

THE ORAL INSTRUCTION OF KÜN-ZANG LA-MA
ON THE PRELIMINARY PRACTICES
OF DZOG-CH'EN LONG-CH'EN NYING-TIG

Kün-zang La-may Zhal-lung

PART ONE

As transcribed by
Pal-trül O-gyen Jig-me Chö-kyi Wang-po Rin-po-ch'e



NGA-GYUR NYING-MAY SUNG-RAB
ENGLISH TRANSLATION SERIES
VOLUME IV

Translated from the Tibetan and edited by
Sonam T. Kazi

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First Edition

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Diamond-Lotus Publishing
P.O. Box 43242
Upper Montclair, N.J. 07043, U.S.A.

First Printing, 1989

ISBN 0-923468-03-X

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Dpal-sprul O-rgyan-jigs-med-chos-kyi-dbañ-po, b. 1808.
[Kun bzañ bla ma'i žal-luñ. English]

Kün-zang la-may zhal-lung / as transcribed by Pal-trül O-gyen Jig-me Ch'ö-kyi
Wang-po Rin-po-ch'e; translated from the Tibetan and edited by Sonam T. Kazi.
—1st ed.

p. cm. — (Nga-gyur Nying-may Sung-rab English translation series; v. 4)
Translation of: Kun bzañ bla ma'i žal luñ.

Contents: [1]. The oral instruction of Kün-zang La-ma on the preliminary
practices of Dzog-ch'en Long-ch'en Nying-tig.

ISBN 0-923468-03-X (v. 1)

I. Rdzogs-chen (Rñin-ma-pa) 2. 'Jigs-med-rgyal-ba'i-myu-gu, ca. 1750-1825.

I. Kazi, Sonam T. (Sonam Topgay), 1925- . II. Title. III. Series:
Nga-gyur Nying-may Sung-rab English translation series: v 4, etc.

BQ7662.4.D6313 1989

294.3'4—dc20

89-32345

CIP

Printed in the United States of America by
Blue Dolphin Press, Inc., Grass Valley, California

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List of Color Plates

1. Śākyamuni Buddha (fifth century B.C.E.), the present Buddha. Above left, the previous Buddha, Kāśyapa; above right, the future Buddha, Maitreya. Below, left and right, are Śākyamuni Buddha's two main disciples: Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana. Between them are four-faced Brahmā, offering a cakra, and Indra, holding a conch; they are requesting Lord Buddha to turn the Wheel of Dharma and blow the Conch of Dharma.
2. The Lotus-Born Guru (Padmasambhava) of India. Below left, Mahāpaṇḍita Śāntarakṣita (K'yen-ch'en Zhi-wa-ts'o) of India; below right, the Dharma King, Tr'i-song Deu-tsen of Tibet. These three pioneers, known as the *K'yen-lob-ch'ö Sum*, formally established Buddhism in Tibet in the eighth century C.E.
3. The First Kün-k'yen, Long-ch'en Rab-jam Dri-me Ö-zer (1308-1363), the greatest Tibetan scholar-saint of the *Nying-ma* School of Buddhism in Tibet. The *Dzog-ch'en Nying-t'ig* tradition up through his time is known as the Earlier *Nying-t'ig*.
4. The Second Kün-k'yen, Rig-dzin Jig-me Ling-pa (1729-1798), a great *Ter-tön* who excavated and propagated the teachings of the Later *Nying-t'ig*, known as *Long-ch'en Nying-t'ig*. This gold painting is believed to have been done during Jig-me Ling-pa's lifetime.
5. Atīśa Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna of India (982-1054), the great Buddhist teacher from Bengal. He visited Tibet in 1040, at the start of the New Translation Period, and established the Old *Ka-dam-pa* School of Buddhism. Above, left to right: the Mahāsiddha Ti-lo-pa, Vajradhara with His consort, and Nā-ro-pa. Below, left and right, Atīśa's disciples, Brom-tönpa and Ngog Leg-pay Shey-rab. Below them is a figure of an offering goddess, flanked by two Dharma Protectors.
6. The famous translator, Mar-pa Ch'ö-kyi Lo-drö (1012-1097), founder of the *Ka-gyü* School of Buddhism in Tibet. The figure of a Guru above him (caption illegible) may be that of Atīśa. Below him, left to right, are three of his disciples (see Chapter Six, page 225): Ngog-tön Ch'ö-dor of Zhung, Mey-tön Ts'ön-po of Tsang-rong, and Ts'ur-tön Wang-de of Döl. Below right is his spiritual consort, Dag-me-ma, holding a child.
7. This painting depicts how Je-tsün Mi-la Re-pa (1040-1123) destroyed his enemies with the help of black magic and hailstones, and how

he had to construct a nine-story building at the command of his gracious Guru, Mar-pa, in order to absolve his sins.

8. Je-tsün Mi-la Re-pa, who dramatically proved that, through proper meditation, it is possible to dissolve one's sins—however heavy they may be—and attain Buddhahood in one lifetime. He is seen teaching the Dharma to establish peace, tranquility, and eternal happiness in a frightened deer, a voracious hunting dog, and a greedy hunter, Gom-po Do-je, who thereafter gave up hunting. Below are three of Je-tsün Mi-la Re-pa's disciples: left to right, Re-ch'ung Do-je Drag-pa, Ngen-dzong Tön-pa, and Re-pa Zhi-wa-ö. The yogi depicted above left may be Dam-pa Sang-gyay.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Plates 1-2 and 5-8 have been reproduced from *Bod Kyi Tangka*, a book on Buddhist paintings from Tibet. These well-preserved, excellent paintings, done by the best artists in Tibet, are from the archives of the Potala Palace of His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. Judging from their quality, it would not be overestimating to assume that they were done during the time of His Holiness the Great Fifth Dalai Lama of Tibet (1617-1682).

Plate 3 is newly painted by students of the Dzogchen Pema Choling Meditation Center, Inc., New York, New York.

Plate 4 has been reproduced from an original painting of Kün-k'yen Jig-me Ling-pa from the private collection of Mrs. Tsede Kazi, President and spiritual director, the Longchen Nyingthig Buddhist Society, New York, New York.

Translation and Pronunciation Notes

Tibetan, a very concise language, rarely uses the plethora of articles, pronouns, conjunctions, and prepositions needed to convey meaning in English. Therefore, when such words appear in the English text, no special notation is used to indicate their absence in the original Tibetan. Significant textual interpolations, which have been made only when necessary, are set off in brackets ([]).

Although most Tibetan words and sentences are gender neutral, English often requires the use of gender specific pronouns. In keeping with conventional usage, the masculine forms have been used throughout; however, it should be understood that words such as Guru, Bodhisattva, and so forth apply equally to male and female beings.

Two notation systems are used for Tibetan words, names, and titles: transliteration and phonetic transcription. Footnotes use both the transliteration system, which is set in italic type, and the transcription system, which is set in upright type. The body of the text uses only the phonetic transcription system. Words are set in italic type, and names and titles, due to the frequency of their appearance, are set in upright type.

