FROM HERE TO ENLIGHTENMENT
From Here to Enlightenment: An Introduction to Tsong-kha-pa's Classic Text The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment / His Holiness the Dalai Lama; translated, edited, and annotated by Guy Newland.

Summary: “In 2008, to commemorate the completion of the English translation of Tsong-kha-pa’s classic text ‘Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment’ (Tib. Lam Rim Chen Mo), the Dalai Lama gave a six-day teaching on this text at Lehigh University. ‘From Here to Enlightenment’ makes this momentous event available for a wider general readership. The basic topics of Buddhism are woven together for his Western audience. With dependent relatedness as the primary theme of the teachings, the Dalai Lama explores this from various viewpoints throughout the book. True to the Dalai Lama’s profound sense of compassion, these fundamental issues of Buddhism are always presented within the context of basic human values and concerns”—Provided by publisher.

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CHAPTER TWO

The Great Value of This Teaching

Transmission

This book, the *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, was of course written by Atisha Dipamkara, an eleventh-century Bengali who came to Tibet. Shantarakshita had come in the eighth century, so by the eleventh century the Nalanda tradition was well established in Tibet. Atisha composed a short text, *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, with the aim of providing a way to integrate the various Buddhist teachings intended for practitioners at different levels of mental capacity. Atisha’s *Lamp* became the root of all stages of the path (*lam rim*) literature. In that sense, one can treat Tsong-kha-pa’s *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* as an extensive commentary on, or exposition of, that short text by Atisha.

I received the transmission of these teachings on the *Great Treatise* from Trijang Rinpoche and from Ling Rinpoche, my two tutors. Trijang Rinpoche had received these teachings from his teacher, Pabongka Rinpoche. Ling Rinpoche also had Pabongka in his lineage, but in addition—when he was quite young—he also received these teachings from the Thirteenth Dalai Lama.

The Buddha

The *Great Treatise* (1: 33) opens with a salutation to Manjushri in the Sanskrit language. This is partly to indicate that the source of the Tibetan tradition is the Sanskrit tradition. Sanskrit became the domi-
nant medium through which the Buddha’s teaching was presented in the Nalanda tradition. The custom evolved to acknowledge that the teaching derives from Indian sources by often placing a salutation in Sanskrit at the beginning of Tibetan texts.

Then, in Tibetan, the text opens with a salutation to the Buddha. Here Tsong-kha-pa pays homage to the Buddha by reflecting upon the qualities of the Buddha’s body, speech, and mind. In the first line he reflects upon the qualities of the Buddha’s body, pointing out that the Buddha’s physical body came into being as a result of its causes. This is an important idea, right here. The Buddha’s embodiment in form results from specific causes and Tsong-kha-pa identifies those causes as good qualities—by which he means virtuous acts. Even the attainment of buddhahood is the result of something; it arises from causes and conditions. Buddhahood does not come out of nowhere, nor is it an eternal permanent state that is uncaused. In a sense, Tsong-kha-pa is echoing the point Dignaga makes in the opening stanza of his *Compendium of Valid Cognition* where, in identifying Buddha as a reliable person, he says that the Buddha has become such a person. Commenting on that, Dharmakirti says that in order to negate the idea that the Buddha was uncaused, Dignaga intentionally uses the term “become.” The Buddha, through some processes, came to be a reliable person.

Tsong-kha-pa speaks about the Buddha’s body as arising from a vast array of causes. These causes are listed in various texts, particularly in studies of the Perfection of Wisdom tradition, but they are also explicitly mentioned in Nagarjuna’s *Precious Garland*. Tsong-kha-pa emphasizes that even the Buddha whom we revere, the Blessed Buddha, was previously an ordinary being on the path to becoming a buddha. There was a time when the Buddha was just like us. By gathering all of the relevant conditions, he evolved into a fully enlightened being.

