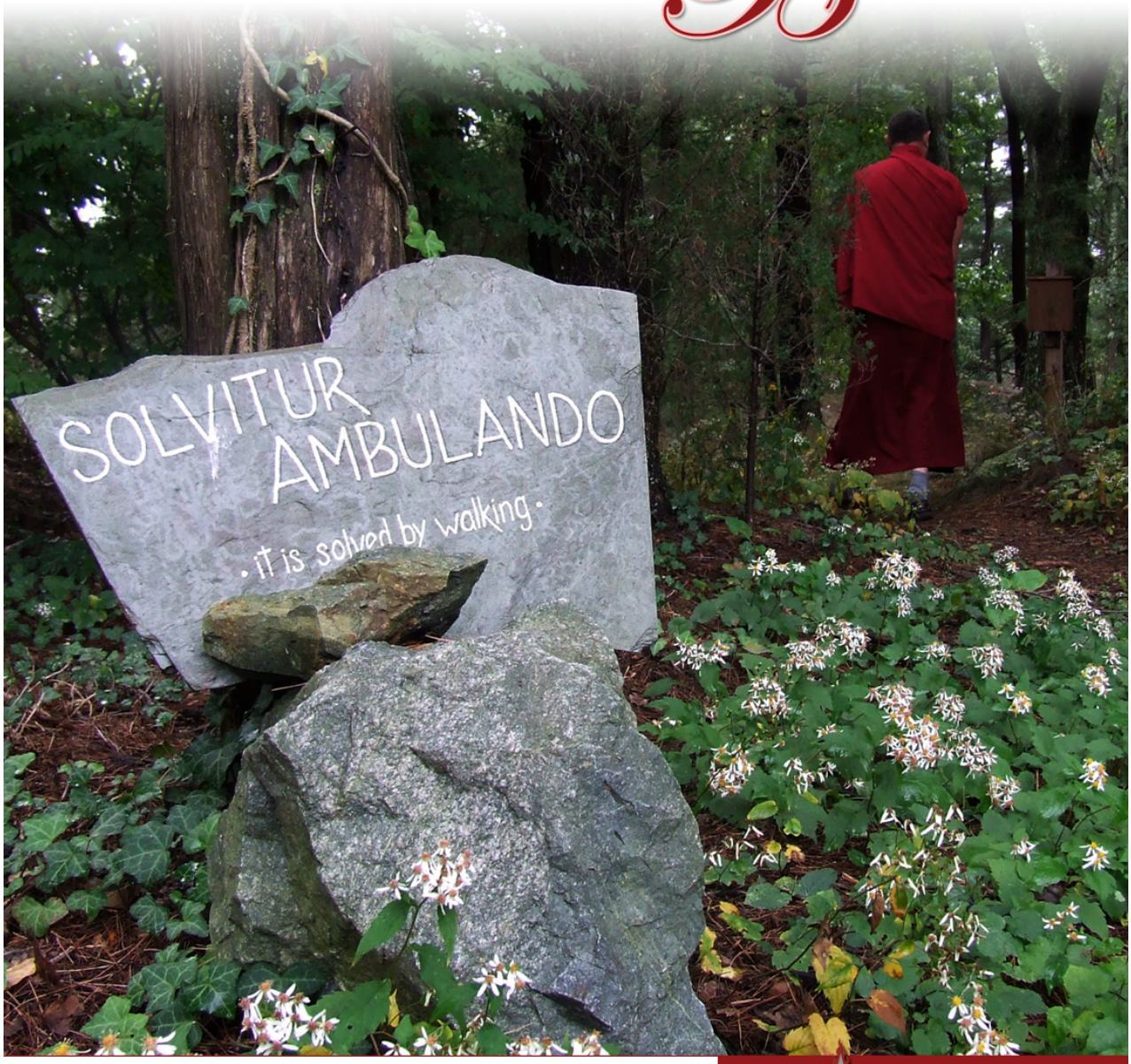
4th Annual Thanksgiving Retreat

# Blissful Path to Bliss




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# The Path to Bliss

**The Path to Bliss** by the HH First Panchen Lama, Lobsang Chökyi Gyeltsen (1570–1662)
Translated by Geshe Michael Roach (ACIP text S5944)
Reading for Lama Marut's Blissful Path to Bliss Retreat on the Lam Rim.

Herein contained is The Path to Bliss, a Dissection Text on the Steps of the Path to Enlightenment, to be used for Traveling to Omniscience.

I bow down, in every moment, at the feet of my high and holy Lama—who is completely indivisible from the Lord of the Able Ones, the Keeper of the Diamond. I beg you to take me after you, out of your infinite love.

Here we will present the profound steps of the path to enlightenment—a true means, for those who possess enough goodness, to travel to the land of enlightenment. We proceed in two stages: an explanation of how to rely on a spiritual Guide, which is the very root of the path; and a presentation of the steps for training ones mind, once you have come to rely upon this Guide.

The first of these two has two parts: an explanation of what we do during our actual meditation sessions, and then what we do in between our meditation sessions. . . .

## How They Come in the Darkest of Days

This brings us to the actual practice, which has two parts: the instructions for relying upon our spiritual Guide in our thoughts, and the instructions for relying upon them in our actions. The first of these has two sections of its own—these are developing an attitude of faith, which is the very root of the practice; and learning to respect our Lama, a feeling which comes in us through remembering all the kindness they have showered upon us.

From within the heart of my Lama, the Lord of the Able Ones, fly forth all of the Lamas with whom I enjoy an actual dharma relationship. I picture them then seated in mid-air before me, and I make supplication to them in the following words.

"All of these here in front of me, all of my spiritual Guides, are actual enlightened Beings.

"It's just the way that the totally enlightened one, Lord Buddha, has described it in the precious teachings of the secret way. He states there that the victorious Buddha, the Keeper of the Diamond, will come in the days of degeneration and show himself in the physical form of our human spiritual Guide, and thus undertake deeds of benefit for all living creatures.

"All of my spiritual guides here before me are only showing themselves in separate physical forms. In reality it is only the one victorious Buddha, the Keeper of the Diamond, showing himself in the form of a human spiritual Guide, in order to more easily lead all of us who lack sufficient goodness to see a Buddha directly.

"And so now I and all my mothers, all these other living beings, beg you my Lama, my Angel, to bless us so that we may actually see all these spiritual Guides as the Lord of the Able Ones, the Keeper of the Diamond."

Think then that, because of our supplication, a stream of nectar descends from the physical part of the Lama atop our head (and then the process above is repeated).

[*The process above continues with—There are five kinds of nectar, each with its own light, and then:*] The light sinks into the bodies, and the minds, of every living being—both myself and every other.

The nectar cleans away the various obstacles that relate to the topic of this particular section, and triggers extraordinary realizations—within the minds of both myself and all the other suffering beings around me—that relate again to this specific section.]

Now the following thought might come into your mind: "Certainly it's the case that an enlightened Being has eliminated within themselves every undesirable quality, and possesses all good qualities. But we can see that my spiritual Guides here still have this or that negative quality, fostered within them by the three inner poisons. As such they cannot be real enlightened Beings."

But the fact is that these things only appear this way to us due to our own impure vision of the world. The same thing happened in olden times with the follower of the Buddha named Lekpay Karma. He saw everything that our Teacher, Lord Buddha, ever did as being something devious.

Asanga too saw the holy Loving One as a female dog. And there was Maitripa, who saw Shawaripa, a veritable lord among yogis, committing highly inappropriate acts such as killing pigs.

And I'm just the same as them. It's not that I see negative qualities in my spiritual Guides because they actually have them; it's only due to my own impure vision of the world.

As such, we must make then the following supplication:

"I beg you, my Lama, my Angel, to bless me and every other suffering being there is, that within our hearts we may never for even a split second imagine that any of these spiritual Guides before us have any negative quality at all. Please bless us that we may with great ease develop the type of faith that allows us to see everything they ever do as reflecting extraordinary spiritual attainments."

Think then that, because of our supplication, a stream of nectar descends from the physical part of the Lama atop our head (and then the process above is repeated).

## The Offering that Pleases Most

Here secondly are the instructions for learning to respect our Lama. Picture the spiritual Guides before you once more, very clearly, and think to yourself as follows.

These Guides have been incredibly kind to me. I have reached a point where I possess some grasp of the profound path that can take me, easily, to that highest freedom where I am beyond each and every pain of the cycle of life in general, and more particularly the sufferings of the three lower realms. It can take me with ease as well to the high state of a totally enlightened Buddha. All of this is due to the kindness of these spiritual Guides.

As such, I should now make the following supplication:

"I beg you, my Lama, my Angel, to grant me the blessing of being ever mindful of the extraordinary kindness that these spiritual Guides have shown me, and thus easily develop the highest respect for them."

Think then that, because of our supplication, a stream of nectar descends from the physical part of the Lama atop our head (and then the process above is repeated).

Here next is the second part from before: learning to rely upon our spiritual Guide in our actions. Again focus clearly on the spiritual Guides before you; keep this vision in mind as you make the following supplication:

"I swear that I will give away my body, my life, and all the things I own—everything there is—for these my spiritual Guides. Most especially I will please them with the

offering of carrying out what they ask me to do. I beg you, my Lama, my Angel, to grant me the ability to do all this."

Think then that, because of our supplication, a stream of nectar descends from the physical part of the Lama atop our head (and then the process above is repeated).

Here is the third step from above: how to conclude our session. Continue asking your Lama Angel for help, maintaining the vision of them atop your head. Recite your mantras, and then finally dedicate all the good karma from your session—with prayers that come fiercely from your heart, send it to both the immediate and the ultimate goals that you and others all wish to achieve.

This brings us to the second general topic from before, which is what we should do between our meditation sessions. During these in between periods we should review those highest of all teachings—the word of Lord Buddha—along with the later commentaries upon these teachings, particularly the instruction on how to rely upon our spiritual Guide.

With great mindfulness and awareness, throughout the day, we should make great efforts in the practices of a true yogi: monitoring our vows, and to observing moderation in what we eat, and never wasting our time just sitting around.

Furthermore we should exert ourselves in learning the yogic practices that are carried out in our sleep; and those relating to washing ourselves and eating our meals.

## Our One Opportunity

Next comes our second general subject: a description of the steps that we use to train our minds. We will proceed in two parts: some urgent advice that we should try to get the very essence out of our spiritual opportunities and resources; and then an explanation of the method for getting the essence out of these opportunities and resources.

The advice comes in two parts of its own: what we do during our actual meditation sessions, and then what we do between the sessions. . . .

Here . . . is what we do during the actual session. This has two steps: a contemplation of how important our spiritual opportunities and resources are; and a contemplation of how difficult they are to find.

Maintain the meditative vision of your Lama, the Angel, atop your head, and then take your mind through the following train of thought.

"I possess both spiritual opportunity—in that I have the time to practice the holy Dharma; and spiritual resources—since I enjoy all the outer and inner conditions needed for this practice.

"To put it briefly, the body and mind that all of here possess—endowed as they are with these spiritual opportunities and resources—is something of extraordinary importance. Using this body and mind, we can practice the perfection of giving, which then brings to us the exquisite physical form and material possessions of the higher realms. So too we can practice the ethical life; and patience; and all the other perfections.

"Most especially, the various vows can grow with this particular body and mind; and so we can even attain, with ease, the high state of an enlightened Being—in but a single, brief life here in the age of degeneration."

As such then we should make the following supplication:

"Now I possess this precious body and mind, endowed with every spiritual opportunity and resource—something which is difficult to find and, when found, of supreme importance. I swear then that I will never spend this life meaninglessly; I swear that I will get the very essence of it. And I beg you, my Lama, my Angel, to bless me, and give me the ability to do so."