The transliteration system is as follows:

i	u	e	o
k	kh	g	ñ
c	ch	j	ñ
t	th	d	n
p	ph	b	m
ts	tsh	dz	w(b)
z	z	,	y
r	l	ś	s
h	a		

The phonetic transcription system and its pronunciation are as follows:

a	as in far	p	as in pat
i	as in feel	p'	as on haphazard
u	as in food	b	as in bet
ü	as in nuisance	m	as in man
e	as in fed	ts	as in fits
o	as is go	ts'	as in its him
ö	as in French bleu	dz	as in words
k	as in king	w	as in wake

Translation and Pronunciation Notes

<i>k'</i>	as in backhand	<i>zh</i>	as in azure
<i>g</i>	as in go	<i>z</i>	as in zone
<i>ng</i>	as in ring	<i>y</i>	as in you
<i>ch</i>	as in church	<i>r</i>	as in rid
<i>ch'</i>	as in churchhall	<i>l</i>	as in lit
<i>j</i>	as in jewel	<i>sh</i>	as in show
<i>ny</i>	as in canyon	<i>s</i>	as in sit
<i>t</i>	as in ten	<i>h</i>	as in hill
<i>t'</i>	as in coathanger	<i>tr</i>	as in trill
<i>d</i>	as in done	<i>tr'</i>	like <i>tr</i> , but aspirated
<i>n</i>	as in none	<i>dr</i>	as in drill
		<i>l'</i>	as in drill hole

Sanskrit words, names, and titles are set in normal, upright type. The transliteration system and its pronunciation are as follows:

<i>a</i>	as in but	<i>j</i>	as in jewel
<i>ā</i>	as in far	<i>jh</i>	like <i>j</i> , but aspirated
<i>i, i</i>	as in feel	<i>ñ</i>	as in canyon
<i>u, u</i>	as in food	<i>t, t̪</i>	as in ten
<i>r, ṛ</i>	as in rid	<i>th, th̪</i>	as in coathanger
<i>l̄</i>	as in lit	<i>d, d̪</i>	as in done
<i>e</i>	as in fed	<i>dh, dh̪</i>	as in glad heart
<i>ai</i>	as in fine	<i>n, ñ̄</i>	as in none
<i>o</i>	as is go	<i>p</i>	as in pat
<i>au</i>	as in shout	<i>ph</i>	as in haphazard
<i>m̄</i>	as in calm	<i>b</i>	as in bet
<i>h̄</i>	as in hah	<i>bh</i>	as in abhor
<i>k̄</i>	as in king	<i>m</i>	as in man
<i>kh̄</i>	as in backhand	<i>y</i>	as in you
<i>ḡ</i>	as in go	<i>r</i>	as in rid
<i>gh̄</i>	as in tag him	<i>l̄</i>	as in lit
<i>ñ̄</i>	as in ring	<i>v</i>	as in vow
<i>c̄</i>	as in church	<i>ś, s̄</i>	as in show
<i>ch̄</i>	as in churchhall	<i>s̄</i>	as in sit
		<i>h̄</i>	as in hill

Preface

**Beginning with the Primordial Buddha,
Up to the gracious Root-Guru,
The ocean-like Rig-dzins of the Three
Traditions who have come:
With due respect to them, the history
of the Dharma is being related.**

This is a brief description of the Three Traditions,¹ a special term used within the Great Secret Doctrine of the *Nying-ma* School; the three divisions of the Inner Tantras,² in general; and the manner in which the *Ka-ma* and *Ter-ma* traditions of the *Nying-t'ig* teaching descended, in particular.

The Mind-to-Mind Tradition of the Buddhas

Śākyamuni Buddha attained the ultimate realization of enlightenment incalculable aeons ago. Thereafter, He manifested His Dharmakāya, Sambhogakāya, and Nirmāṇakāya as, respectively, Samantabhadra, the five races of Buddhas,³ and the great Vajradhara in the pure upper regions of the gods. He also manifested His Nirmāṇakāya as the six races of Buddhas in the six regions of sentient beings. All of these [manifestations] preached an inconceivable number of doctrines to suit the individual abilities of sentient beings.

¹ *gyü-pa sum / brgyud.pa gsum*

² *nang-gyü de-sum / nañ.rgyud sde.gsum*

³ Vairocana, Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi

In the unblemished, self-created Paradise of *Ög-min Tug-po Kö-pa*, the Primordial Buddha [Samantabhadra] taught the highest of these innumerable doctrines, *Ö-sal Dzog-pa ch'en-po*, to His followers, the five Sambhogakāya [Buddhas], who were no other than His own manifestations. He communicated the teaching not through words, but through the blessings of His mind. This tradition which descended through Vajrasattva and others by means of the transference of primordial wisdom thus came to be known as the Mind-to-Mind Tradition of the Buddhas.⁴

The Gesture Tradition of the Rig-dzins

The Inner [Tantras] have three divisions, [the outer, inner, and secret]: *Do*, or *Kye-pa* Mahāyoga; *Gyü*, or *Lung* Anuyoga; and *Sem*, or *Dzog-pa* Atiyoga. *Kye-pa* Mahāyoga, the outer yoga, is further divided into *Gyü-de* and *Drub-de*.

[The *Gyü-de* tradition] was established by Vajrasattva, who taught it to the three races of Bodhisattvas. They in turn taught it to the devas, the nāgas, and the yakṣas,⁵ liberating hundreds of thousands of their respective followers. Vajrapāṇi also taught this doctrine to human and non-human Rig-dzins at Mount Malaya, and at other unspecified places, at which time the teaching was recorded by the rākṣasa Lo-drö T'ab-den. He inscribed the [Tantras] in volumes made of precious materials and concealed them in the sky. Later, these volumes descended upon the roof of the palace of King Dza.⁶ Thus the *Gyü-de* teaching gradually began to propagate.

⁴ *gyal-wa gong-gyü / rgyal.ba dgoṅs.brgyud*

⁵ The three races of Bodhisattvas are: Mañjuśrī, who taught the devas (divine beings); Avalokiteśvara, who taught the nāgas (serpent-like spirits); and Vajrapāṇi, who taught the yaksas (a class of incorporeal beings). They represent, respectively, the Buddha's Mind, Speech, and Body.

⁶ S. Indrabhuti

In the *Ög-min* Paradise, Kün-zang Ch'e-ch'og Heruka⁷ preached the *Drub-de* Dharma by means of the Dharmadhatu's own sound. Rig-dzin Do-je Ch'ö collected these [Tantras], committed them to writing in book form, and entrusted them to the Dākinī Lay-kyi Wang-mo. She put the general and particular Tantras in precious caskets and concealed them as treasures in the De-je Tseg-pa stūpa in India. Later, when the appropriate time arrived, the caskets containing the particular Tantras were handed over to the Eight Rig-dzins.⁸ The casket containing the general sum and substance of all those precious Tantras was handed over to Guru Padmasambhava.

After [Śākyamuni] Buddha passed into nirvāṇa, the Dharma and the circumstances under which it had been propagated began to deteriorate. When heretics began to criticize it, five excellent beings of noble birth⁹ became dissatisfied and arose from their profound meditation. They went to the summit of Mount Malaya and offered prayers of twenty-three lines that expressed their impatience. At this, urged by the mercy of the Buddhas of the three times, Vajrapāṇi appeared [to them] in his true form. He expounded the Anuyoga Tantra, and thus it began to propagate.

Vajrasattva gave the initiations and transmitted the teachings of the secret Atiyoga Tantra to Sem-l'ag-chen, the son of the gods. Thereafter, the Atiyoga began to propagate in the godly regions.