To understand fully the significance of this first line—that the Buddha’s body is born of a vast array of excellent causes—you have to understand the relationships among the four noble truths. And in order to understand completely the presentation of the four noble truths, you have to develop an understanding of the teaching of the two
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truths, the conventional and the ultimate. In particular, it is important for you to understand how the two truths have the same nature but distinct identities. We will explain more when we discuss the practices pertaining to the person of medium capacity. Implicit in this line on how the Buddha’s qualities are born from a vast array of excellent causes is the important principle of dependent origination in terms of cause and effect.

Tsong-kha-pa writes that the Buddha’s speech fulfills the hopes and aspirations of countless sentient beings, limitless living beings. The “hopes” of countless beings means their welfare. The welfare of living beings includes their immediate and temporary welfare as well as their long-term, ultimate welfare. To be able to fulfill their welfare in either sense, the Buddha needs a deep understanding of what these needs are and how most effectively to meet them. The primary way that the Buddha acts for the welfare of others is speech. Thus, the enlightened quality of the Buddha’s speech is its capacity to fulfill the aspirations of living beings.

In some texts we find reference to the Buddha’s qualities in terms of their supernormal nature; there are marvelous qualities associated with the Buddha’s body, speech, and mind. Various texts identify marvelous qualities of the Buddha’s physical body, the marvelous quality of the Buddha’s mind is that it can realize all facts. The Buddha’s speech is marvelous in providing instructions that help all beings. Of these three, the qualities of the Buddha’s speech are always considered the most important.

In his Praise to the Buddha for Teaching Dependent Origination Tsong-kha-pa writes—addressing the Buddha—that among all of your enlightened activities the most important is your speech and that, within that, speech teaching dependent origination is the very most important. Also, in Nagarjuna’s texts, his opening salutations to the Buddha often involve particularly recognizing the Buddha’s having taught dependent origination.

We notice that Tsong-kha-pa identifies the qualities of the Buddha’s body primarily from the point of view of its causes. Then, when identify-
ing the qualities of the Buddha’s speech, he does this mainly in terms of its *results*, how it brings about the welfare of others. And when identifying the qualities of the Buddha’s mind, he identifies the enlightened quality of the Buddha’s mind as its capacity to be fully immersed in realization of ultimate truth while in the same instant perceiving the world of diversity as well. This enlightened mind of the Buddha is the actual identity of buddhahood. So he praises the Buddha’s mind from the perspective of its being the *nature* of buddhahood.

After paying homage to the Buddha as the great sage of the Shakya clan, in subsequent stanzas Tsong-kha-pa makes salutations to Manjushri and Maitreya and then to Nagarjuna and Asanga, the two main pioneers of the Mahayana tradition. He then also makes salutations to Atisha Dipamkara, who is, in a sense, the founder of this lineage of teachings on the stages of the path, and also to the great masters who are upholders of this lineage.

*Integrated Practice*

Tsong-kha-pa (1: 33) then explains his primary motivation for composing the *Great Treatise*. This is quite important. He says that he sees many people who are deeply dedicated to meditation, but are lacking in learning. Because of this deficiency, they focus on just one or two aspects of a particular practice. With only minimal understanding of the overall Buddhist path, they cannot take an approach that integrates into practice all the key elements of the essential teachings.

Those who are learned can sometimes be very skilled at integrating the teachings into their personal practice. But in other cases those who are highly learned in Buddhist text-traditions do not seem to have much actual experience. They may get very little benefit from all of their Dharma learning. Today, we see cases where learning seems to serve as a further reinforcement for the scholar’s ego, creating conceit, jealousy, and other problems. Even when these negative qualities are not pronounced, some teachers somehow seem lost when it comes to applying what they know in practice. Faced with the vast dimensions of
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the teachings, their approach is scattered. Such scholars are somehow unable to bring the teachings together in an integrated format that is useful for actual practice.

Furthermore, Tsong-kha-pa says that many individuals show partiality in their study and in their practice. For example, in Tibet, when someone happens to be keen in the practice of the Sutra path, then they tend to ignore the Vajrayana teachings. If someone happens to be a practitioner of Vajrayana, then they tend to ignore the Sutra teachings. If someone is enthusiastic about epistemological studies, then they may specialize in just that. For others, it may be Abhidharma or monastic discipline.