Think then that, because of this supplication, a stream of nectar descends from the physical part of the Lama atop our head (and then the process above is repeated).

Here secondly is the contemplation upon just how difficult it is to find these spiritual opportunities and resources. Again maintain the vision of your Lama, Angel, sitting at the tip of your head—and take yourself through the following train of thought.

The spiritual opportunities and resources that I have reached now are not only incredibly important, but also infinitely difficult to attain.

Most of the different types of beings—humans and the rest—spend most of their time acting in ways such as the ten different types of harmful deeds. And acting this way then prevents them from attaining these same opportunities and resources.

More particularly, there are certain things needed in order to attain this perfect kind of mind and body, complete as it is with the various spiritual opportunities and resources. First we must observe a perfectly ethical life, as a foundation. This must be accompanied then by the perfections of giving and the rest. And finally we must make the passage between death and rebirth with the purest of prayers. People who manage to attain these and the other necessary causes for a body and mind like the ones we have now are in themselves extremely few.

Compared to falling into one of the realms of misery, as an animal or one of the rest—the simple fact that we have reached one of the higher realms is something that borders upon the impossible. And compared to all the places within the higher realms that we might have found ourselves in, coming to a body and mind like this—endowed with all the spiritual opportunities and resources—is infinitely rare: about as common as a star shining in the noontime sky.

As such I will never waste this body and mind, endowed with spiritual opportunities and resources that are so hard to find and—once found—so very important. I have attained this kind of body and mind only this once, and I swear I will get the very essence of it.

How will I get this essence? I will rely upon my Lama, and rely upon him or her as being indivisible from a Buddha; and then I will put into practice the very essence of the advices of the highest way. In this way I will easily attain the high state of an enlightened Being, in this one life itself. And so I make this supplication: "I beg you, my Lama, my Angel, to bless me, that I may be able to do so."

Think then that, because of this supplication, a stream of nectar in five different colors of light descends from the physical part of the Lama atop our head. The light sinks into the bodies, and the minds, of every living being—both myself and every other.

The nectar cleans away the various obstacles that relate to the topic of this particular section, and triggers extraordinary realizations—within the minds of both myself and all the other suffering beings around me—that relate again to this specific section.

As far as the third part—that is, what we are to do at the conclusion of our session—follow what was said before. Regarding the second step too, on how to use the time between meditation sessions, you should also proceed as we outlined above: do things like reviewing the high words of Lord Buddha, and the commentaries that elucidate these words, on the subject of our spiritual opportunities and resources.

## Death the Enemy Will Surely Come

Here next is the second general topic from before: the instructions on how to get the very essence from our spiritual opportunities and resources. There are three different sections to this point: training our minds in the steps of the path which are shared with people of lesser scope; training our minds in the steps of the path which are shared with people of medium scope; and training our minds in the steps of the path for people of greater scope.

The first of these three sections contains two parts of its own: instructions for what to do during your actual meditation sessions, and then what to do between these sessions. . . .

Here . . . is how the actual session goes. This has four parts: the contemplation on our impermanence, our coming death; the contemplation on the sufferings of the lower realms; practicing coming for shelter to the Three Jewels; and developing faith, based on reasoning, in the laws of karma and its consequences. Here is the first of the four.

Again, maintain the vision of your Lama Angel atop your head, and follow this train of thought in your mind:

"The body and mind I've found now—endowed with those opportunities and resources that are so difficult to obtain and, once obtained, are so important—will quickly be destroyed: it is absolutely certain that death will come to me.

"And this death, coming to me as it does because of factors which exist both outside me and within me, is not something that I can ever prevent. There is no way to add extra time onto my life; it leaks away without a moment's pause. My death is certain, and even in the hours left to me I will never have enough time to practice the Dharma.

"Not only do I have to die, but there is absolutely no certainty when I will have to die. We live on the continent of Dzambu, where the lifespan is not something which is fixed in length. There are millions of things that can kill us, and only a very few which help to keep us alive. And our bodies are like water bubbles; fragile and weak. And so we can't be certain when it is we will die.

"And on the day that I do die there is absolutely nothing at all except the Dharma that can help me in any way. It doesn't matter how much my friends and family may care for me; and they can even be standing at my side when the time comes—but there is no way that I can take even a single one along with me then.

"I doesn't matter either how many masses of lovely money and things I may possess when the time comes—there is not a single atom of them that I can carry in my hand with me when I go. I will even be ripped away from the very flesh and bone that has been part of me all along. And so what possible good can it do me to be attached to any of the good things of this life?

"Death the enemy will surely come; and no one can say the day he will come. I am in danger of dying even today. And so I must now make some preparations for death.

"The preparation that I can make for death is to stop this craving I have for any of the good things of this life; and then undertake some true practice of the Dharma."

Stop then and make this supplication: "I beg you, my Lama, my Angel, to help me make this preparation."

The nectar in five different colors of light then descends into me again from the physical part of the Lama Angel atop my head. It fills the bodies and minds of myself and every other living being. It cleans away all the obstacles that relate to the topic of this particular section, and triggers—within the minds of myself and all the others—extraordinary spiritual insight into this same topic.

## Only Two Choices

Here next is the second of the four steps mentioned above: contemplating the sufferings of the lower realms. Once now again, maintain the vision of the Lama Angel atop your head, and go through the following thoughts.

"And so I do now possess a body and mind endowed with every spiritual opportunity and resource—something so difficult to find, and so important once it is found. And yet they will be very quickly destroyed.

"But once they are destroyed, it's not as if I just cease to exist. I must go and take yet another birth. And there are only two options of where I will take this birth: it will either be in the lower realms, or in the higher realms.

"Suppose I take my birth in the lower realms. It may be as one of the hell beings, tormented by the unspeakable pain of fire and ice, and everything else we think of when we hear of these tortures.

"Or it could be as one of the craving spirits, tormented by the unspeakable pain of hunger and thirst, and everything else we think of when we hear of these tortures.

"Or it could be as one of the animals, tormented by the unspeakable pain of dullness and ignorance, and everything else we think of when we hear of these tortures.

"There is thus simply no way that I could ever bear these different sufferings of the lower realms. And so I supplicate my Lama, my Angel, in the following words:

"Now is the hour that I have found this body and mind, endowed with all the various opportunities and resources—so hard to find, and so important when found. And so in this very moment I swear that I will attain the high state of my Lama, the Buddha—the state where I have left behind each and every suffering of the lower realms. And I beg you, my Lama, my Angel, to be able to do this." (Then continue as before.)

## True Shelter

Here next is the third of the four topics from above: practicing coming for shelter to the Three Jewels. A great mass of holy beings now flies forth from the body of the Lama atop my head: Lamas, close Angels, the Three Jewels, man and woman Warriors, Dharma Protectors and Defenders. They fill the entire sky.

Bring to mind again clearly the vision of all the different beings and objects of shelter circling your Angel and Lama atop your head. Hold your thoughts on all the extraordinary qualities of your Lama's holy body, speech, mind, and sacred deeds.

Feel then a fierce longing and pray to yourself, "I beg you in this very instant to shelter me and every other living being, every mother I have ever had, from the terrors of the cycle of pain in general, and especially from the torture of the lower realms."

Come to them then for shelter, saying the following words a hundred times over, or even a thousand, or ten thousand, or a hundred thousand times:

"I come for shelter to my Lama, close Angel, Three Jewels."

Then too take the time to learn the various immediate and ultimate benefits of coming for shelter to the Three Jewels, and then train yourself properly in the various commitments related to coming for shelter.

## Laws of the Universe

Here is the fourth step from above: developing faith, based on reasoning, in the laws of karma and its consequences. Again, go back to that vision of your Lama Angel sitting atop your head, and with them there go through the following sequence of thoughts:

That highest of all spoken words—the teachings of the victorious Buddhas—presents the following principles of karma and its consequences. If we conduct ourselves in a virtuous way, then the only result that can come from this cause is happiness, and never pain. When we conduct ourselves in a non-virtuous way, then the only result which can come from this cause is pain, and never happiness.

And even if the cause is relatively small—even if we behave in comparatively minor virtuous or non-virtuous ways—then the result (if nothing else occurs that would prevent it from doing so) that comes from this cause is incredibly large.

And if there is no cause—that is, if we don't undertake actions which are either virtuous or non-virtuous—then there can be no corresponding result, no experience of happiness or pain. If on the other hand there is a cause—which means, if we do undertake these two of virtuous or non-virtuous action—then (again, if nothing else occurs that would prevent them from doing so) this cause can never just wither away on its own: it is absolutely certain that it will produce the corresponding effect, of either happiness or pain.

It is stated, finally, that this karma becomes much more powerful according to certain factors: the person towards whom we commit the action; our state of mind as we commit it; the nature of any physical objects involved; and the kind of person we are.

Undertake to develop then a kind of faith, based upon reasoning, in these various principles of karma stated by the Buddhas.

Make fierce efforts to do what is right, and to avoid what is wrong. Seek to carry out even the very slightest form of good deed, whether it be one of the ten positive actions or anything of the like. Seek too to avoid sullying your actions or words or thoughts with even the most insignificant form of bad deed—with any of the ten negative actions, or anything of that kind.

Make then the following supplication too: "I beg you, my Lama, my Angel, to give me your blessing, so I may be able to keep this too."

Think then once more that the nectar in five different colors of light descends into you, from the physical part of the Lama Angel atop your head. It fills the bodies and minds of yourself and every other living being. It cleans away all the obstacles that relate to the topic of this particular section, and triggers—within the minds of yourself and all the others—extraordinary spiritual insight into this same topic.

Remember though too that—even if we are able to make these fierce efforts to do right—well the spiritual countermeasures within our minds are rather feeble, whereas our negative emotions are incredibly powerful. And so in the unlikely event that we do dirty ourselves with some negative deed, then we should undertake the practice of the four powers, to admit our mistakes and resolve to avoid making them again in the future.

As for the third part, the conclusion of the session, follow the steps from before. Repeat the suggestions from above as well for the next section, on what to do between your meditation sessions. That is, you can do things like reviewing the teachings of the Buddha and commentaries upon those teachings which treat the subjects covered in the steps of the path that are shared with persons of lesser capacity.

This completes our presentation on training one's mind in the steps of the path which are shared with people of lesser capacity.

## The Cycle of Pain

Here now is the second main section: training our minds in the steps of the path which are shared with people of medium spiritual capacity. We proceed in two steps: learning to develop an aspiration for freedom, and then establishing just what the path for traveling to this freedom is like. . . .

This brings us to the actual meditation. Here there are two steps: a contemplation upon the pain of the cycle in general; and then a contemplation upon the various specific sufferings of each form of life. Here is the first.

Maintaining the vision of your Lama Angel seated atop your head, take yourself through the following train of thought.

If I manage to train myself properly in that form of ethical living where I give up the ten negative deeds, then it's true that I will attain the high state of one of the better rebirths, so far beyond the pain of the three lower births.

But the fact is that—unless I can go further and reach that freedom where I have eliminated all suffering from its very root—then I will never enjoy a single instant of happiness.

Suppose that a particularly wicked criminal has been sentenced to die at the end of one month, with no chance of a pardon. And even during that month he must undergo terrible suffering, subjected each day to a whole range of punishments: the torture of molten drops, being beaten with clubs, and so on.

Now he might be the type of prisoner who has friends in high places—and so for the time being he may be spared the pain of beatings and the rest. Still, with every day that goes by he comes closer and closer to the pain of death itself—and so there's no way he can ever pause and enjoy but a moment of mental peace.