In this world of ours, the Lion of the Śākyas, the Guru of sentient beings, completed the training of His followers with the Body and Speech Doctrines. Thereafter, when the time came for Him to train His followers with the Mind Dharma, the daughter of King A-sha of Uddiyāna happened to be

⁷ the ferocious aspect of Kün-tu Zang-po

⁸ Mañjuśrīmitra, Nāgārjuna, Hūmkara, Vimalamitra, Prabhahasti, Dhanasamṣkṛta, Rong-bu Guhya, and Sāntigarbha

⁹ the deva Drag-den Ch'og-kyong, the nāga Jog-po, the yaksa Kar-da Dong, the rāksasa Lo-drö T'ab-den, and the human being Licchavi Dri-me Drag-pa

meditating on the beach of the Gold Ocean. She had a dream in which she saw a crystal man of wonderful appearance initiating her with a crystal vase inscribed with letters. As a result of this auspicious dream, she gave birth to Ga-rab Do-je, an incarnation. Later, Vajrapāṇi gave Ga-rab Do-je the *gyal-t'ay chi-lug* initiation,¹⁰ and handed over to him the *Dzog-ch'en* doctrines in eighteen volumes, known as the Semme Cho-gye, twenty thousand volumes of *Long-ch'en*, and similar Tantras. Ga-rab Do-je was consecrated as the sole upholder of all the Mahā, Anu, and Ati doctrines.

After meditating at Nyi-ma Nang-je Mountain for twenty years, [Ga-rab Do-je] transformed himself into the essence of the sun, which enabled him to move about in the sky. He began to recite the 6,400,000 *Dzog-ch'en* Tantras that were primordially in his mind. The Dākinīs collected them and wrote them down in groups of three, seven, and twenty-one Tantras.

Jam-pal Shey-nyen, the son of King Zhön-nu-pal of Ceylon, became [Ga-rab Do-je's] principal disciple and the source of these Tantras. Although he was able to attain liberation as soon as he was shown a mere sign of the doctrine, he was given the initiations and transmissions of all the Tantras and secret techniques so that he would hold the entire Buddhist doctrine. Later, when his Guru dissolved himself into a mass of light at the source of the River Dhanti, he received books [of his Guru's] Testament, which descended from the center of the light. This made [Jam-pal Shey-nyen] realize insight equal to that of his Guru [Ga-rab Do-je]. He then summarized the 6,400,000 Tantras into three classes: *Sem-de*, *Long-de*, and *Men-ngag-de*. The most important of all the important teachings [of the *Men-ngag-de*] is the *Nying-t'ig*, which he classified into *She-gyü*¹¹ and *Nar-gyü*.¹² He committed the latter to writing, but considered the former too precious to be propagated, and hence concealed them at Bodhgaya as a hidden treasure.

¹⁰ rgyal.thabs spyi.blugs kyi dban

¹¹ bṣad.rgyud

¹² rnar.brgyud

[Jam-pal Shey-nyen] lived at the So-sa Ling [charnel-ground] for 129 years and had twenty-five great pāṇḍitas as disciples, headed by Śrī Simha, who was from China. Nāgārjuna, one of the best among them, attained the rainbow body after transmitting the teaching to Āryadeva. After imparting teachings to Śrī Simha for a period of twenty-five human years, Jam-pal Shey-nyen ultimately took a miraculous rebirth in western India, and came to be known as the Later Jam-pal Shey-nyen. It was he who transmitted many tantric teachings to U-gyen Rin-po-ch'e,¹³ and held Sang-gyay Ye-shey as his disciple, teaching him the Jam-pal Zhal-lung. This is not different from *Dzog-ch'en* in essence, and is widely known among the followers of the tantric teachings that were introduced [in Tibet] at a later period.

Śrī Simha, having received the liturgical tradition of the *Nying-t'ig* teaching, classified the teaching about *t'ig-le*¹⁴ into four groups: outer, inner, secret, and supreme. Of these, he concealed the first three as a hidden treasure; concealing the last one in his mind, he went to the Sil-jin charnel-ground and remained there. His disciples included Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra, and so on. Chief among them was Jñānasūtra, to whom he offered the entirety of the initiations, lineal transmissions, and secret teachings.

When Śrī Simha entered nirvāna, he gave [Jñānasūtra] his Testament, *The Rays of Seven Lights*, together with the secret techniques. Furthermore, when Vimalamitra received a prophecy from a Dākinī, he paid a visit to Jñānasūtra, who gave him the entirety of the secret teachings. After [Jñānasūtra] dissolved his body into a rainbow, his Testament descended to Vimalamitra. This enabled [Vimalamitra] to attain primordial wisdom equal to that of Jñānasūtra.

These were the teachers who attained the supreme spiritual accomplishment and vanished into rainbows, without leaving their mortal bodies behind. They were the Rig-dzins

¹³ i.e., Guru Padmasambhava

¹⁴ thig.le

who held the Gesture Tradition.¹⁵ The ways in which the aforesaid three tantric traditions were transmitted, and the number of Tantras expounded to elucidate each of the yogas individually, are unfathomable. Because of the enormity of the writing involved, I am afraid to deal with them in detail.

The Ear-to-Ear Tradition of Human Beings

The manner in which the teachings appeared in Tibet is as follows.

King Tr'i-song Deu-tsen invited the Abbot Śāntarakṣita and Guru Padmasambhava [to come to Tibet from India]. [The king then] built the Sam-yay Mi-gyur L'ün-drub monastery and provided its contents, the emblems of Buddhism, which were formally blessed and consecrated by [the Abbot and the Guru] for the people to worship. [Later, the king] dispatched three emissaries—Ma, Nyag, and Ch'og—to the king of India with a royal letter and much gold, [requesting that a great pandita be sent to Tibet]. In response, the king of India sent Vimalamitra, one of the foremost of five hundred great panditas. The great pandita Vimalamitra preached the general Buddhist teachings of the Sūtras and Tantras. By widely exposing the particular teaching on the secret *Dzog-ch'en Nying-t'ig* to fortunate, suitable followers, he caused it to flourish. Most of the followers of this tradition attained rainbow bodies. The continuity of this doctrine has been maintained through an unbroken chain of oral teaching from Guru to Guru. It is known as the Ear-to-Ear Tradition of Human Beings,¹⁶ and is the *Nying-t'ig Ka-ma*.

According to the *Nying-t'ig Ter-ma* tradition, the doctrine was transmitted by Śrī Simha to Guru Padmasambhava, who had to consider four points: that the doctrine would not disappear; that its teaching would not be mistaken; that its blessings would not disappear; and that its tradition would be maintained by a close lineage. With these views in mind, he

¹⁵ *rig-dzin da-gyü / rig.'dzin brda'.brgyud*

¹⁶ *gang-zag nyen-gyü / gaṅ.zag sñan.brgyud*

formulated secret teachings, showing the method of attaining perfection¹⁷ through the Tantras, the method of achieving the core techniques¹⁸ through perfection, and instructions on how to put the core techniques into practice.¹⁹ With the blessings,²⁰ the authority of initiation,²¹ credentials of authority,²² future prophecy,²³ and so on, these [secret teachings], which were assigned to fortunate individuals who would excavate them in the future, [were concealed in small boxes]. The boxes that contained the main subject—the essential, secret teachings of the self-existence of the Three Kāyas; the continuity of the [holy] books that contain the words traditionally used to indicate the meaning; the sacraments that bring liberation upon tasting; and the emblems of the body, mind, and speech—were sealed with the five elements and buried at different places of concealment. Later, when the appropriate time came to help the sentient beings, a series of blessed, fortunate individuals unearthed these treasures and propagated the doctrine.