So there are meditation practitioners with no learning, scholars of great learning who cannot apply their learning to practice, and also many others who are in various ways one-sided in their approach to study and practice. Tsong-kha-pa says that all three of these are cases of being unable to practice the Dharma in a way that would truly please those who have wisdom. He means that none of these persons can practice on the basis of an integrated approach encompassing all essential elements of the Buddhist path.

What Atisha gave us in his *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* was just such a way to integrate all of the key elements of the Dharma for an individual practitioner, one person sitting on one cushion. So Tsong-kha-pa says that his heart takes great delight in writing an extensive exposition of Atisha’s *Lamp* because it offers a way to practice that will please those who have great wisdom. It brings all of the key elements of the teaching into a framework within which one person can practice them all in stages.

This integration is very similar to what Aryadeva presents in his *Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way*; there we also have a series of stages. On the first level, you must avoid nonvirtuous actions; in the middle stage, you must stop grasping at self; and finally, you must stop grasping at all views. The one who fully understands this approach is truly wise.
Listen Well

In the final stanza of his salutation Tsong-kha-pa (1: 34) calls upon readers who may benefit from this approach, asking them to listen well. Such readers will be those with minds unclouded by biased thinking, the mental capacity to distinguish right from wrong, and an interest in finding real meaning in their human existence of leisure and opportunity. He asks those of us with such good fortune, “Please listen to what I have to say with a single-pointed mind.”

Again, this is strikingly similar to Aryadeva’s *Four Hundred*, which says that a practitioner of the Dharma who is listening to the teachings needs three qualities: objectivity, critical intelligence, and a real interest in what is being taught.31

Atisha and the Stages of the Path Tradition

Tsong-kha-pa (1: 35-43) then explains the greatness of the text’s author, by which he means the Indian master Atisha. Atisha’s teaching derives from two primary lineages. One stems from Nagarjuna and pertains mainly to the Buddha’s teaching on the philosophical view of emptiness, emphasizing dependent origination and its relation to ultimate reality. The other is Maitreya’s lineage, passed through Asanga to successive masters. Here the primary focus is the method aspect of the Mahayana path, especially practices involving the cultivation of loving-kindness, compassion, and the spirit of enlightenment (*bodhicitta*). These two lineages really converge in Atisha.

In Tibet, Atisha’s teachings evolved in three main lines. One was the “Kadam great text” lineage of Potowa,32 which understands Atisha’s instructions on the basis of study and practice of six principal Indian texts. The first two of these texts are the *Jataka Tales*, stories of the Buddha’s past lives, and the *Collection of Aphorisms*.33 These two texts are seen mainly as a basis for cultivating and enhancing your devotion to the Buddha. Then, Asanga’s *Bodhisattva Levels* and Maitreya’s *Orna-
ment for the Mahayana Sutras are considered mainly in terms of teachings on meditative states; they deal extensively with the various levels and paths in Mahayana practice. And the last two texts are Shantideva’s Compendium of Instructions and his Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds, presenting primarily the bodhisattva’s practices.

A second lineage—the “Kadam stages of the path” lineage—evolved among Atisha’s students who based practice on texts presenting the stages of the path (lamrim) or stages of the teaching (denrim). And there also evolved a third lineage, the “Kadam personal instructions” lineage, emphasizing small, personal instruction texts designed for specific situations.

When you approach stages of the path teachings, including Tsong-kha-pa’s Great Treatise, you can find all three of these lineages. Tsong-kha-pa received the teachings of all three. Moreover, if you look at the Great Treatise, most of its source texts are really in the Perfection of Wisdom literature. In fact, Tsong-kha-pa’s student Gyel-tsap wrote a book on the Perfection of Wisdom literature in which he sometimes cites the Great Treatise, thus showing this close connection.