All of us here now are just the same. Until that day when we manage to attain freedom and eliminate our pain from its very root, we must still suffer. It doesn't matter what high state of rebirth we might be able to reach—even then the momentum of the good karma we did in the past wears itself out, and then we drop to the three realms of misery. And there we must suffer, for a vast length of time, suffer in every way there is, and suffer intensely

And once we are here in this cycle off pain—once our past deeds and negative emotions have forced us to take a birth here—then nothing we ever encounter can be anything else but pain itself.

Enemies for example turn to friends, and friends turn to enemies: nothing is sure about those who help us, and those who hurt us.

No matter what kinds of pleasant things we manage to get here in this cycle, we can never reach some final point of satisfaction. Not only that, but these good things actually only increase in us our feelings of desire—and so in the end they only lead more suffering to our door.

No matter how beautiful or strong a body we may have been born with, we must still give it up—as we have countless times before. And so nothing is sure about the body we've been born with.

For time with no beginning then we have been dragged across the border from death to another suffering life; and so there is no end in sight to the births we will still have to take.

Whatever small good thing we happen to get here in the cycle of pain, we must in the end lose it; and so there is nothing sure about any of the good things that come to us.

When we pass then on to our next life, we must do so alone—no one can go with us. And so there is nothing sure about those who are with us now.

Given that all this is true, I will do whatever I can to use this time, these moments where I've attained the various spiritual opportunities and resources—things that are incredibly difficult to find; things that, once found, are of such extraordinary potential. No matter what now, I will achieve the high state of my Buddha Lama, the state of one who has rid themselves of every suffering of the cycle of pain.

And I beg you, my Lama, my Angel, to grant me the ability to do so.

Think then that, because of your supplication, a stream of nectar descends from the physical part of the Lama atop your head. There are five kinds of nectar, each with its own light.

The light sinks into the bodies, and the minds, of every living being—both myself and every other. It cleans away all the obstacles to our practicing the topics of this particular section, and triggers within the minds of both myself and everyone else extraordinary realizations of these same points.

## The Very Being We Are

Here next is the second meditation step from before; that is, a contemplation upon the various specific sufferings of each form of life in the cycle. Begin, again, in meditation with your Lama Angel atop your head. And then lead yourself through the following train of thought:

Once we have taken on these impure parts of a person, then we never experience anything other than pain.

The pain of the three lower realms needn't even be mentioned. But from the very moment that we even step into a human body and mind like these, then we begin to experience hunger and thirst; and the inexorable decay of the body; and being

separated from what we like, those we love; and meeting up with what we don't like, those we hate.

We try to get the things we want, but we can't; and things that we don't want strike us suddenly, at any unexpected moment. And then there are always the four of being forced to take this birth, and to get old, and to fall sick, to die—and all the rest.

But then suppose we take on the impure body and mind of a lesser pleasure being. They too have their own special suffering: minds tormented by envy for the glory and wealth of the full pleasure beings, and then physical agony which strikes them as they act on their envy.

And should we instead take on the impure body and mind of one of the full pleasure beings who live in the desire realm, then we must undergo their particular pain: battling against the lesser pleasure beings, who chop off their limbs, and tear open their bodies, and kill them, and so on.

And then there is that special pain they have when, completely against their will, the five omens of imminent death come to them: they suffer as they foresee how the wonders of the realms of pleasure will be ripped from them, and how they will then be forced to enter the tortures of the three lower realms.

And even should we take on the impure body and mind of a pleasure being in one of the two higher realms, still we must undergo the limitless suffering of having no control at all over staying there: of watching the momentum of our previous good karma wear out, throwing us down to one of the three births of misery.

In short, any impure body and mind that we ever take on can only provide us a place where in that same life we re subjected to sufferings like taking birth, and aging, getting sick, and dying. Even worse, they act in that life and the lives beyond it to bring us both the suffering of outright pain, and the suffering of change.

And the simple start of an impure body and mind like this is enough to insure that we will live in a body and mind whose very nature is to collapse, completely at the mercy of the karma and mental afflictions that we had before.

And so now, no matter what, I must achieve the high state of my Buddha Lama, free of the cycle of pain which consists of the very body and mind I have now taken on. I beg You, my Angel and Lama, to bless me, and grant me the ability to do so.

Think then that, because of your supplication, a stream of nectar descends from the physical part of the Lama atop your head. There are five kinds of nectar, each with its own light.

The light sinks into the bodies, and the minds, of every living being—both myself and every other. It cleans away all the obstacles to our practicing the topics of this particular section, and triggers within the minds of both myself and everyone else extraordinary realizations of these same points.

For the third part of the meditation—the conclusion—proceed the same as before. As for the second period, the one between your meditation sessions, also proceed as before—devoting yourself to activities such as reviewing teachings by Lord Buddha himself, and the great commentaries upon them, which describe how each and every part of the cycle of pain in which we live is never anything but true suffering.

## The Chain of Events

Here next is the second step from the beginning of this section: establishing just what the path for traveling to freedom is like. This step as well has two parts of its own: what to do during our meditation sessions, and what to do inbetween these sessions. . . .

Now the actual meditation here goes like this. Maintain a continual awareness of your Angel Lama atop your head, and then take yourself through the following train of thought.

In and of itself, the mind is simply neutral. But then it begins to go through a certain process: first it looks upon either me or what is mine, and an idea develops that these exist through some nature of their own.

And then, all because it is grasping onto some self-nature, the mind starts to pass through a whole range of seeing things the wrong way: it begins to have feelings of liking for the people and things I consider to be on my side; and feelings of dislike for those I consider to belong to some other side; feelings of pride where I consider myself better than anyone else, and so on.

All because of this, the mind begins to develop wrong views and all kinds of doubts about the Teacher who has explained how things have no self; and about the principles of karma and its consequences which this Teacher has also enunciated; about the four higher truths; and about the Three Jewels and so on, refusing to believe in any of these.

And all because of this, then all the other mental afflictions begin to grow and spread. Because of all this, we start to collect karma. And then, despite the fact that we don't at all want to, we begin to undergo this experience of a huge variety of sufferings, here in the cycle of pain.

Every single form of pain that exists then can be traced back, ultimately, to ignorance at its very root. As such, I will—no matter what—attain the high state of my Buddha Lama, in which I have eliminated from their root each and every suffering of this cycle of pain.

And in order to do so, I will practice—in the proper way—the path of the three precious trainings.

Most especially, I will properly observe the ethical way of life, in whatever forms I have committed myself to follow, and never abandon it—even at the cost of my life. And this is because it is of such tremendous benefit if I observe these commitments properly, and equally such a tremendous wrongness if I fail to do so.

Now since it's the case that failing to understand ones ethical commitments is an open door to transgressing them, I will to prevent this from happening devote myself to learning these commitments clearly from my Teacher, and thus come to understand them well.

The attitude of disrespect is another open door to transgressing ones ethical commitments; and so in order to prevent this from occurring I will always show the deepest respect for the Teacher, and for the commitments they have granted me, and for all my spiritual companions who are keeping the way of purity and properly observing these commitments.

A lack of awareness during the day is another open door to transgressing ones ethical commitments; and so in order to prevent this from occurring I will try always to maintain my awareness during the day, cultivating the attitudes of watchfulness, recollecting myself, shame, and consideration for the feelings of others.

Allowing the mind to entertain different negative emotions at any given time is yet another open door to transgressing ones ethical commitments. To prevent then the emotion of liking things in an ignorant way I will cultivate an awareness of how truly repulsive things are. To prevent the emotion of disliking things in an ignorant way, I will cultivate love for others. And to prevent the dark ignorance which underlies both of these, I will cultivate an understanding of principles such as dependent origination. In these ways then I will see to it that I am able to follow a practice of the ethical life which is completely pure, unsullied by any kind of imperfection.

And I beg you, my Lama, my Angel, to give me your blessing, that I may always be able to do so.

Think then that, because of your supplication, a stream of nectar descends from the physical part of the Lama atop your head. There are five kinds of nectar, each with its own light.

The light sinks into the bodies, and the minds, of every living being—both myself and every other. It clears away all the obstacles to our practicing the topics of this particular section, and triggers within the minds of both myself and everyone else extraordinary realizations of these same points.

Carry out the third point here—the conclusion—in the same way we did before. As for the second step of what to do in between your meditation sessions, also continue as before—this time reviewing scriptures that discuss the various commitments which relate to the vows of individual liberation.

This then completes our explanation of the steps of the path which are shared with people of medium spiritual capacity.

## First, Equanimity

Here then begins the third major category of the steps of the path: Training our minds in the steps that belong to the path of people of the highest spiritual capacity. These steps are presented in two stages—how to develop the Wish for enlightenment, and how to train oneself in the activities of a bodhisattva, once you have developed this Wish.

The first of these comes in two parts of its own: the actual practices for developing the Wish, and then how to commit oneself to the Wish in a formal ritual.

There are two separate sets of instructions for gaining the Wish: developing it through the advices on seven steps of cause and effect; and developing it through treating oneself and others the same, and exchanging oneself and others. Here we begin with the first.

In the first of these two methods, before anything we try to develop a sense of equanimity towards every living being. And then after that we take ourselves through the various steps, from recognizing that all beings are our mother up to the Wish for enlightenment itself.

And so now we proceed in two parts: what to do during our meditation sessions, and then what to do inbetween these sessions. . . . .

Here . . . is the actual meditation. Maintain the vision of your Angel Lama atop your head, and then visualize sitting before you a person towards whom you feel neutral—someone who has neither helped you nor harmed you.

Practice then a sense of equanimity towards them, free of that attitude where you either like them because they are close to you, or dislike them because they are not so close to you. They, on their part, simply want to be happy, and to avoid any pain. And we cannot go on feeling sometimes as though they are close to us, and wanting to help them; and then at other times feeling that they are not so close to us, and wanting to hurt them.

Go then through the part where you ask your Angel Lama for their blessing, that you might actually be able to develop this attitude of equanimity.

Once you have achieved equanimity towards this neutral person, then begin to visualize sitting before you someone that you know, who is appealing to you. Practice this feeling of equanimity towards them too. Do the meditation by trying to put a stop to whatever attachment you may feel towards this person: think to yourself, "The only reason that I don't already feel equanimity towards this person is that I have this attraction for them. But being attached to those I found appealing in the past is what has forced me now to take this birth in the cycle of pain."

Once you have reached a state of equanimity toward this appealing person, then begin to visualize in front of you someone that you know, whom you find unappealing, and start to practice equanimity towards them. Do the meditation trying to stop any feelings of dislike for the person: think to yourself, "The reason I don't already feel equanimity toward this person is that I have somehow made up my mind that I can never get along with them—and this has caused in me these feelings of dislike. But if I can't achieve a sense of equanimity toward them, then there is absolutely no chance for me to develop the Wish for enlightenment."

Once you've reached a sense of equanimity toward this person that you find unappealing, then move on to a new visualization. This time picture two people sitting in front of you. One is someone you find appealing to the extreme: someone like your mother. The other is someone that you find unappealing to the extreme: like your worst enemy.

For their own part, these two people are exactly the same, in that all they want is to be happy, and to avoid pain. For my part, the one person here whom I correctly consider a

loved one has—over the course of beginningless time in the cycle of pain—served too as my most hated foe, more times then could ever be counted.

And the other person here, the one that I currently consider my enemy, has in this same beginningless cycle of pain also served as my own mother, and cared for me with intense love, in more lifetimes than numbers could ever count.

And so now which of these two people should I like, and which one should I dislike? It's time for me to school myself in equanimity, and stop this attitude of liking those who are close to me and disliking those who are not so close to me.