Of these treasures concealed in the earth and in the mind, in conformity with the former method, the [*Nying-t'ig*] doctrine concealed by Vimalamitra at U-ru Sha-yi L'a-k'ang was unearthed by Nay-ten Dang-ma L'ün-gyal; it came to be known as the *Vi-ma Nying-t'ig*. [The *Nying-t'ig* doctrine] concealed by [Guru] Padmasambhava at Thong-lung Tr'a-mo Drag was unearthed by Pe-ma Lay-dral Tsal; it came to be known as the *K'a-dro Nying-t'ig*. These two are known as the two mother *Nying-t'igs*. Their elaborate explanation and the exposition of their secret meanings in a condensed manner are called the *La-ma Yang-t'ig* and the *K'a-dro Yang-t'ig*, and their combined secret essence is called the *Zab-mo Yang-t'ig*.

¹⁷ *drub-t'ab* / sgrub.thabs

¹⁸ *men-ngag* / man.nág

¹⁹ *lag-len* / lag.len

²⁰ *mön-lam* / smon.lam

²¹ *wang-kur* / dbañ.bskur

²² *te-gya* / gtad.rgya

²³ *lung-ten* / luñ.bstan

When the third is not counted separately, the [*La-ma* and *K'a-dro Yang-t'ig*] are known as the two *Nying-t'ig bu* (children). The secret teachings received by Kün-k'yen Dri-me Özer²⁴ (1308-1363) as treasures concealed in the mind²⁵ are known as the Earlier *Nying-t'ig* tradition.²⁶

Now, the manner in which the Later *Nying-t'ig* tradition,²⁷ *Long-ch'en Nying-t'ig*, came into being [is as follows]. Among the eighteen different kinds of hidden treasures, the best is the one secretly concealed in the mind. The most superior manner of [its] revelation is through direct insight while in the awakened state;²⁸ the mediocre manner is through experiential knowledge; and the inferior manner is through dreams.

Being moved by the Lotus-Born Buddha's²⁹ request for his mercy, Ga-rab Do-je, the expounder of the *Dzog-ch'en* doctrine, once again manifested in the world for the benefit of the sentient beings of Tibet as Rang-jung Do-je Jig-me Ling-pa, the Second Kün-k'yen (1729-1798). Once, when the *kün-zhi*³⁰ of his mind transformed into the clear Dharmakāya state, Jig-me Ling-pa found himself in the bliss and clarity of the non-conceptual state, which reflected an external projection of cognizant clarity. At that point, he had a glimpse of the path that circled the Ja-rung K'a-shor stūpa in Nepal,³¹ upon which he met a Jñāna Dākinī who presented him with actual writings that indicated the vastness of [inner] clarity. He also experienced the actual blessings of the Jñānakāyas³² of the great U-gyen [Rin-po-ch'e]³³ and Long-ch'en Do-je Zi-

²⁴ also known as Long-ch'en Rab-jam-pa

²⁵ *gong-ter* / *dgoṅs.gter*

²⁶ *nying-t'ig gong-ma* / *rñiñ.thig goṅ.ma*

²⁷ *nying-t'ig ög-ma* / *rñiñ.thig 'og.ma*

²⁸ *tog-pa* / *rtog.pa*

²⁹ i.e., Guru Padmasambhava

³⁰ *kun.gži*

³¹ the great stūpa at Baudha, on the outskirts of Kathmandu

³² wisdom-bodies

³³ i.e., Guru Padmasambhava

ji,³⁴ and they accepted him as their follower. This filled him with inspiration, and hence he received the class of doctrines of the treasure store of space—*gong-ter*—known as *Dzog-pa Ch'en-po Long-ch'en Nying-tig*. This doctrine has the secret techniques of the *zung-jug*³⁵ of *Ka-ma* and *Ter-ma*, the redistilled essence of the ocean-like *Gyü-de* and *Drub-de* of the *Nga-gyur Nying-ma* tradition, having four rivers of transmission lineage. Even with a single one of these techniques one can realize Buddhahood, without depending on any other dharmas. This profound, direct path, difficult to find in this world, like the *udembara*³⁶ flower, is embodied in Jig-me Ling-pa's work in nine volumes.³⁷

Its lineal tradition, which is backed by the initiations for maturity and liberation, has been held by Jig-me Ling-pa's direct disciples—Ch'ö-dag Do-drub Jig-me Tr'in-lay Ö-zer; Jig-me Gyal-way Nyu-gu; Chag-sam-pa Ye-shey Lün-drub; Pra-ti Ngag-ch'ang Tr'in-lay Do-je; Jig-me Kün-dröl; Jig-me Lo-sal Ö-zer; Jig-me Ngo-ts'ar; and so forth—and by their disciples—Gyal-say Zhen-p'en T'a-yay; K'en-ch'en Padma Vajra; Jam-yang K'yen-tsey Wang-po; Jig-me Kal-zang; Pe-ma Tra-shi; Tra-shi Gya-ts'o; Lo-drö Dri-me; A-lag Ten-dar; Mi-gyur Nam-k'ay Do-je; Ch'ö-ying Tob-den Do-je; Re-pa Dam-tsig Do-je; Do K'yen-tsey Ye-shey Do-je; and so forth.

Out of this outburst of a huge nest of scholarly saints, the chief disciple of Dza Tr'a-ma La-ma³⁸ was Dza Pal-trül³⁹ (1808-1887), whose spiritual attainment equaled that of his teacher. It was he who wrote down his Guru's oral instructions on the preliminary practices, in the work called *Kün-zang La-may Zhal-lung*.

³⁴ i.e., *Long-ch'en Rab-jam-pa*

³⁵ zuñ.'jug

³⁶ S. *udumbara*

³⁷ *Nga-gyur Nying-may Sung-rab Series, Volumes 29-37*

³⁸ i.e., Jig-me Gyal-way Nyu-gu

³⁹ i.e., O-gyen Jig-me Ch'ö-kyi Wang-po

Gyal-say Chang-ch'ub Do-je, [also known as] Lung-tog Ten-pay Nyi-ma Pal-zang-po, followed Dza Pal-trül for twenty-eight years and received a vase full of secret teachings from him. My unparalleled rescuer, the Lord of my cakra of bliss, Ö-sal Rin-ch'en Nying-po Pe-ma Lay-dral Tsal (1879-1941),⁴⁰ who had been offered this name by his tutelary deity, followed [Gyal-say Chang-ch'ub Do-je] for over six years. The oral, secret, doctrinal method was transmitted to him through an effective, practical instruction, and he was consecrated as the Dharma-Regent.

After following him for seven years, I, Nag-k'yim Sang-gay Do-je, received the entire doctrine that brings maturity and liberation, with the backing of initiations belonging to both the Earlier and Later *Nying-t'ig* traditions. In particular, I received the oral tradition of *Kün-zang La-may Zhal-lung* three times, and the notes on it, known as *Zin-dri*, thirteen times, and committed them both to memory. Except for me, all the Gurus of the lineage were miraculous, noble beings who attained unique perfection. None of them were ordinary; they were all Vajradharas who held the Three Traditions. I am describing them as such not just because I feel like doing so—but because their attainment tallies with their fame.

As for me, I am just struggling to follow the above lineage. Having little karmic connection and not being favored by fortune, I am involved in family life and living among the people of the Kaliyuga,⁴¹ unscrupulously enjoying black remunerations.⁴²

I am writing this introduction at the present time because my disciple, Sonam Kazi, has translated *Kün-zang La-may Zhal-lung* from Tibetan into English. Since I do not know English, I could not check the English translation; but whatever the English composition may be, I have full confidence

⁴⁰ also known as Ka-t'og K'en-po Ngag-wang Pal-zang

⁴¹ this present, degenerate time

⁴² offerings received in connection with teaching the Dharma

and belief that he has not made major errors with respect to the meaning of the words or their connotations. I feel that if the Buddhist doctrine is translated into all the prevalent languages of the world, it will be like opening the door for Buddhism to offer its benefit and help to those, both now and in the future, who have interest or faith in Buddhism and would like to put it into practice. As English is known throughout the world, I am sure that maximum benefit can be derived through an English translation.