You are primarily following the approach of the “lamrim great texts” lineage if you study the Great Treatise on the basis of its seven supporting texts—Tsong-kha-pa’s Ocean of Reasoning, Illumination of the Thought, Essence of Eloquence, the insight sections of his Great Treatise and Shorter Treatise, and his Golden Garland of Eloquence, as well as Gyel-tsap’s Heart Ornament of Explanation. Or you can instead follow the “Kadam stages of the path” lineage by concentrating mainly on Tsong-kha-pa’s Great Treatise and Shorter Treatise. However, Tsong-kha-pa stated that, since there are hardly any people who know how to apply in practice all of these explanations, more condensed versions for practice should be made. So his followers composed many instructional texts on the stages of the path, both in brief and in detail. There are the six shorter texts in the famous collection of eight great guides to the stages of the path, but there are also many other texts of that sort. If your approach follows these texts, then you are following the “lamrim
personal instructions” lineage. So within the context of the study and practice of the stages of the path, you can follow three different lineages deriving from Atisha’s followers.

*Atisha and the Four Schools of Tibetan Buddhism*

Following Atisha’s arrival in Tibet and composition of the *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, each of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism in some way adopted the pattern and structure of the stages of the path teachings. For example, in the Nyingma tradition, Long-chen-pa’s *Mind at Ease* presents the path in a way that follows the basic structure of Atisha’s approach. The same is true of Sakya Pandita’s *Clear Elucidation of the Buddha’s Intent*, which could be seen as a fusion of the stages of the path teachings with mind training (*lojong*) teachings. Similarly, in the Kagyu tradition, Gampopa’s *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* presents the basic structure of the path in a manner just like what Atisha lays out. Sometimes slightly different sequences are adopted, but basically in all of these traditions the stages of the path are very similar. For example, the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* speaks of turning one’s mind away from four things. If you look at these four turnings of mind, they echo teachings in the stages of the path tradition.

*Two Aspirations*

In a sense, Atisha’s teachings derive from a point that Nagarjuna makes in his *Precious Garland*. Nagarjuna explains that if you examine all the teachings of the Buddha, they can be classified into two categories related to two aspirations: (1) aspiration to attain a fortunate rebirth in a higher realm and (2) aspiration to obtain ultimate liberation or, as Nagarjuna calls it, “definite goodness.” All of the teachings of the Buddha, in one way or another, relate to the fulfillment of these two aspirations.

How do we fulfill our aspirations for better rebirth? This is done through adopting a way of life that is not harming, nonviolent. The
heart of that practice is to live one’s life on the basis of trust and confidence in the law of karma. So it requires cultivation of confidence that dependent arising works in the sense that our actions have karmic effects. Living one’s life according to that conviction is the primary method by which one seeks to fulfill the aspiration to gain a fortunate rebirth.

The other aspiration is to seek final enlightenment or liberation, and here the primary method is to cultivate an understanding of the ultimate nature of reality. We understand the ultimate nature of reality primarily through the Buddha’s teaching that dependent arising entails emptiness. One needs to cultivate wisdom. Thus, the key factors one needs to cultivate in Buddhist practice—confidence in karma and wisdom knowing emptiness—both derive from understanding dependent arising.

Attainment of liberation can be in two forms. One is the liberation of individuals, liberation from unenlightened existence. But there is also attainment of buddhahood for the benefit of all beings. Earlier we saw that the primary quality of the Buddha’s speech is its ability to fulfill the aspirations of all beings. This is the aim of the Mahayana practitioner, a person motivated to bring about the welfare of all beings. The welfare of all beings is the purpose for which the Mahayana practitioner seeks to attain buddhahood. Because of that motivation, she or he needs to complement the path of wisdom with bodhichitta, the spirit of enlightenment. These two together will allow one to bring about realization of that final aspiration.