Go again then through the part where you ask your Lama Angel to bless you, that you may be able to do so.

Once you have attained a sense of equanimity towards these last two people, then continue on to practicing equanimity towards every single living being there is. The way you do this is as follows.

Think to yourself, "For their part, every living being that exists wants to be happy, and to avoid pain.

"And for my part, every single on of them is family. As such, I should be feeling a sense of equanimity towards all of then—an attitude where I am totally free of the habit of liking those who are close to me and disliking those who are not so close to me. I must stop this tendency where I consider some people close to me and try to help them, while considering others not so close, and trying to hurt them."

Go then once more through the part where you beg you Angel Lama to help you actually reach this attitude.

[*Conclude the meditation as before, and in between sessions do things like reviewing this subject in scripture.*]

## They Really Have Been Our Mother

Here then is how we meditate upon all the steps from recognizing that every living being is our mother, all the way to the Wish for enlightenment–now that we have completed the necessary preliminary of equanimity.

Again, continue to maintain the vision of your Angel Lama atop your head, as you take yourself through the following contemplation:

"Now just how is it that we can say that every single living being is family to me? Well if I really think about it, this self-perpetuating cycle of pain has been going on for time with no beginning; which means as well that there was never any first birth that I ever took in this cycle. And then I have gone on in a flow, from birth to birth–so there is not a single country or place that I can point to and say that I was never born in.

In fact, I've been born in each one of them more times than numbers can possibly count. And there's not a single form of life that exists which I can point to and say, "I have never taken on *this* kind of body." The fact is that I have worn every kind of body there is, for times that are again beyond all number.

So too there is not a single living creature that I can point to and say, "This one has never been my mother." Each one of them has been my mother for more times than numbers can count.

Even more, there is not a single living creature that I can point to and say that "This one has never been my mother in a life that I took as human being." In fact, they have been a human mother to me for times beyond number, and will be so now again. Which means most certainly they *are* my own mother, and have cared for me with infinite kindness.

Now some objections may come up in your mind, like: "But the actual number of living beings is infinite. As such, it is physically impossible that they are all mothers of mine."

And yet it doesn't follow that–simply because the number of living beings is infinite–then they cannot all be mothers to me. The number of lives that I have taken in this cycle of pain is just as infinite as the number of living beings that there are. And so it really is the case that every one of them is my own mother.

Or your mind may come up with a different objection: "But now since I and all these other living beings don't realize who we are to each other, then they really aren't my mother."

And yet it's not true that–simply because we fail to recognize who we are to each other–then they are not really my mother. Even in this present life we can see lots of cases where mothers and their children get separated, and may not later realize who they are to each other.

Or perhaps a third objection: "I can admit that, in lifetimes that have already passed, then every living being may have been my mother. But what's past is past–and so it's wrong to say that they are mothers of mine."

Well then (you should answer yourself), I suppose that anyone who was your mother yesterday can never be your mother today–because what's past is past, including the person who was your mother yesterday.

And so, you see, there's absolutely no difference between the person who was your mother yesterday and the person who is your mother today, *from the point of view that each of them is your own mother*. Neither is there the slightest difference in the way that they have loved and taken care of you.

Nor, you see, is there any difference then between all those who have been your mother throughout the entire string of your past lives and the person who is your mother in this present life. They are all equally your mother, and equally have they all loved and taken care of you. And so the simple, undeniable fact is that every single living being is my own mother.

[*Conclude the meditation as before, and in between sessions do things like reviewing this subject in scripture.*]

## Paying Back Their Kindness

Once you have gained some fluency in the meditation on recognizing that every living being is your mother, then go on to the next step, which is thinking about all the care and kindness that they have shown to us. The way to do this is as follows.

Maintain that same vision, of your Angel Lama seated atop your head. And then in front of you picture your mother in this life–not as she looked in her younger years, but as aged and frail. Next take yourself through the following train of thought.

My mother here has been my mother not only in this life, but for times beyond any counting in the beginningless string of all my lives.

And she has paid me such infinite kindness–in this current life, in particular, she first began to love and care for me while I still lay within her womb. Then, after she had given birth to me, she set me down in soft, gentle blankets; or raised me up joyfully just to look at me again; or pressed me lovingly to the warmth of her body.

She greeted me always with a smile of endearment, and eyes that said she was happy to see me. She wiped the snot from my face with her own lips, and when I soiled myself she cleaned it away happily with her bare hands.

If it looked as though I might be falling even the least bit ill, this hurt my mother even more than something that might threaten her very life. She went about obtaining, and then giving over for me, whatever money it took to assure that I would grow up healthy and strong. And she did whatever she had to to get the money–even if it was immoral, or it physically hurt her, or damaged her reputation, or even endangered her own life.

In short, my mother did everything within her personal capacity to assure me limitless forms of help and happiness, and to protect me from limitless forms of suffering.

Think thus how very kind your mother has been to you.

Once you find yourself gaining some fluency in this particular train of thought, then transfer it over to your father, and other loved ones. Go about this in the following way.

First picture your father, or whoever it may be, sitting in front of you; and then think to yourself, "Now this person has, over the string of my lives with no beginning, served as my own mother for more times than numbers can count. And during each of those lives, they loved and cared for me with all the kindness that my mother in this life has shown me. Indeed, they have been incredibly kind to me."

Again, after you have achieved some fluency in this meditation you should move it over–this time, to people towards whom you feel neutral. You go about this by picturing all these neutral people seated before you–and then thinking as follows.

"At the present moment it would admittedly seem that I share no particular relationship with all these people here. But the fact is that, over the beginningless string of all my lifetimes, each of those here has served as my own mother, for times beyond numbers. And during all of these lives, they paid me all the kindness that my mother in this life has paid me. Yes indeed, they have all been incredibly kind to me."

Once you are fluent in this last train of thought, go on then to meditate upon someone you consider your enemy. The way to do this is to begin by picturing them sitting in front of you. Then think to yourself, "Why nowadays should I be thinking of this person as my enemy? Over the length of all my past lives, they have served as my own mother for more times than numbers can count.

"And during each of those lives as my mother, they worked to acquire for me unlimited forms of help and happiness. They protected me from unlimited forms of harm and suffering. We were in a position where, without them, I simply never would have made it–and the same could be said for them without me. We have counted on each other for lifetimes beyond number.

"The fact that our relationship has sunk to the point where it is right now is just because of some bad karma here and there; in actuality, this person is no more or less than my own mother, who loves and cares for me so."

Once you are fluent at this particular meditation, then expand it to thinking about the kindness which every living being has paid you.

After we have completed the contemplation upon our mothers' kindness as described above, then we go on to the next step, of working to repay that kindness. Again we begin by maintaining that vision of our Lama Angel seated atop our head, and take ourselves though the following train of thought.

"Here then are all these living beings, my own mothers, who for time with no beginning have showered me with such kindness. And now the great demon of the mental afflictions has ravaged their minds, to the point where now they are actually insane, and have lost all control over what their own minds are thinking.

"In their heads they have no eyes–they cannot see that there is a path which could take them to the higher births, and to ultimate happiness. Nor do they have a spiritual guide, someone to lead the blind. Over the entire length of their lives, in every second of their lives, they are degraded by their own negative habits, beaten and mangled by

"They walk now blind, inexorably, to the edge of a terrifying chasm which drops in general to the entire cycle of pain, and more specifically to the three lower realms. If I were to abandon them now, in this darkest hour, there would be no greater act of shame. And so now I will take the chance to repay all the kindness they have bestowed upon me: I will liberate them from the pain of the cycle, and deliver them to the happiness of freedom.". . .

[*Conclude the meditation as before, and in between sessions do things like reviewing this subject in scripture*.]

## To Give Happiness Which is True

Next comes the meditation on love, which you do as follows. First visualize a person sitting in front of you who is as appealing to you as your very own mother. Then take yourself through this train of thought:

How could this person in front of me have any pure happiness at all? They don't even have any happiness of the impure kind.

All the things that in their deluded state of mind they hold to be happiness always end up causing them pain. They want to be happy—they work at it, all the time; they exhaust themselves seeking it, over and over—but all they manage to do is prepare the causes that later on will bring them the suffering of the lower realms.

Even in this life the only result they get from all these efforts is to wear themselves down, until all their energy is gone—all they accomplish is to hurt themselves.

So how wonderful it would be if this person sitting here in front of me could come to have every kind of happiness, and all the things that cause happiness.

I pray that they do come to have happiness, and the things that cause happiness.

I will see to it that they come to have happiness, and the things that cause happiness.

I beg you, my Lama, my Angel, to bless me, so that I may have the power to do so.

Continue on in that same way.

Once you have gained some fluency in this particular contemplation, then expand it as we did before, doing the meditation of visualizing your father and other loved ones; then people you find neutral; then your enemies; and finally every living being there is.

[*Conclude the meditation as before, and in between sessions do things like reviewing this subject in scripture.*]

## The Way to Develop Compassion

Here next is how to do the meditation on compassion. Maintain once again the awareness of your Lama Angel seated atop your head.

Then begin the meditation, first upon people whom you know are in terrible pain, using the vision of a sheep under the butcher's knife.

The way you do this visualization is as follows.

Picture these people in the form of a sheep, lying on the ground in front of you. Its legs are tied up tightly with ropes. Its chest is already cut open. The butcher is reaching in to tear out their heart, and they are completely aware that now the time has come to die.

They look up into the butcher's face, and in their eyes he can see that they know. Contemplate thus the pity of their pain.

Let this contemplation bring up in you that train of thought which includes these feelings—

How wonderful it would be if this poor being could be freed from every form of pain there is, and from every cause of every pain there is.

I pray that they may be freed from every form of pain there is, and from every cause of pain there is.

I will see to it that they are freed from every form of pain there is, and from every cause of every pain there is.

And I beg you, my Angel, my Lama, to grant me the power to do so.

Once you have gained some fluency in this contemplation, then turn your thoughts to all these beings around you, rushing the whole day long to misuse and waste the resources of the spiritual community; or to sully their vows; or to give up the Dharma; or to grasp to wrong views; or to harm other beings; or engage in a whole variety of reproachable and hurtful actions towards others.

The meditation then goes like this. Picture people like these in front of you, and think to yourself, "Judging from the way all these people are acting now, they will never be able to find any happiness here in this life; and what's more, they will beyond a shadow of a doubt be forced to take rebirth in one of the three lower realms, right after they die.

"And if they do take birth there, then they will have to experience an infinite variety of sufferings, terrible pain, for an extremely long time."

Continue on to that same train of thoughts and feelings as before including:

"And so how wonderful it would be if all the people could be freed from every form of pain there is, and from every cause of every pain there is.

"I pray that they may be freed from every form of pain there is, and from every cause of every pain there is.

"I will see to it that they are freed from every form of pain there is, and from every cause of every pain there is.

"And I beg you, my Angel, my Lama, to grant me the power to do so."

Once you have gained some fluency in this contemplation, then sit and visualize before you your loved ones, such as your mother. Take yourself through the following series of thoughts.

"All these people have fought and struggled for their entire lives, trying to care for those they love and hurt the ones they hate. And yet all it got them was the pain of outright pain, and the pain of things that change. In fact, they have never even experienced a few moments of genuine happiness.

"And because they were rushing around their whole life doing these negative deeds, they didn't have time to develop any virtuous attitudes at all. And this means that, as soon as they die, they will be forced to go through and infinite variety of savage pain, for time beyond imagining."

Let this trigger in your mind the same series of feelings as before, including—"And so how wonderful it would be if all my loved ones could be freed from every pain there is, and from every cause of pain there is.

"I pray that they might be freed from every form of pain there is, and from every cause of every pain there is.