For many years, undermining all difficulties, Sonam Kazi has taken ardent interest in the Dharma. This has resulted in the present wholesome work as its fruit, for which I am expressing my full appreciation and thanks.

This is written on the fifteenth day of the first month of the Fire Rabbit Tibetan year at Mr. Sonam T. Kazi's request, made in person and through correspondence received in the past. May this bring peace and happiness to all.

Cha-tral Sang-gyay Do-je

Introduction

I am very grateful to the most revered Guru Cha-tral Sang-gayay Do-je Rin-po-ch'e for his lucid description of the entire lineage of the Earlier and Later *Dzog-ch'en Nying-t'ig*. As described by him, the Second Kün-k'yen, Jig-me Ling-pa (1729-1798), excavated the buried teachings of the Earlier *Dzog-ch'en Nying-t'ig*. This became known as the Later *Dzog-ch'en Nying-t'ig*, or *Long-ch'en Nying-t'ig*. The First Do-drup-ch'en, Jig-me Tr'in-lay Ö-zer (1745-1821), one of his foremost disciples, was regarded as the *Ch'ö-dag*, who received and compiled the doctrine.

The Excellent Path to Omniscience (Nam-k'yen Lam-zang) is the liturgy written by Kün-k'yen Jig-me Ling-pa as the preliminary to *Dzog-ch'en Nying-t'ig*. One of his eminent disciples, Jig-me Gyal-way Nyu-gu, gave an excellent oral commentary (*zhal-lung*) on it.

This unparalleled oral commentary was vividly remembered by Jig-me Gyal-way Nyu-gu's most eminent disciple, Dza Pal-trül Rin-po-ch'e. Later, at the request of his colleagues, he unerroneously committed it to writing. His unique skill in writing further enhanced the value of the commentary. Since Dza Pal-trül Rin-po-ch'e regarded his Guru as no other than Kün-tu Zang-po (Samantabhadra Buddha) Himself, he gave the work the title *Kün-zang Lamay Zhal-lung*.

The commentary was extremely popular with innumerable followers in all walks of life, in Tibet and elsewhere, for it

presented the highest teaching in a simple and lucid language, and was filled with interesting short stories and effective analogies. Numerous relevant sayings of the Buddha and other well-known Indo-Tibetan teachers of the leading Buddhist schools were cited so that the teaching would go deep into the heart of seekers. The number of people who have succeeded in understanding the *Dzog-ch'en* teaching by following this preliminary instruction is astounding.

These instructions were given in conformity with the saying, "the best instructions are those that hit at the heart of one's defects." Its criticisms, given with great compassion, did not spare seekers at all levels, whether lamas or laymen, incarnates or relatives of high lamas, parents or children, businessmen or officials, rich or poor, male or female, so long as their sole intention was to attain immediate relief from the sufferings of the world.

Kün-zang La-may Zhal-lung consists of thirteen chapters. Chapters One to Six deal with the common outer preliminary practices for all the Yānas, Chapters Seven to Twelve deal with the unique inner preliminary practices for the Pāramitāyāna and Vajrayāna only, and Chapter Thirteen deals with *P'o-wa*, the method of transferring one's consciousness to a higher level.

This volume, Volume IV of the Nga-gyur Nying-may Sung-rab English Translation Series, presents the common outer preliminary practices, and Volume V will present the unique inner preliminaries and the chapter on *P'o-wa*.

Each of the six chapters of the common outer preliminary practices consists of two sections:

1. the manner of listening to the teaching;
2. the teaching itself.

The manner of listening to the teaching consists of a set of extremely important techniques which have to be used not only as a preparation before beginning every new chapter, but also as a guiding principle in following Buddhism. Ultimate

success depends on these profound secret techniques of the Pāramitāyāna and Vajrayāna. These techniques can be summed up as the development of universal love and compassion, called Bodhicitta, the understanding of the doctrine of Śūnyatā, and the goal of the attainment of Buddhahood by all the sentient beings.

The following are the essential teachings of the six chapters:

Chapter One explains the most valuable leisure, having eighteen endowments that are difficult to obtain, that provides us with the great opportunity to work for our freedom.

Chapter Two reminds us of the impermanence of life—the precarious nature of our existence. If we fail to take advantage of this most valuable leisure, we will be destroyed by death and miss the opportunity to liberate ourselves and others.

Chapter Three teaches us that if we fail to obtain freedom, hereafter we will again suffer in one of the six regions of samsāra. Knowledge of the miseries of samsāra should therefore prevent us from accruing the causes for reappearing in it.

Chapter Four shows us the causes for the ephemeral happiness and unhappiness that shackle us forever in samsāra. We should stop earning such karma and earnestly look for eternal freedom.

Chapter Five explains that the only way to escape samsāra is to attain our innate eternal life and happiness. This will be attained the moment we realize nirvāṇa—whether it be the Hinayanic nirvāṇa or the Mahayanic nirvāṇa.

Chapter Six teaches us how to find a real Guru, how to follow a Guru, and how to attain the ultimate goal by knowing the Guru's mind. It is for this reason that the Guru should be a realized person. Even if all the qualifications of a Guru mentioned in the Sūtras and Tantras are not present, the Guru should at least have fully-developed Bodhicitta in order to be able to help the sentient beings.

Thus, Chapters One through Four of the first volume contain the four important instructions that teach us to develop strong aversion for the main causes of misery. They are collectively called *Lo-dog Nam-zhi*. If these are not thoroughly understood, we cannot transcend the misery of samsāra even for a moment. Hence, to attain nirvāṇa is out of the question. Chapters Five through Six teach us the importance of nirvāṇa and how to find a realized Guru to guide us.

While studying each chapter, in order to gain the real benefit, one should read *Kün-zang La-may Zhal-lung* with genuine respect and interest, and meditate on the teachings point by point, so that one understands them spiritually. No benefit will be obtained if one reads the whole volume in a few hours as an intellectual pastime. The purpose of studying *Kün-zang La-may Zhal-lung* is to make one really feel the nature of samsāra, and the urgent need of seeking liberation for oneself and others.

For this reason, the Tantric teaching is not only to be followed by those in monasteries, but by sincere lay devotees who properly maintain the secret vows and understand the special injunctions. One should also remember that the secret Tantric teachings strictly warn against exposing the teachings to those who have no foundation and real understanding. These warnings are given for the benefit of both the giver and receiver, so that neither will suffer untoward consequences, and so that the Dharma perpetually maintains its efficacy.

It is also necessary that the ending prayers of every chapter be repeated thousands of times with deep contemplation, so that they act as constant reminders. Proper prayers and dedication after finishing the reading should be done. If one takes the time to let the teachings sink into one, one's mundane nature will be dramatically transformed.

The first edition of *Kün-zang La-may Zhal-lung* that I read was the personal book used by the late Most Reverend Shug-seb Je-tsün Lo-ch'en Rin-po-ch'e of Tibet. She had

given this to my wife, Mrs. Tsede Kazi, one of her most devout followers, as a souvenir. It was this very book with which the late Lo-ch'en Rin-po-ch'e had blessed me for the first time in 1949 at the Shug-seb retreat in Tibet. She not only showed great kindness to my wife and me by giving initiations of the principal teachings of *Long-ch'en Nying-t'ig*, but also blessed us by reincarnating in our daughter. It was His Holiness, the late Sixteenth Kar-ma-pa, who discovered her as the heart reincarnation of the late Lo-ch'en Rin-po-ch'e. This was very graciously confirmed by His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, the highest Buddhist authority, respected by all as the Buddha of Mercy reincarnated in human form, whose sole intention is to reinforce peace and happiness in this world.