Among the six texts that Atisha’s followers used to practice the stages of the path in the Kadam great text lineage of Potowa, the Jataka Tales and the Collection of Aphorisms primarily pertain to developing confidence in karma, Asanga’s Bodhisattva Levels and Maitreya’s Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras can be understood as pertaining to the compassionate motivation of Mahayana practitioners, and Shantideva’s Compendium of Instructions and his Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds can be understood as pertaining to the view of emptiness. I find this perspective on the six texts most helpful.
There Are No Contradictions in the Buddha’s Teaching

What we have discussed so far gives us a sense of the greatness of the stages of the path teaching by highlighting the authenticity of its origins and sources. Another way to inspire confidence in the teaching is to explain the greatness of the teaching itself. One of the reasons Atisha’s teaching on stages of the path is great is that it allows an individual practitioner to realize that there are no contradictions among all the teachings of the Buddha (1: 46-49).

The Buddha’s speech has the capacity to fulfill the diverse aspirations of countless beings. So the beings who are helped by the Buddha’s speech are not just limitless in number. They are also limitless in the diversity of their mental dispositions as individuals. To accommodate the diversity of mental dispositions and mental levels among his audience, the Buddha gave many different teachings. Depending upon the level of one’s aspiration, one can distinguish those of the Mahayana from those of the Fundamental Vehicle. Also, one can distinguish the four classical Buddhist schools of India according to the level of understanding of the wisdom teachings. If you simply take these different teachings as individual texts, then on the surface they seem to contradict one another. However, Atisha’s stages of the path approach allows you to understand this diversity not only as an accommodation to different individuals, but also as useful to a single practitioner as he or she progresses to different levels of realization.

For example, among the teachings on wisdom there are different levels of subtlety in the explanation of selflessness. If we relate these teachings to our own mental states, how we perceive the world, then we can see that each of them may be highly effective in particular situations. When we observe our minds and consider how we imagine our own identity, we recognize that we often see ourselves as possessing some kind of unitary, eternal, autonomous reality—something internal that we call “self” or “soul.” We grasp on to this. The Buddha’s teachings refuting such a self are then immediately applicable, helping us to dissolve that kind of grasping.
Likewise, when we examine how we relate to the external world, we recognize that we act as though the physical world out there had some kind of independent reality of its own. It seems to possess some distinct reality completely independent of our perceptions. In this case, the Buddha’s Chittamatra teaching—rejecting an external, objective world—helps us to dissolve that kind of grasping.

Thus, many of the teachings seem contradictory on the surface but make sense in relation to the needs of an individual who is progressing in realization and dealing with a series of different mental distortions. Atisha’s teaching on the stages of the path shows us that all the Buddha’s teachings are useful to a single individual, without any contradiction.

Taking All the Teachings as Personal Instructions

Tsong-kha-pa (1: 50-53) explains that another benefit of the stages of the path teaching is that it allows you to understand all the teachings of the Buddha as personal instructions. Some people adopt the perspective that among Buddhist teachings there are two fundamentally different categories: (1) the class of scholastic texts that are really relevant only for expanding your knowledge and (2) other teachings that are relevant for your personal practice. Tsong-kha-pa considers this dichotomy to be mistaken and unhelpful.

If you adopt Atisha’s approach, then you see that all Buddhist teachings have direct relevance to your own personal practice. They are all personal instructions because there is nothing in the teachings of the Buddha that is not related, in one way or another, to training and taming your own mind and heart.

The Ultimate Intention of the Buddha’s Teachings

Another benefit of the stages of the path approach is that it allows you to understand the ultimate intention of the Buddha’s teachings (1: 53). The ultimate intention of the Buddha’s teachings is to give us the means to fulfill our aspirations to attain a fortunate rebirth and to attain final
liberation. The stages of the path teachings allow us to see all Buddhist teachings as contributing, in one way or another, to the fulfillment of these two aspirations.

**Avoiding the Error of Rejecting Buddhist Teachings**

Tsong-kha-pa (1: 53-54) identifies the final greatness of the stages of the path approach as its preventing the grave error of rejecting the Buddha's teachings, rejecting the Dharma. Here Tsong-kha-pa cites many texts, including the Perfection of Wisdom sutras, where the Buddha states that a practitioner must study, understand, and actually practice all aspects of the path. If you really aspire to help many billions of living beings with diverse mental dispositions, then you have to understand and practice many diverse teachings and approaches. This is what prepares you.