"I will see to it that they are freed from every form of pain there is, and from every cause of every pain there is.

"And I beg you, my Angel, my Lama, to grant me the power to do so."

Once you become fluent in this last contemplation, then move it on as we did before, to people towards whom you feel neutral; and then to people you hate; and finally to every living being there is.

[*Conclude the meditation as before, and in between sessions do things like reviewing this subject in the scripture.*]

## The Exquisite Sense of Personal Responsibility

Once your mind has become totally fluent in these attitudes of love and compassion, then you should continue on to the meditation upon personal responsibility.

Here's how you do that. Maintain that same vision of your Angel Lama seated atop your head, and then take yourself through the following train of thought.

Look at all these living beings—every one of them tortured by pain, every one of them without any happiness at all. I myself now will see to it that they are freed from this pain, and from the things that cause the pain.

I myself will see to it that they come to have happiness, and all the things that cause happiness.

And most especially of all, I myself will see to it that every living being—every one of them my own mother—comes to attain that high state of a totally enlightened Buddha: someone who has completely eliminated from their being each of the two great obstacles, as well as all the mental seeds for these.

I beg you, my Lama and my Angel, to bless me with the ability to do so.

And continue on with the rest here as well.

[*Conclude the meditation as before, and in between sessions do things like reviewing this subject in scripture.*]

## The Step That is the Place

Here next is how we perform the meditation upon the Wish for enlightenment itself. Maintain the vision of your Lama Angel sitting atop your head, and take yourself through the following train of thought.

Begin by saying to yourself, "Let's be honest. At this moment, right now, do you have any capacity at all to take all the suffering beings in this entire universe and lead them to the high state of a totally enlightened Buddha?

"The fact is that I don't even have the capacity to bring a single suffering living being to this state.

"Not only that; I can go so far as attaining the high state of one of the two lower types of enemy destroyers, but even then I will only be some minimal benefit to other living beings—I will still not possess the capacity to bring every living being to the high state of total enlightenment.

"Who then does possess this capacity? A completely enlightened Buddha has it. To begin with, they possess that high quality of their physical form, where their holy body is adorned with all the signs and marks of an Enlightened Being: signs and marks that are perfectly clear and complete.

"A totally enlightened being moreover possesses that high quality of their holy speech where, without any effort at all, spontaneously, they speak in words that have sixty extraordinary features—so that every single sweet syllable they speak has the power to communicate the Dharma to every single being in the universe, in whatever language this being already speaks.

"And a completely enlightened being also possesses that high quality of their holy mind where they directly perceive every existing object in the universe: meaning both the true nature of these objects and the total quantity of the objects, all at the same time.

"They furthermore never stir from a state in which they are helping every living being to improve themselves: they interact at every moment with each living being, without any sense of partiality, serving them with their great compassion, a love for each and every one which is like that of a mother for her only child.

"Their holy deeds occur across the universe in every instant with complete spontaneity, simply by the very nature of things. Every time they send forth a single ray of light, every time they do or speak or think a single thing at all, then this single beam of light has the capacity to bring an inconceivable number of suffering living beings to the same state of omniscience. And these are only some of the high powers which they enjoy.

"In sum, only a totally enlightened Buddha possesses every different sort of high quality, and has freed themselves from every different kind of negative quality.

"And so—if I have any hope at all of providing some ultimate benefit to both myself and others—then I must certainly attain that same high state, of a Buddha who is like this. I decide then, now, that no matter what I will attain the precious state of a fully enlightened

Buddha, and do so as quickly as I can, for the sake of every suffering living being. And I beg you, my Lama, my Angel, to give me the power to do so."

Think then that, because of your supplication, a copy of the divine form of your Lama atop your head splits from them, like a flame passing from a candle which is lit to one which is not.

This second holy form melts down into you, and then suddenly you are yourself the Victorious One, Lord Buddha, the Able Sage of the Shakya Clan. You are seated upon cushions of the moon and the sun, atop a multi-colored lotus which itself rests upon a high and mighty dias, held aloft by eight huge lions.

Continue the rest of this vision as we did earlier . . . .

As for the second division here, on what to do between your meditation sessions, proceed also as before, with activities such as reviewing teachings by Lord Buddha, and commentaries upon these teachings, which give presentations on the subjects of love, compassion, and the Wish for enlightenment.

## Looking Out for Others

Here is the second section from above: how to cultivate the Wish for enlightenment through the dual practice of treating oneself and others the same; and then exchanging oneself and others. Do a preliminary meditation first, taking yourself through three steps from before. These start with a sense of equanimity—an equality of emotion towards every living being—and continue with realizing that they are your mother, and then wishing to repay their kindness. Picture then every being there is, sitting in a circle around you.

Now turn your thoughts to your own mind, and examine it. Think to yourself, Who is it that I cherish—myself or others? And who is it that I ignore? You will find that feelings of cherishing yourself, and ignoring others, automatically rise up in your mind.

At this point you should think to yourself as follows. It's not right that I cherish myself, and ignore others; for both I and everyone else are completely equal, in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering.

And so I must cherish others just as I cherish myself. When I know that others cherish me, I feel a sense of joy. Now, when they know that I cherish them, then others will feel the same joy.

And that's not all. For time with no beginning here in the cycle of pain, I have cherished only myself, seeking the best of things only for myself. But doing so hasn't accomplished anything for me or for others. On the contrary; it has forced us to undergo an endless variety of sufferings.

Now I realize that taking care only of myself is the source of all the different troubles of life: the source for the cycle of pain in general, and for the sufferings of the three lower realms, and for everything of the like. Now then I will never allow any new thoughts of looking out for myself to grow in my heart; and I will put an end to any such thoughts that may have grown there before.

Looking out for others, on the other hand, is the source of every good quality that a person can have. And so now I will see that those thoughts of looking out for others which have not yet grown in my heart do; and those which have already grown there increase, higher and higher.

Continue then as before, with the words, "I beg you, my Angel and Lama, to bless me, and grant me the ability to do so" and so on.

To put it briefly, the Lords of the Able Ones ignored themselves, and cherished others. They worked only for others, and this is what brought them to the state of total enlightenment. If I had managed to do the same thing, then I would have reached my own enlightenment too—long, long ago. But I couldn't cherish others, and so I have wandered, to this day, in the cycle of pain.

And once I've fallen into the trap of cherishing myself, then I can't develop any new thoughts of cherishing others. Even those thoughts of cherishing them that I've developed in the past I won't be able to maintain. So from now on, I won't allow a single thought to come where I watch out only for myself and ignore the needs of others. Instead I will now ignore what I want, and devote myself to others.

I will be the one to do it: I myself will see to it that others—that every other living being—is freed from pain, and reaches perfect happiness. And I will accomplish this by taking all the suffering and bad deeds of others upon my own heart; and by giving away all of my happiness and good deeds to them.

The fact is, though, that at the present moment I have no ability to do this. Who then does? A fully enlightened being can do all these things. And so I will, myself, attain the state of a perfectly enlightened being, for the sake of all these living creatures, every one

my mother. And I beg you, my Angel and Lama, to bless me, and grant me the ability to do so. Continue then as before.

## Taking the Vows of a Warrior

Here second is our description of committing oneself to the Wish for enlightenment through a formal ceremony. We proceed in two parts: going from not having bodhisattva vows to having them; and then keeping oneself from breaking the vows.

Here is the first. In the tradition of the teachings on the steps of the path, the vows are taken in two stages: first you commit yourself to the Wish in the form of a prayer, and then in the form of actual actions. The tradition of Master Shantideva though is more convenient in a way, where you take the two commitments at the same time. So this is how we'll do it here.

First put your mind into a state where it is mixed inseparably with all the preliminary steps of the path in general, and more especially the specific subjects you've been meditating on during your sessions so far—starting with how to take yourself to a spiritual guide, and continuing up to the instructions on the Wish for enlightenment.

All this time, your Angel Lama is seated atop your head. Think to yourself, "Now, for the sake of every living being—each one my own mother—I will quickly attain the state of a perfectly enlightened Buddha. In order to do so, I will take the vows of a child of the Victors, and train myself in the powerful deeds of a bodhisattva—from this moment until the day that I reach the inner heart of enlightenment. For every living being, I will become a Buddha." Think to yourself that you will keep this intention itself, all the way up to enlightenment.

Imagine then that you are repeating the following words after your Lama, the Lord of the Able Ones:

I ask you to hear me,
All Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Those in the past
Who have Gone to Bliss
First gained the Wish for Buddhahood
And then they traveled
And gradually reached

One by one, the things
That a bodhisattva must learn.

To help all living beings,
I swear
I will do the same.
I will gain the Wish for Buddhahood
And I will learn
One by one, the things
That a bodhisattva must learn.

Repeat this three times, and then feel strongly that you have received the vows of a bodhisattva.

Continue next with the following:

Now finally
My life has some meaning;
Born as a mortal,
Today I have joined
The family of Buddhas:
I am a child of the Buddhas.

And now, no matter what,
I will undertake those things
That fit the family I've found.
I will never disgrace
My pure and noble family.

With these words, then, take joy.

Here is the second part from above, which is keeping oneself from breaking the vows. Go through the same part as before: Your Angel Lama is seated atop your head. Think to yourself, "Now, for the sake of every living being—each one my own mother—I will quickly attain the state of a perfectly enlightened Buddha.

"In order to do so, I will again commit myself to the Wish for enlightenment, three times during each day, and three times at night—bringing to mind the great benefits of this Wish. And no matter how other beings may treat me from their side, I on my part will never give up on a single one of them. To develop this Wish in myself ever higher, I will

make every effort I can in completing the two collections—through actions such as making offerings to the Jewels.

"I will moreover give up any behavior which might cause this Wish to diminish. This includes the Four Black Deeds and other such acts: deceiving my Lama or any other such being with a lie, even if it is meant as a jest, or for fun; causing others to regret any good deed they have done; getting angry and then saying something unpleasant to a bodhisattva—meaning anyone who has entered the greater way; and acting in a devious way, unless it be through some high motivation such as taking personal responsibility for the liberation of all beings.

Finally, I will train myself now properly in every kind of behavior that might cause the Wish to thrive within me: I will practice the Four White Deeds, and other such actions.

"In brief," you must continue, "I will at the cost of my life keep these vows of a bodhisattva perfectly pure, forever unsullied by the 18 root downfalls and the 46 secondary offenses. And I will keep them this way all the way up to the day that I reach the inner heart of enlightenment."

Continue then as before, saying, "I beg you, my Angel and Lama, to bless me, and grant me the ability to keep them like this . . ."

## Beginning the Deeds of the Warrior Saint

Here then is our second part from above, which is how to train oneself in the actions of a bodhisattva, once we have attained the Wish. Here there are two parts: how to train oneself in the general activities of a child of the Victors; and how to train oneself, more particularly, in the last two of the perfections.

For the first of these we proceed in two steps: what to do during our actual meditation sessions; and what to do between these sessions. . . . .

Here . . . is the actual practice. Here we cover practice relating to those actions which serve to ripen ones own mental continuum—the six perfections; and then practice relating to the actions which ripen the minds of others—that is, the four methods of gathering disciples.

Here is the first of the two. Picture your Lama Angel at the tip of your head, as before, and take yourself through the following train of thought:

For the sake of every living being—every one of them my own mother—I will now attain the state of a fully enlightened Buddha, as quickly as possible.

In order to do so, I will now train myself, properly, in the practice of the three different types of giving. I will make the gift of the Dharma by teaching others, to the very best of my ability. I will present that highest Dharma to any living being who lacks it, without regard to any considerations such as gain, honor, or fame.