In doing this translation, I consulted two other editions of *Kün-zang La-may Zhal-lung*. One was the xylograph copy from His Holiness the late Sixteenth Kar-ma-pa's center in Rumtek, Sikkim. The costs of the wooden blocks for this edition were assumed by the late Dzog-ch'en Pön-lob Rin-po-ch'e, brother of His Holiness the Sixteenth Kar-ma-pa. The other edition I consulted was from the *Pal-trül Sung-bum*, the collected works of Dza Pal-trül Rin-po-ch'e, consisting of six volumes. These belonged to the private library of His Holiness the late Dü-jom Rin-po-ch'e. He kindly lent them to me for publication in the Nga-gyur Nying-may Sung-rab Series in Tibetan. *Kün-zang La-may Zhal-lung* corresponds to Volume 42 of this series, published in Gangtok in 1971. The page numbers given in brackets (<>) in the English translation correspond to this edition.

In translating *Kün-zang La-may Zhal-lung* into English, I have tried to follow the Tibetan text as closely as possible. Wherever I found major or minor mistakes, typographical or otherwise, which I am sure were not in the original text, I have inserted corrections and provided a footnote accounting for the change.

The term "Dzog-ch'en" (S. Mahāsandhi) has been left in Tibetan throughout. It is the duty of one's Root-Guru to

explain what it really means. Proper names have not been translated into English. Sanskrit words which are familiar to all, such as *samsara*, *nirvana*, and *Bodhicitta*, are used instead of translating their Tibetan equivalents into English.

In conformity with the time-honored tradition in Tibet, Pal-trül Rin-po-ch'e has given acknowledgments, dedications, a detailed account of how he wrote the book, and so on, in a Colophon at the end of the second volume. Accordingly, I have gratefully acknowledged those who have helped me in editing and typing the manuscript for this book at the end of the second volume.

The following is the uninterrupted, pure *Nying-t'ig* lineage that Cha-tral Rin-po-ch'e holds:

Kün-k'yen Jig-me Ling-pa

1. Jig-me Gyal-way Nyu-gu
2. Jig-me Ch'ö-kyi Wang-po (Dza Pal-trül)
3. Nyu-shü'l Lung-tog Ten-pay Nyi-ma
4. Abbot Ngag-wang Pal-zang
5. Cha-tral Sang-gyay Do-je

I received the oral transmission as well as the explanation of *Kün-zang La-may Zhal-lung* from my gracious Guru, Cha-tral Sang-gyay Do-je Rin-po-ch'e.

May the humble service that I have offered in translating *Kün-zang La-may Zhal-lung* contribute to the perpetuation of the paramount *Dzog-ch'en* teaching. May all the realized Gurus live long, and accomplish their compassionate mission. May all the sentient beings of this world live long and enjoy peace and happiness. May they quickly attain the state of Samantabhadra Buddha.

February 5, 1989
Kerhonkson, New York

Sonam T. Kazi



Plate 1. Śākyamuni Buddha



Plate 2. Guru Padmasambhava, Abbot Śāntarakṣita,
and King Tr'i-song Deu-tsen



Plate 3. Guru Long-ch'en-pa



Plate 4. Guru Jig-me Ling-pa

**DZOG-PA CH'EN-PO LONG-CH'EN NYING-TIG-GI
NGÖN-DRÖ TR'I-YIG
KÜN-ZANG LA-MAY ZHAL-LUNG
ZHEY JA-WA ZHUG-SO**

**[HEREIN] IS CONTAINED THE INSTRUCTION ON
THE PRELIMINARY PRACTICES OF
DZOG-PA CH'EN-PO LONG-CH'EN NYING-TIG
CALLED
“THE ORAL INSTRUCTION OF KÜN-ZANG LA-MA”**

Homage to all the revered Gurus, who possess great non-conceptual mercy.

The Buddha's mind [lineage]; the Rig-dzin's gesture lineage;
[And the oral lineage] of persons who—their fortune being superior to that of ordinary people—
Followed the Noble Ones and attained the dual accomplishment:

To all the Gurus of these three lineages, I pay homage.

He attained the Dharmakāya mind in the sphere of dissolved phenomenal appearances;
He saw the manifestations of the Sambhogakāya paradise in the clear-light emptiness;
In the eyes of his followers, he performed the duties of a Nirmāṇakāya [by liberating] sentient beings:
To the Omniscient Dharma-King [Long-ch'en-pa], I pay homage. <3>

Through his [dual] transcendent wisdom, he saw the ultimate truth in all knowable things;

His rays of compassion shined as inspiration to his followers; He elucidated the teaching of the paramount vehicle, the profound method:

To Rig-dzin Jig-me Ling-pa, I pay homage.

An Avalokiteśvara in the guise of a spiritual teacher, He established on the path of liberation all those who heard his voice,

[By] showing limitless actions to [suit the needs of] his followers:

To my gracious Root-Guru [Jig-me Gyal-way Nyu-gu],¹ I pay homage.

The entire Buddhist doctrine transmitted through the Kün-k'yen² tradition, <4>

The essence of the secret techniques, is the Dharma that yields Buddhahood in one lifetime.

The outer and inner preliminary practices of the path, Together with the ejection [of consciousness],³ a direct path [to realization] that complements the main instructions, Are unique, secret techniques that are clear and easy to understand.

These instructions of my unparalleled Guru, In the manner I recall them in my mind, are unerroneously related here.

Gurus and deities, bless me please.

¹ One of Jig-mey Ling-pa's eminent disciples, who gave the oral commentary which forms the text of this translation.

² Long-ch'en-pa

³ p'o-wa / 'pho.ba

According to my notes, the outer and inner preliminary practices⁴ of *Dzog-pa Ch'en-po Long-ch'en Nying-tig*,⁵ as exactly explained by my unparalleled Guru, have three divisions:

Part One

The Common Outer Preliminary Practices⁶

Part Two

The Unique Inner Preliminary Practices⁷

Part Three

The Instruction on the Ejection of Consciousness,⁸ a direct method that complements the main practice of meditation.

⁴ *ngön-dro* / sñon.'gro

⁵ *rdzogs.pa chen.po kloñ.chen sñiñ.tig*

⁶ *t'ün-mong ch'i ngön-dro* / *thun.moñ phyi'i sñon.'gro*

⁷ *t'ün-min nang-gi ngön-dro* / *thun.min nañ.gi sñon.'dro*

⁸ *p'o-way Tr'i* / *'pho.ba'i khrid*

PART ONE

The Common Outer Preliminary Practices

[The explanation of the common outer preliminary practices is set forth in six chapters:]

1. The Difficulty of Obtaining Leisure and Endowment;
2. The Impermanence of Life;
3. The Misery of Saṃsāra;
4. The Cause and Effect of Karma;
5. The Benefit of Freedom;
6. Following a Spiritual Teacher.