Historically, it has been a tradition among Tibetan masters to study and also to practice all the lineages—Sakya, Kagyu, Geluk, Nyingma—and Jonang as well.44 This is an excellent model. We should adopt a nonsectarian approach, not just studying all of these lineages but also putting their teachings into practice.

**A Question about Shugden**

**Question:** Your Holiness, I feel agitated to see and hear the Shugden protesters outside the building here. How do I help myself? Please address this issue, as many are misinformed about this.

**Answer:** We have had this problem for 370 years. It started during the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama. And from 1951 until the 1970s, I myself worshipped this spirit. I used to be one of the practitioners!

One of my reasons for abandoning Shugden worship is that much of my efforts are directed to promoting nonsectarianism—especially within Tibetan Buddhism. I always encourage people to receive teachings from the teachers of diverse traditions. This is like the Fifth Dalai
Lama, and many other great lamas, who received teachings within many traditions. Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, down to today, I have been practicing this way myself.

A Nyingma teacher, Kunu Lama Rinpoche, initially gave me teachings on Shantideva’s texts. This lama was very nonsectarian, having received innumerable teachings from many different traditions. After that, I wanted to receive from this great lama a certain teaching distinct to the Nyingma tradition. I asked my tutor, Ling Rinpoche, pointing out that I had already received some teachings from this lama, but I now wanted to receive teachings on an important Nyingma tantric text.

Ling Rinpoche was a little bit cautious about this because of Shugden. He never worshipped the spirit, but he was cautious about it. (My other tutor, Trijang Rinpoche, was very close to this spirit practice.) The rumor that was circulating was that if a Geluk lama takes teachings in the Nyingma tradition, Shugden would destroy him. Ling Rinpoche was a bit frightened for me and he really warned me to be careful. The Shugden worshippers have a tradition that one must be extremely strict about one’s own distinctive Geluk tradition.

Actually, I think this standpoint deprives people of religious freedom, preventing them from taking other teachings. In practice, discouraging a standpoint that deprives people of the freedom to choose is actually an affirmation of religious freedom. A double negation is an affirmation.

Around 1970, I was reading the life stories of many great lamas, mainly of the Geluk tradition. I had the idea that if Shugden is truly reliable, then most of the great lamas who tutored the Dalai Lamas must have practiced Shugden worship. It turns out that this is not the case. So I developed some doubt and the more I investigated, the clearer it became.

For example, the Fifth Dalai Lama very explicitly explains his position vis-à-vis the worship of this spirit. He explains what it is and he explains the causes and conditions that gave rise to it. He describes the destructive functions of this particular spirit. He says that it arose from misguided motivation and that as a spirit it manifests as a violator of a
pledge. According to the Fifth Dalai Lama, its function is to harm both the Buddhist doctrine and living beings.

Once I realized these things, it was my moral responsibility to make the facts clear. Whether you listen to me is entirely up to you as an individual. From the outset, I told both Tibetans and some of our other friends what I had come to understand. They are free to listen to my advice or not. It is an individual right to accept religion or not to accept it. Accepting this religion or that religion is entirely up to the individual.

My opinion is that Shugden worship is actually not a genuine practice of Dharma; it is simply worship of a worldly spirit. This is another aspect of the problem: from what I have taught, I think you can see that Tibetan Buddhism is a continuation of the pure lineage of the Nalanda tradition, which relies on reasoning, not blind belief. So it is very sad that certain Tibetan practices could cause this profound and rich tradition to become a sort of spirit worship.

Both the Fifth Dalai Lama and the Thirteenth Dalai Lama were gravely critical toward this spirit. Since I am considered the reincarnation of these Dalai Lamas, it is only logical that my life should follow theirs. One could say that it proves that I am a true reincarnation!

It seems that these people outside are really fond of worshipping this spirit. Okay, it is their life; I have no problem if that is what they want to do. When I taught in Germany a group of Shugden followers shouted for at least three or four hours. Eventually I felt great concern about how their throats would be affected by so much shouting.