I will offer the gift of protecting others from fear, by helping all those living beings who are threatened by either humans or other types of beings, or even by negative spirits.

And I will give the gift of material assistance to living beings who are poor and in need, by giving away any object which might fit their needs, without any trace of stinginess—giving up all hope of getting anything from them in return, or any karmic reward.

In sum, I will attain the state of a fully enlightened Buddha, for the sake of every mother living being, with all possible speed. And to do this, I will give away my own body, and all the things I own, and every good karma I have ever collected, to every being in the universe—without the slightest hesitation at all.

Ask your Lama Angel now for the ability to accomplish this, just as we have done before. Cultivating the attitude of making these gifts to others is the practice of giving.

Next comes the practice of leading an ethical life. Again we picture our Lama Angel atop our head, and go through the following series of thoughts.

For the sake of every living being—every one of them my own mother—I will now attain the state of a fully enlightened Buddha, as quickly as possible.

In order to do this, I will strictly avoid any negative action: anything which is against the vows that I have taken—whether they relate to the ten non-virtues, or anything else of the kind. I will undertake as well to develop within myself all those pure virtues which I have yet to develop: things such as the six perfections of giving and the rest, and leading a good life. I will as well now develop to an even higher degree those virtues which I have already managed to attain.

So too I shall guide every living being to the path that will both ripen and liberate them: I will see to it that they apply themselves to every pure good deed, including the ethical life and the rest. And I beg you, my Lama, my Angel, to bless me to find the ability to do so. Continue on in this light.

## Blessings for Bodhisattvas

Here next is the practice of patience. Picture your Lama Angel at the tip of your head, as before, and take yourself through the following train of thought:

For the sake of every living being—every one of them my own mother—I will now attain the state of a fully enlightened Buddha, as quickly as possible.

In order to do so, I will complete within myself, and within every other living being, all the high qualities of a Buddha: those of perfection of patience and all the rest. To attain this patience, I will never allow myself a single moment of anger at others—even if every living being that there is should suddenly rise up against me, as my enemy. For every harm they do to me, I will return some helpful good to them.

And suppose that things suddenly befall me that I don't want to happen at all: things like not having enough food to eat, or money, or even a place to sleep—or sickness or anything of the sort. At such moments I will recall that there is no reason why I should be unhappy; on the contrary, I will reflect that undergoing each of these sufferings is a karmic result from something that I have done to others in the past—and that the very ripening of these results is also using up massive amounts of my own negative karma.

Most especially, the fact is that—if I can develop an ability to endure any kind of suffering for the sake of my Dharma practice—then it will bring me closer and closer to the path of an all-knowing being. As such, I will take up these pains happily, so that I can cut off the stream of suffering which both myself and others are experiencing; here in the cycle in general, and more specifically in the three lower realms.

Now the power of the ripenings of karma, both white and black; and the power of the blessings of the Three Jewels; and the power of the great beings of the universe—the Buddhas and bodhisattvas—is beyond all imagination.

And if I have faith in all these; and in the unsurpassed state of enlightenment; and in the twelve divisions of the highest speech; and in all the acts in which bodhisattvas train themselves; then the result which comes to me must be something extraordinary.

Armed with this faith, I will now train myself, properly, in all the acts of a bodhisattva—which are themselves the very subject matter of the twelve divisions of the highest speech. And I will do all this in order to reach the unsurpassed state of enlightenment.

*[Translator's note: The "twelve divisions of the highest speech" are different ways of describing how the teachings are stated, rather than the subject matter which they state. The classical description of the twelve is most often drawn from a text called Highest Essence of the 8,000 Lines, a commentary from the Tengyur written by Rinchen Jungne Shiwa in explanation of the Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines. The relevant section reads as follows:*

> Here are the twelve divisions of the Dharma:
> (1) Sutras; (2) texts ornamented with poetry; (3) prophecy; (4) Verses; (5) themes;
> (6) visions of the past; (7) Accounts; (8) backgrounds; so too (9) epics;
> (10) Stories of past lives and (11) presentations;
> Then lastly (12) the collection of miraculous things.]

Continue then with the part that includes, "And I beg you, my Lama and my Angel, to bless me to be able to do so . . ."

This brings us to the practice of joyful effort. Picture your Lama Angel at the tip of your head, as before, and take yourself through the following train of thought:

For the sake of every living being—every one of them my own mother—I will now attain the state of a fully enlightened Buddha, as quickly as possible.

And I will take joy in this task—I will never for a moment relinquish in my effort—even if reaching the state of enlightenment requires that I remain in the lowest of all the hell realms for billions upon billions of years, in order to acquire any single one of qualities of a Buddha, like the marks and signs of their holy body; or to succeed in any one of the deeds of a bodhisattva, such as the perfection of giving.

With this unshakeable joy, I will gather within myself all the virtuous power of both the profound and the far-reaching sides of the teaching. And I will guide others to the path of goodness, and thus bring them to unsurpassed enlightenment as well.

Repeat then the lines that begin with asking your Lama, your Angel, for the power to do so.

Next is the practice of meditative concentration. Picture your Lama Angel at the tip of your head, as before, and take yourself through the following train of thought:

For the sake of every living being—every one of them my own mother—I will now attain the state of a fully enlightened Buddha, as quickly as possible.

In order to do so, I will now train myself in all the different forms of that meditative concentration which the children of the Victors practice. These different types of meditation can be divided, as far as their essence, into the two types of meditative concentration for goals of the world; and meditative concentration for goals that transcend the world.

As far as their form, they can be divided into meditative concentration in the form of stillness, or *shamatha;* meditative concentration in the form of the high vision of emptiness, or *vipashyana;* and meditative concentration in the form of stillness and vision combined.

As far as their function, they can be divided into meditative concentration which leads to comfort in body and mind; meditative concentration which provides the foundation for all high spiritual qualities; and meditative concentration which is used to serve all living beings.

Repeat once more the lines that begin with asking your Lama, your Angel, for the power to do so.

Here finally is the practice of wisdom. Picture your Lama Angel at the tip of your head, as before, and take yourself through the following train of thought:

For the sake of every living being—every one of them my own mother—I will now attain the state of a fully enlightened Buddha, as quickly as possible.

In order to do this, I will now train myself in all the different forms of wisdom which are practiced by the children of the Victors. I will master the wisdom which perceives ultimate reality—which knows how things really are; the wisdom which perceives deceptive reality—which understands the five great divisions of knowledge; and the wisdom which perceives how to fulfill the needs of every living being.

[*Translator's note: The "five great divisions of knowledge" are described as "The knowledge of Sanskrit and the knowledge of logic, which enable one to defeat those who have no faith; the knowledge of the fine arts and the knowledge of medicine, which enable one to help those of faith; and the knowledge of Buddhism, which enables one to turn oneself into a being who knows all things." (Quotation from* The Treasure House of Precious Jewels *(ACIP digital text S6419), a commentary upon* The Path to Bliss *by Ngulchu Dharma Bhadra (1772-1851).*]

Repeat again the lines that begin with asking your Lama, your Angel, for the power to do so.

We come next to the practice of the four methods of gathering disciples. Picture your Lama Angel at the tip of your head, as before, and take yourself through the following train of thought:

For the sake of every living being—every one of them my own mother—I will now attain the state of a fully enlightened Buddha, as quickly as possible.

In order to do so, I will gather every living being into my circle of disciples, by giving them things. And then I will speak the Dharma to them sweetly, once I have reasoned with them carefully, and induced them to follow me.

After that I will get them to practice: I will teach them to make the Dharma which I have taught them an actual part of their lives.

So too I will practice what I preach to them: I will carry out in my own life everything I have taught others to do. Thus then will I guide every living being to the paths of ripening and liberation, by relying upon all these different methods of accomplishing what others need.

Repeat again the lines that begin with asking your Lama, your Angel, for the power to do so.

As for how to conclude your session, proceed as before.

This brings us to the second general topic from before, which is what we should do between our meditation sessions. During these in between periods we should review those highest of all teachings—the word of Lord Buddha—along with the later commentaries upon these teachings, particularly the instructions on how to carry out the deeds of the children of the Victors: both those deeds which relate to the profound side of the teachings, and those which relate to the far-reaching side.

## The Light of a Rainbow

Here secondly is how we train ourselves, more particularly, in the final two perfections. This comes in two steps: how to train ourselves in stillness (*shamatha*), which is the very essence of meditative concentration; and how to train ourselves in vision (*vipashyana*), which is the very essence of wisdom.

[*Translator's note: We pause here to present the traditional definitions of both stillness* (shamatha) *and vision* (vipashyana), *partly in order to clarify some popular misperceptions*

*about the latter as the* vipassana *(Pali for* vipashyana*) meditation, which is limited to watching the breath.*

*The definitions are drawn from* The Garland of White Lotuses, the Essence of Eloquence: An Overview of the Meditations of the Form and Formless Realms *(ACIP digital text S0016), a work by the famed textbook writer of Sera Mey Monastery, Kedrup Tenpa Dargye (1493-1568).*

*The traditional definition of stillness, or shamatha, is:* "A state of meditation which is imbued with the extraordinary bliss of practiced agility, due to the power of its single-pointed concentration upon its object."

*The traditional definition of vision, or vipashyana, is:* "A state of wisdom which is based in stillness, and which is imbued with the extraordinary bliss of practiced agility, due to the power of its analysis of its object."]

We cover the first step itself in two parts: what to do during our actual meditation sessions; and what to do between our sessions. . . .

Now as for the actual session, a great many meditation objects for developing stillness are described in the teachings. For the most part though the practice of bringing to mind the Buddha is the highest. It also has many other purposes, such as helping you become a worthy vessel for the Yoga of the Angel in the secret way. As such, it is best to focus your meditation upon the holy form of a divine being.

And here is how to do so. Out of the holy heart of the Angel Lama atop the tip of your head comes a ray of light as fine as a spider's thread. At the very point of the ray is a cushion made of a multicolored lotus, and a moon. Upon this cushion sits the victorious Buddha, the Able One of the Shakya Clan. His body shines like molten gold.

Continue in this vein as before, up to the part about your Lama Angel sitting with his legs in the diamond posture. , , ,

Alternately, you can picture that a second Lama Angel splits off from the one at the tip of your head, in the same way that you light one candle from another. This second Lama melts down into you. There inside of you is a jeweled throne held aloft by eight great lions. The throne is high, and broad; resting upon it is a cushion made of a multicolored lotus, and the disks of the moon and the sun. Upon this cushion sits a holy being, your Lama.

His outer appearance is that of the victorious Buddha. Continue with this visualization as before, up to the part about your Lama sitting in the lotus posture.

Suddenly he shines like the light of a rainbow; now go into deep meditation, focusing single-pointedly upon the fact that he has no nature of his own.

Now it may happen at this point that things in the visualization don't go quite the way you intended. An area that was supposed to be yellow comes up red, or something like that. You're trying to picture your Lama as sitting, but instead what comes to your mind is the image of him standing up.

Or perhaps you were trying to visualize only a single Lama, but instead you keep coming up with a lot of them—something like that. You have to try not to let it continue this way. Return your mind single-pointedly to your original visualization, and keep meditating upon it.

Now you may not be able to see the image clearly at first—it might not seem like a person made of the purest crystal light. But just try to get a general outline of your Angel's holy form—or say just even half of their silhouette—and continue your meditation on that, fixed upon this object single-pointedly.

Make a very fierce resolution: say to yourself, "I'm going to see to it that—at least for the length of this particular meditation session—I don't get dullness or agitation coming up even just once. And if by some chance they do, then I'm going to detect them, and immediately drive them from my mind."