CHAPTER ONE

The Difficulty of Obtaining Leisure and Endowment

The instruction on the difficulty of obtaining [a human state with] leisure and endowment¹ is twofold:

1. The Manner of Listening to the Instructions;
2. The Categories of the Dharma to Be Explained.

1 THE MANNER OF LISTENING TO THE INSTRUCTIONS

[The section on the manner of listening to the instructions] is twofold:

1. Motivation;
2. Conduct.

1.1 MOTIVATION²

There are two types [of motivation]:

1. The Broad-minded Bodhicitta Motivation;
2. The Secret Tantric Motivation with a Wide Range of Techniques.

¹ *dal-jor nye-ka-wa / dal.'byor rñed.dka'.ba*

² *kün-long / kun.sloñ*

1.1.1 THE BROAD-MINDED BODHICITTA MOTIVATION³

[The broad-minded bodhicitta motivation] is based on the idea that] there is not one out of all the sentient beings who dwell in samsāra <5> who has not been your parent in [the course of] beginningless time. When they were your parents, they treated you with great affection and provided you with the best food and clothes [they could afford]. They were very kind in bringing you up with loving care. These gracious beings yearn for happiness, but they do not know how to practice the ten virtuous Dharmas, the causes of happiness. They dislike suffering, but they hardly know how to avoid the ten vices,⁴ the causes of suffering. The ends they desire from the core of their hearts and the means they follow become contrary. Bewildered, on a wrong path, they find themselves as helpless as blind men abandoned in the middle of a plain. Develop pity for them, and think thus, “If I now listen to a profound Dharma and practice it, I can help them achieve their goal. These sentient beings, my parents who are afflicted by the suffering and pain of the six regions,⁵ must be rescued from all the karmic sufferings and habits pertaining to each of those six regions. I must help them attain the state of omniscient Buddhahood.” This is the thought [called “the broad-minded bodhicitta motivation”].

Having this sort of motivation is very important while listening to religious discourses, while putting them into practice, and, in fact, while doing everything [for the attainment of Buddhahood]. While earning virtuous merit, whether large or small, you must: [1] ensure it with skillful means, by developing bodhicitta; [2] to protect the merit you have earned <6> from quick dissipation by destructive causes, practice non-conceptual meditation—the principal step; and [3] to

³ *sam-pa gya-ch'e-wa ch'ang-ch'ub sem-kyi kün-long / bsam.pa rgya.che.ba byañ.chub sems.kyi kun.sloñ*

⁴ See Chapter Four for an explanation of the ten virtues and the ten vices.

⁵ See Chapter Three for an explanation of the six regions.

multiply its virtue infinitely, conclude fully with prayers of dedication [to all sentient beings]. Thus, you cannot do without these three perfect principles.⁶

Therefore, while listening to a discourse about Dharma, not only is the manner in which you listen important, the motivation with which you listen is even more important.

As it is said:

**It is the virtuous or unvirtuous thought that makes the difference,
Not the extent of the physical manifestation of virtue or vice.**

Accordingly, no matter how much you may listen to the Dharma, as long as you are motivated by pride, a sense of superiority, or other attitudes directly concerned with mundane life, you are not considered to be following the Dharma properly.

So, to start with, it is highly important that you turn inward and shape your motivation. If your motivation is properly shaped, your virtuous deeds will be well-founded and will lead to the Great Being's⁷ path of immeasurable merit. If your motivation is not properly shaped, the acts of listening to and practicing the Dharma will tend to be mere formalities. Therefore, while listening to the Dharma, putting it into practice, visualizing the deities, uttering mantra, doing prostrations or circumambulations, or even saying a single word of [the mantra] *om mani padme hūm*, it is important that everything be motivated by bodhicitta.

⁶ *dam-pa-sum* / *dam.pa.gsum*

⁷ i.e., the Buddha's

1.1.2 THE SECRET TANTRIC MOTIVATION WITH A WIDE RANGE OF TECHNIQUES⁸

From the Ts'ül-sum Drön-me:

**Although identical in purpose [to the Sūtrayāna],
It is unobscured, has many methods, requires no
effort, <7>**

**And is meant for those having sharp mental acumen;
Therefore, the Mantrayāna⁹ excels in its superiority.**

Thus, the esoteric Vajrayāna¹⁰ has many entrances, many methods for earning good merits, and many effective techniques for achieving the fruit [of Buddhahood] without undergoing much hardship. Again, the root of these methods is based on the shaping of attitude.

It is said:

**All things are [created by] causes;
These [in turn] depend entirely on the focal point of
one's attitude.**

Thus, you should not regard [such things as] the place where the Dharma is preached, the teacher who preaches it, and so on, as common, ordinary things that are [usually] seen by obscured eyes. Rather, assume them to be like five perfect things,¹¹ and listen with this changed attitude.

Assume the nature of the place to be the perfect Dharmadhatu Palace in the Ög-min¹² Paradise; the teacher to be the perfect Dharmakāya Samantabhadra; and the followers to be perfect [holders] of the Buddha's mind tradition, Wisdom-Holders¹³ of the gesture tradition, male and female Bodhisat-

⁸ *t'ab gya-ch'e-wa sang-wa ngag-kyi kün-long / thabs rgya.che.ba gsang.ba snags.kyi kun.sloṅ*

⁹ i.e., Tantric Buddhism

¹⁰ i.e., Tantric Buddhism

¹¹ the perfect place, teacher, disciples, doctrine, and time

¹² *'og.min / S. Akanīṣṭha*

¹³ *rig-dzin / rig.'dzin*

tvas, and gods and goddesses. Or, assume the nature of the place where the Dharma is taught in fact to be the Pe-ma Ö Palace on Zang-dog Pal-gyi Ri-wo;¹⁴ the Guru who is preaching the Dharma actually to be O-gyen Pe-ma Jung-nay;¹⁵ and we followers who are hearing the Dharma to be the eight Wisdom-Holders, the twenty-five disciples, and dākas and dākinīs. Or, assume the nature of the place to be the perfect <8> Ngön-par ga-wa¹⁶ Paradise in the east; the teacher to be the perfect Sambhogakāya Vajrasattva; and the followers to be the host of deities of the Vajra race and male and female Bodhisattvas. Or, assume the nature of the place to be the perfect De-wa-chen¹⁷ Paradise in the west; the teacher to be the perfect Buddha Amitābha; and the followers to be the perfect host of deities of the Padma race, male and female Bodhisattvas, and gods and goddesses.

Whichever assumption [you make], have firm faith in the wheel of the Mahāyāna Dharma, which has been turning continuously since time immemorial. Regarding these [visualizations], know that you are visualizing what actually exists as it is; you are not visualizing non-existent things as existing.

The Guru embodies in himself all the Buddhas of the three times.¹⁸ As, in essence, his body is the Saṅgha, his speech is the Dharma, and his mind is the Buddha, he embodies the Three Jewels.¹⁹ As his body is the Guru,²⁰ his speech is the Deva,²¹ and his mind is the Dākinī,²² he embodies all the Three Basic Divinities.²³ As his body is the Nirmāṇakāya, his speech is the Sambhogakāya, and his mind

¹⁴ bzañ.ldog dpal.gyi ri.bo / the Glorious Copper-colored Mountain

¹⁵ Guru Padmasambhava

¹⁶ mñon.par dga'ba / S. Abhirati

¹⁷ bde.ba.can / S. Sukhāvatī

¹⁸ the past, present, and future

¹⁹ kön-ch'og-sum / dkon.mchog.gsum

²⁰ la-ma / bla.ma

²¹ yi-dam / yid.dam

²² k'a-dro / mkha'.gro

²³ tsa-wa-sum / rtsa.ba.gsum

is the Dharmakāya, he embodies all the Three Kāyas.²⁴ He is the incarnation of all the past Buddhas, the source of all the future Buddhas, and the regent of all the present Buddhas. <9> Because he delivers the beings of this deteriorated period, who could not be rescued even by the thousand Buddhas of the Superior Aeon, from the standpoint of his grace²⁵ and kindness, he is even more important than all those Buddhas.