Continue then with the mind placed single-pointedly upon the object of your meditation. Try just to get to where you are not losing this object completely—where you can keep it in mind even in some cursory way, and maintain some continuity of the visualization. All this is a perfect method for a beginner to get themselves up to one of the nine levels of meditation.

To put it briefly, anyone who hopes to reach some genuine state of concentration in their meditation would do well to follow the advice expressed in the lines [from Lord Maitreya's *Distinguishing between the Middle and the Extremes*]:

> It comes from a certain cause:
> Eliminating the five problems of meditation,
> And applying the eight different actions.

The point here is of course that real meditation can only be attained if we know how to apply the eight different actions as antidotes to the five typical problems that come up during meditation.

Now when we first try to sit ourselves down to meditate, the problem of not feeling like meditating comes up. There are four corrections to this problem. The first is faith—an ability to see the great benefits of getting good at deep meditation.

The second is really wanting to meditate: a strong desire to master it. The third is being willing to make great effort—to do the hard work that mastering meditation requires. The fourth correction here is actually getting good at meditation, which is the result of the hard work.

When we actually begin to make serious efforts in meditation, then "forgetting the instructions" [losing the object completely] will be a problem. The correction for this problem bringing the object back to mind.

It's not enough, by the way, if our bringing the object back to mind is simply managing not to lose it completely. We have to bring it back to a firm mental hold, where our meditation is focused one-pointedly on our object, with a certain quality of intensity.

## Driving Down the Middle

Once you start going into deeper meditation, dullness and agitation are the problem you'll have to face. The antidote for these two is awareness. Awareness keeps a close eye out to see whether dullness or agitation have come up in the mind, or not.

Those of highest mental faculties are able to detect and stop dullness or agitation as soon as they start to raise their heads. Those of medium faculties do so immediately after one of the two have already arisen. Even those of lowest faculties must try to spot and stop the dullness or agitation not long after they come up.

"Well now," you may ask. "What exactly is the difference between mental fogginess, and the two of dullness and agitation?"

Mental fogginess in meditation is typified by a heaviness of body or mind, and an unclear object of focus.

Gross dullness feels a little as if dusk had begun to settle upon the mind. Even though the mind has not flown off from the object of focus to something else, there is neither brightness nor clarity—and your capacity to recover the object has dropped.

Subtle dullness is where you still have brightness and clarity, but where you have slipped a bit from a tight hold as you lock on to the object. The antidotes for both of these are to turn you mind to the high qualities of the Three Jewels; or to place your mind in some shining place; or to carry out the special instructions for mixing both inner winds and the mind with empty space.

[*Translator's note: These slightly cryptic instructions are clarified as follows in the commentary to* The Path of Bliss *by Master Ngulchu Dharma Bhadra (1772-1851) entitled* The Treasure House of Precious Jewels *(ACIP digital text S6419):*

If the subtle or medium forms of dullness come up in your mind during meditation, you can eliminate them by concentrating your mind a little more tightly.

If this doesn't clear the problem up, then you should sit a while and think about all the wonderful qualities of the Three Jewels. Concentrate primarily on the amazing qualities of the holy body of an enlightened being.

If the problem still doesn't go away, you can try that unique method of putting your mind into some shining place. You do this by meditating upon some kind of shining light—within a mental image of the light of the sun, the moon, the stars, a flame, or anything of the like. It's especially effective to imagine yourself sitting within the massive halo of light that is coming off the holy body of a divine being as you picture them.

If the dullness *still* doesn't go away, then go throw some water on your face, or else put on some lighter clothing. You can also carry out the special instructions for mixing both inner winds and the mind with empty space.

These instructions are expressed in that line from Pa Dampa where he says, "If dullness comes up, dispel it with *phet.*" First picture your body as being made of the light of a rainbow. In the middle of your navel is an extremely subtle drop consciousness, inner wind and mind combined. It's about the size of a dove's egg, and colored a mix of red and white.

Say the word *phet!* with force. Then bring the drop up to your heart, and repeat *phet!* Bring it up to your throat, and again *phet!*

Let the drop now fly out the top of your head, far away, higher and higher into the sky. Focus on it and think that at some point it just mixes inseparably into the realm of empty space itself. Now that your dullness is finally removed, ease yourself back into the flow of your original meditation.

(*Another note from the translator: These instructions are found in Pa Dampa Sangye's* Holy Dharma for Killing Suffering, *which described at length in His Holiness the First Panchen Lama's commentary on Mahamudra, or the Great Seal,(ACIP digital text S5940. Pa Dampa Sangye, whose date of passing is sometimes listed as 1117 AD, was a rather wild, inspired Tibetan yogi and poet.)*]

Subtle agitation is where you are unable to keep your mind immobile on the object—it flies slightly off. The antidote for this is to return the object to the mind and apply awareness, then continue in the meditation.

Gross agitation is where—even though you try to return the object to the mind, and to apply awareness—the mind refuses to stay on the object, flying off to objects of attraction. The antidotes here are to meditate for a bit on impermanence; or the sufferings of the lower realms; or the sufferings of the cycle of pain in general. You can also carry out the advices for cutting off agitation using drastic means.

[*Translator's note: The "advices for cutting off agitation using drastic means" are described as follows, again in the commentary by Master Ngulchu Dharma Bhadra:*

When subtle agitation comes up, apply the antidotes of returning the object, and awareness, to continue the meditation.

If even this doesn't keep you on the object, and your mind flies off to some object of attraction, then you have gross agitation.

To fix this problem, you can contemplate your own impermanence—the fact of your coming death; as well as the sufferings of the three lower realms, and of the cycle of pain in general. This enables you to make the mind a little sad—to bring the mind down a bit—and then the gross agitation goes away.

If though it does not, you can carry out the advices for cutting off agitation by using drastic means. These instructions follow, as they are expressed by Pha Dampa in the line, "If the mind flies off, then cut the very root."

See the upper wind, the life wind, with a white color, coming in through the nostrils. Press it down to the navel. Then pull up the lower wind, the downward-clearing wind, seeing it as yellow. Imagine the two combined as a drop of consciousness, about the size of a dove's egg, and hold a capsule for as long as you can. When you reach your limit, exhale the air out of your nostrils, and then hold the capsule again.

Alternately, you can visualize yourself in the form of an Angel. Hold this vision, and hold the upper wind, again and again. This is the visualization used in the Action Group of the secret teachings, for retaining the life wind, and you can also do it this way. When the stream of your agitation has been stopped, ease yourself back into the flow of your original meditation.]

When either dullness or agitation do occur, a typical problem that comes up is that we neglect to take necessary action. The antidote for this is to recognize dullness and agitation right after they appear; and then to take the appropriate action to eliminate them.

Now when you attempt to increase the intensity of your focus by concentrating the mind too tightly on the object of meditation, you come to a state of clarity. But because of the high degree of agitation, it's difficult to come to a state of fixation. Then again if you loosen up your focus, trying not to concentrate too tightly, you come to a state of fixation; but again because of the high degree of dullness, it's difficult to come to that state of clarity.

And so you have to develop the ability to judge where you are: "If I stimulate my frame of mind to this point, I tend to get agitation"—and then you loosen up a touch. "But if I just let my mind slack to this extent, I tend to get dullness"—and then you stimulate the mind, raise it a bit, just far enough.

And so you are balancing on the border between the two, seeking a state of fixation as you correct that flighty agitation. But every time you arrive at the fixation, there's a danger of dullness—and then you try to elicit the state of clarity.

If you can maintain your meditation, alternating between these two steps, then you will attain deep meditation which is flawless. Be careful not to trust a simple feeling of brightness that lacks though a state of clarity where you have a firm hold on the object, with intensity.

You will reach a point where you have stopped the flow of both subtle dullness and agitation—where you can engage in deep meditation in a steady stream. Here it becomes a problem if you continue to take action; and as an antidote you just leave it alone: you apply neither the antidote to dullness nor the antidote to agitation.

If you are able to maintain the above procedure properly, then you will pass—one by one—through the nine levels of meditation, and thus achieve stillness, along with the practiced ease of body and mind that accompanies it.

As for the third point from before—how to conclude your session—simply follow the same steps as before. Continue too as before through the second part of the day, for how to practice between your meditation sessions. That is, devote yourself to activities such as reviewing the word of Lord Buddha, and the commentaries upon the meaning of this word, which cover presentations of stillness.

## Two Meditations on Emptiness

Here secondly is the explanation of how we train ourselves in vision, which is the essence of wisdom. Again there are two parts: what to do during our actual meditation sessions; and what to do between our sessions. . . .

There are two steps to the actual session: how to meditate by establishing what the lack of a self to the person is like; and then how to meditate by establishing what the lack of a self to things is like. Here is the first.

An infinite number of different proofs for establishing what the lack of a self is have been stated in those highest teachings of the victorious Buddhas. People who are just starting out though will find that establishing this object by means of the four crucial points is easier to bring up clearly in the mind.

Here is how we do that. People like you and me have an extremely strong tendency, seated deep at the bottom of our hearts, to think in terms of *"Me, Me,"* during everything we do, from the deepest state of sleep on up to all our other activities. This tendency is what we refer to as the "inborn" tendency of grasping to "me."

We see this come up when someone appears and accuses us of something that in fact we haven't done at all: "You did such and such a bad thing!" In the moment we get this overwhelming feeling, deep in our hearts, of *me, me: I* didn't do anything at all, and yet they're accusing *me* of this thing!

At times like this, the way our inborn tendency holds to some "me" is the most obvious. Take the opportunity to let a little corner of your mind examine just what kind of "me" the main part of your mind is holding on to; and how it's holding on to it.

Now it may happen that the second part of the mind may get too strong: and then the first part of it will just disappear into thin air. If this happens you won't get anywhere, just some sensation of something lost. It's crucial therefore that you maintain this little side section of you mind to observe what's going on, even in the face of that constant stream of the part of your mind which is thinking *me, me,* at its deepest levels.

As you observe your mind, look into *what kind of "me"* it is that this inborn tendency of grasping to a "me" is holding on to. It's certainly not holding on to something that is *other* than the five heaps or parts that make me up; it's not holding on to something that is *other* than the two of my own body and mind. But neither can I find "me" in just any *one* of the five parts to me; nor in just *either* my body *or* my mind.

But neither does "me" seem to me to be just an idea applied to the whole package of the five parts of me, or two the two of my body and my mind taken together. I grasp, rather, to some solid "me" that has existed on its own, since the very beginning. That's then how the inborn grasping to a "me" holds on to its "me."

The "me" that this state of mind is taking as the object it thinks it sees is the object that we deny: the object that we have to work to deny. We have to strive to actually see the way this tendency works, face-to-face, inside of our own minds—and not just through some general understanding that we glean from what someone else has told us, or through trying to imagine what the words for it mean. This entire process then is the first of the four crucial points: we call it "the crucial point of actually seeing how the very thing we deny appears within our mind."

The second crucial point is "seeing that the possibilities are covered." Again, we have that incredibly strong tendency, deep down within us, to think of *me, me.* Now suppose we decide that the "me" which this tendency is holding on to exists somewhere in the five heaps or parts that make us up. "Me" then must either be *the same* as the five parts, or *something different from* these parts.

It's completely impossible that there can be some "me" which exists in a third way—in a way which is not covered by these two possible ways of being. Every single object which exists in the entire universe must be manifesting either as a single entity or as multiple entities. Decide then in your own mind that it has to be either one way or the other: it's simply not possible that anything could be something other than these two.

## Emptiness

Here next is the third crucial point, which is coming to a definite understanding that the object is not one "real" thing. Suppose now that you think to yourself, "The me that I am

holding on to the way we spoke about before [with my inborn tendency to grasp to 'me'] is one with my five parts."

If that were the case, then there would have to be five different, discrete selves to me—since this one person has five different parts. Or else the five parts to me would have to be one indivisible thing.

Reach thus to a place where you think to yourself, "So many problems like this come up when I think that 'me' is one with my five parts. It just can't be that the 'me' I'm holding on to, as we described it before, is like this."

Suppose still that the "me" I hold on to the way we spoke of before were one with my five different parts—the five heaps. This "me" that exists the way I so strongly hold it to be—this very solid, self-standing "me"—would then have to be something that was in a continual state of growing and decaying, just as the five parts themselves are in this same state.

And if "me" were in this same state, then I'd have to ask myself a question: "Let me think about the successive instants of this 'me'—this me that is in a continual state of growing and decaying. Do these instants amount to one thing, or to separate things?"

If they amount to one thing, then the me of my last life, and the me of my next life, and the me in this life right now—these three—are all a single, indivisible thing.

And suppose those successive instants amounted to separate things. Now in general, it's not the case that if things are simply separate from each other then they are necessarily separate from, and totally unrelated to, each other. It *is* the case though that—if anything were separate from another thing and also existed through some nature of its own—then the two things would have to be separate in a way that could never allow for any relationship between them at all.

As such, the me of my last life, and the me of my next life, and the me in this life right now—these same three—would then have to be separate in a way that could never allow for any relationship between them at all.

If this were the case though a lot of other problems would come up. I would for example have to meet with experiences that did not result from something I myself had done in the past. Or else karma I had committed in the past would have to simply go away, without my experiencing any result. The fact is then that the successive instants of the kind of "me" we're talking about here cannot amount to separate things.

Decide then to yourself that no "me" which exists in the way that the tendency we've described above holds that it does could ever be one with the five parts of yourself.

And suppose once more that the "me" which we hold on to that way *were* one with the five parts to yourself. It would then have to be a single thing which existed in reality. And then it would have to be one from every possible point of view.

But in this case, still more problems would arise. For example, "me" or "myself" could never then be the one that took on these five parts at birth; nor could the same five parts be what "me" or "myself" took on at birth. Decide to yourself once more, therefore, that the "me" which we hold on to as described above could never be one with the five parts to ourselves.

Here finally is the fourth of the crucial points: coming to a definite understanding that the object is not multiple "real" things.

Suppose that you think to yourself, "Now even though the 'me' which I hold on to that way doesn't exist as a single thing within the five parts to me, it *does* exist within these same five parts as separate things."

But think about these five parts, or heaps. These are things that you can break out individually into the heap of form and so on, and then identify individually as well in wording like "the heap of consciousness."

If things were as we've said, then after you broke the various heaps of form and the rest out individually, you'd have to be able to identify them separately, in wording like "this heap is what that 'me' is." But in fact we don't do this. As such, you must decide to yourself that the "me" which we hold on to as described before cannot be something which is separate from the five parts to yourself.

Take yourself thus through the examination which utilizes the four crucial points. You'll come to the definite conclusion that there doesn't even exist any "me" that could be the way that our inborn tendency to grasp to "me" believes it to be.

Work then to maintain this exact same certainty single-pointedly in deep meditation, without any dullness or distraction at all.

Now it may happen that you begin to slip a bit from this clear decision about how things are. If you're fairly new to these things, then you should take yourself through the four crucial points again, and bring back this certainty about how things cannot be "real."

Those of you who have reached some higher level though can go straight to looking into whether "me" actually exists or not in the way that it seems to exist to our inborn tendency to hold to "me." This examination serves, in the same way as the analysis involving the four crucial points, to bring back that same state of certainty.

At this point you need to learn to maintain your single-pointed meditation with two different qualities. First you have a very strong and sure perception that what you are seeing is the fact that "me" is something which doesn't have any nature of its own. Secondly there appears to your mind some kind of sheer emptiness: the simple absence of the thing that we deny—the simple absence of anything that is "real." This then is how to carry out the meditation we know as "The Empty Sky."

In the period after you come out of deep meditation, keep up a continuous practice where you see everything there is—including this "me"—as being a play of illusion. The way you do this is that you build up a stronger and stronger certainty, during your deep meditations, of how things cannot be "real."

This then carries over into the periods following these meditations, where you train yourself in seeing that none of the things around you has any reality, even though it is appearing this way. Thinking this way is called "The Play of Illusion."

## The End of Emptiness

Here is the second section from before: how to meditate by establishing what the lack of a self to things is like. We proceed in two steps of explaining how to meditate by establishing the lack of any self-nature to caused things; and then how to meditate by establishing the lack of any such nature to uncaused things.

For the first of these, we cover three different types of caused things: material things, mental things, and then changing things which are neither material nor mental. To represent material things, we can take something like our own body.

In actuality this body is nothing more than a collection of the five components [four limbs and a head]—nothing but flesh and bone in a certain configuration. In actuality it's nothing more than a projection; but to us it appears as though it were, indisputably, some whole, discrete, and self-standing body.

This is how the thing we deny appears to us.

Now suppose there really *were* a body like that within this other body, the one which is nothing more than a collection of the five components—nothing but flesh and bone in a certain configuration. The question then would be whether it was one with, or distinct from, the body of the mere collection of components, the flesh-and-blood configuration.

Let's say it was one with it. The fact is that the body which is nothing more than the five components pasted together—the flesh-and-blood lump—is something that's made from the semen and blood of your parents.

This means then that the first little ball of semen and blood which acts as the place where consciousness first enters would then have to be a body that was nothing more than the combination of the five components, the flesh-and-blood configuration.

And since there were five components, the body too would have to be five bodies, all of them collections of five components.

Now suppose instead that that self-standing body from before were something distinct from the body of the mere collection of components, the flesh-and-blood configuration. In that case we'd have to be able to separate out each different component—the head or whatever—and then point to it and say, "That's the body."

But of course this is not the way it is; and so you must reach a state of certainty where you think to yourself, "No such self-standing body even exists at all." And once you reach that state, you must be able to maintain it.

Let's go on then, secondly, to things that are mental: we can use our own mind, today's mind, to represent this category. Now let's suppose that what we call "my mind today" were not simply a projection imposed upon the combination of my mind during the first half of the day and my mind during the second half of the day—suppose there existed some "my mind today" that existed from its own side.

We'd have to see then, again, whether this "my mind today" were something that was either one with, or distinct from, the pair of my mind during the first half of the day and my mind during the second half of the day.

Suppose first that it were one with them. In this case, there would have to be a mind of mine during the second half of the day that existed within the mind of mine during the first half of the day.

Suppose instead that that particular "mind of mine today" were something distinct from those two. In that case we'd have to be able to isolate out the two of "my mind during

the first part of the day" and "my mind during the second part of the day," and then point to either one and say "*that* one's the mind I had all day today."

Again though that's not the way it is—and so again you have to come to a sense of certainty that *there is no such mind.* And then, as before, you need to keep up a continual meditation on this.

As something to represent the third type of thing above—a thing which is changing but which is neither material or mental—let's take something like time: a single year. Now a "year" is simply a projection that we impose upon the basis for the projection: a group of twelve months.

But suppose it weren't that way, and that there were such a thing as a year that existed from its own side. In this case we'd have to see, once more, whether this kind of year were either one with or distinct from the twelve months.

Suppose it were one with them. In this case, the year would have to be twelve years—given that there are twelve months.

And what if it were distinct from them? In that case you'd have to be able to separate out each of the twelve years individually, point to each one of them, and say "*this is the one* that's the year." But once more that's not the way it is, and so once more we have to decide to ourselves that there simply doesn't exist any such year—and then maintain this as a meditation.

Here is that second section from the beginning: how to meditate by establishing the lack of any self-nature to uncaused things.

We'll take empty space as our representative example of uncaused things. There are many different parts to empty space: the cardinal directions and the ordinal directions. Again you look into whether that empty space were either one with, or distinct from, these directions. You come to a state of certainty about how this space could never be real, and then you meditate upon it.

To sum, there doesn't exist even a single atom of anything that exists from its own side—there is not a single thing in the world of pain, and not a single thing beyond this world of pain, which is anything more than a simple projection: whether your talking about you, or your parts, or the great mountain at the center of the world, or just the house you live in. Come to a state of certainty about this fact, and then maintain a meditation where you stay single-pointed upon it. This is what we call "the yoga of the empty sky."

During the periods that follow these deep meditations, remain aware that there is no reality to things—that their nature is deceptive: every object, everything that appears to us, is something that occurs through a certain collection of causes and factors. This is what we call the "subsequent perception," the "yoga of illusion." Maintain these two yogas perfectly.

You will find yourself in a balanced meditation which is imbued with the physical and mental bliss of practiced ease—something which is brought on by the force of your analysis. This itself is what we would call a definitive form of "vision."

That brings us to the conclusion of the session, which you should conduct as before.

As for what to do between sessions, proceed once more as described above—except this time you are engaging in activities such as reviewing the words of the Buddha, along with those commentaries upon them, which treat the subject of this extraordinary vision of emptiness.

## You Must Now Enter

Once you have prepared your mind with the shared path, as we've just described it, then you absolutely *must now enter* the way of the diamond.

This is because—if you do rely on this path—then you can very easily complete the two collections, without having to spend three "countless" eons.

You can turn all these instructions—all the steps from how to take yourself to a spiritual guide up to those on stillness and vision—into the teaching of an actual experience. You do this by working on them during four meditation sessions a day, or at the very least in a single such session.

Becoming a true master of these steps to the path—transforming your entire mind with them—is very simply the highest way to do something meaningful with this precious opportunity, this precious human life.

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The shining one,
The Maker of Light,
The glorious Father and Son—
And Lobsang too,

The Buddha Come Again—
Have illuminated for us the true intent
Of the matchless One of the Sugar Cane.
I have undertaken then
To set these teachings down in steps
That are brief and easily practiced.

[*Translator's note: The "Maker of Light, Father and Son" here are Lord Atisha and his spiritual son, Dromton Je. The "One of the Sugar Cane" is an epithet of Lord Buddha, whose people were known as the "Clan of the Sugar Cane."]*

The one that they call Chukyi Gyeltsen
Has tried to write this one thing well,
Intending the work as an aid to those
Of good fortune to travel to freedom itself.
By the goodness of this task I've done
May I and every living being
Come to the final end of the practice
For people of three different scopes.

This then completes The Path to Bliss, a Dissection Text on the Steps of the Path to Enlightenment, to be used for Traveling to Omniscience.

The work was delivered by the Dharma Master Lobsang Chukyi Gyeltsen as a lecture, to a huge assembly, a veritable sea of collected monks, during one of the summer teaching sessions. This text has been compiled from the notes that monks took during the sessions; it was presented to the Master, who then checked and corrected it thoroughly.

By the goodness of this deed too may the work become a victory banner (*gyeltsen*) which flies above the precious teachings, so that they never disappear from our world.

*Mangalam! Joyful Fortune for All!*

*Om swasti!*

Om! Goodness be all.

The teachings of the Victorious Ones
Are a great tree where living beings assemble,
A source of help and happiness.
It spreads its mighty branches and then

Every living creature comes
To pluck that finest fruit
Of the highest form of freedom.
May the tree be fed by the gentle waters
Of an inexhaustible stream of the gift
Of the Dharma, evermore increasing
Here within the walls of the abbey
Where joyful fortune appears of its own.

*Sarva Dzagatam:*
For the sake of every living being.

[*Translator's note: The expression "joyful fortune that appears of its own" includes all the words that make up the name of Trashi Hlunpo Monastery, seat of His Holiness the Panchen Lama.*]