It is said:

**The Guru is the Buddha; the Guru is the Dharma;
Likewise, the Guru is the Saṅgha.
The Guru is the doer of all.
The Guru is the glorious Vajradhara.**

So it is like that. We followers who hear the Dharma from him also have the Buddha-Essence as the basis, the valuable human state as the support, and spiritual teachers as the cause [of our enlightenment]. Upheld by the methods of this secret tantric method, we are the future Buddhas.

From the Tag-nyi Tantra:

**Although sentient beings are intrinsically Buddhas,
They are obscured by adventitious defilement.
Remove the defilement, and there is the real Buddha.**

And so it has been said.

1.2 CONDUCT²⁶

[The instruction on conduct] is twofold:

1. Conduct That Should Be Abandoned;
2. Conduct That Should Be Adopted.

²⁴ a Buddha's body, speech, and mind

²⁵ i.e., blessings

²⁶ *kün-chö* / *kun.spyod*

1.2.1 CONDUCT THAT SHOULD BE ABANDONED

[The conduct that should be abandoned] is threefold:

1. The Three Defects of the Vessel;
2. The Six Defilements [of the Vessel];
3. The Five Wrong Ways of Apprehending.

1.2.1.1 THE THREE DEFECTS OF THE VESSEL

[The three defects of the vessel] are:

1. To be defective like an upside-down vessel, by not lending your ear;
2. To be defective like a vessel with a leaking bottom, by not remembering what you have heard;
3. To be defective like a vessel contaminated with poison, by mixing [what you have heard] with delusive views.

1.2.1.1.1 [TO BE DEFECTIVE LIKE AN UPSIDE-DOWN VESSEL]

While listening to the Dharma, without letting your ear-consciousness be distracted elsewhere, <10> you must focus on the sound communicating the Dharma and listen. If you do not listen thus, it will be like pouring an essential substance²⁷ into a vessel which has been set upside down. Although you are physically present in the religious gathering, you will not hear a single word of the Dharma.

1.2.1.1.2 [TO BE DEFECTIVE LIKE A VESSEL WITH A LEAKING BOTTOM]

If you treat whatever Dharma you hear casually and do not retain it in your mind, it will be like pouring an essential substance into a vessel with a leaking bottom: however much is

²⁷ *chü* / bcud / also means "contents" in relation to a container; i.e., the listener, the vessel, should take in the Dharma, the essential contents.

put in, the vessel will retain nothing. You will not be able to put the teachings into practice, whatever amount of Dharma you hear.

1.2.1.1.3 [TO BE DEFECTIVE LIKE A VESSEL CONTAMINATED WITH POISON]

If you listen to the Dharma with defective motives, such as the desire to promote your own position and fame; or, if you listen under the influence of the five poisons—lust, hatred, delusion, [arrogance, and jealousy]—the Dharma will have no beneficial effect on your mind. In fact, the Dharma will then become anti-Dharma. This will be like putting a precious substance into a poisonous vessel.

On this point, Dam-pa of India said:

When listening to the Dharma, you should be like a wild animal listening to a sound.

When thinking [of the Dharma], you should be like a northerner shearing [wool from a] sheep.

When meditating [on the Dharma], you should be like a dumb man enjoying a taste.

When intensely putting the Dharma into practice, you should be like a hungry yak devouring grass.

When [you attain] fruition, you should be like the sun set free from clouds.

As he said, when you listen to the Dharma, you should be like a wild animal listening spellbound to the sound of a harp, oblivious to a hunter shooting a poisoned arrow at it from the side. <11> You should hear the Dharma with an ecstasy that makes the hairs of your body stand on end and your eyes fill with tears, with your hands in a folded position, and with your mind uninterrupted by any other thoughts.

On the other hand, although you may be physically seated in a religious gathering, if your mind runs after other thoughts and engages in endless gossip, or if your mouth and eyes are engaged in something else, no purpose can be served. When listening to the Dharma, you should stop other religious

activities, such as praying and bead counting, and do nothing but hear the Dharma. Even after listening in this manner, bear in mind whatever meanings have been explained, and do not forget to practice them constantly.

Lord Buddha said:

**I show you the way to liberation,
But know that liberation rests with you.**

Accordingly, a Guru's instructions to a disciple [are given simply] to teach him how to listen to the Dharma, how to practice [the Dharma], how to renounce vice, how to acquire virtue, and how to take [the Dharma] to heart. A disciple must remember the [Guru's instructions] and follow them thoroughly. If you do not take them to heart, although some minimal benefit may result from listening to the Dharma, you will not understand the meaning of the words at all, and there will be no difference between your having heard them or not. Although you may take the instructions to heart, if you mix them with delusion, they will not be the pure Dharma.

Nyam-me Dag-po Rin-po-ch'e said: <12>

**If the Dharma is not followed as Dharma,
The Dharma itself may be the cause for going to hell
again.**

Accordingly, antagonism toward the Guru and the Dharma, which are both at an exalted level; bearing critical views toward religious friends, who are at your own level; and arrogance, disregard for karmic effects, and similar types of immoral thoughts—these will cause you to fall into the lower regions. Therefore, they should be avoided.

1.2.1.2 THE SIX DEFILEMENTS [OF THE VESSEL]

From the Nam-she Rig-pa:²⁸

- [1] Arrogance,
- [2] Lack of faith,
- [3] Lack of interest,
- [4] External distraction,
- [5] Inward withdrawal, and
- [6] Listening with regret

Are the defilements.

As it is said, arrogance, which is the thought, “I am even greater than the Guru who is preaching”; lack of faith in the Dharma and the Guru; lack of interest in the Dharma; engaging the mind entirely in external objects; inwardly withdrawing the five sense organs; and [listening with] regret [by having such thoughts as], “the teaching is taking too long”—these are the six defilements you must abandon.

1.2.1.2.1 [ARROGANCE]

Of all the delusive hindrances, arrogance and jealousy are the two most difficult to recognize; hence, you should observe your mind minutely. If you are proud of the small spiritual or temporal knowledge you have obtained and become attached to it, you will not be able to see either your own inner defects or others’ merits. Therefore, abandon arrogance and always hold fast to an attitude of humility.

1.2.1.2.2 [LACK OF FAITH]

The absence of faith closes the door of the Dharma. Of the four types of faith, acquire unchangeable faith.²⁹ <13>

²⁸ rnam.bśad rig.pa

²⁹ ch'ir mi-dog-pay de-pa / phyir mi.ldog.pa'i dad.pa / The four types of faith are explained in Part Two, Chapter One.

1.2.1.2.3 [LACK OF INTEREST]

Taking interest in the Dharma is the foundation of all knowledge. Dharma-followers of great, mediocre, and ordinary grades are the products of great, mediocre, and ordinary interest in the Dharma. Dharma will never grow if you do not take interest in it. Even ordinarily, it is said, "Dharma, while free, is really for the hard worker." Indeed, while seeking a single, four-word phrase of Dharma, our Lord Buddha had to burn a thousand lamps by pouring seed-oil into holes dug into His own flesh, jump across a ditch full of fire, drive a thousand nails into His body, and endure hundreds of other hardships.

[A Sūtra states]:

**Crossing over bonfires and sharp blades,
The search for Dharma continued to the very brink of
death.**

Hence, as stated, you should hear the Dharma with such great interest that you overcome all difficulties, such as heat, cold, and any other obstacles as well.

1.2.1.2.4 [EXTERNAL DISTRACTION]

The indulgence of consciousness in the six external sensual stimulants³⁰ is the root cause of all illusory concepts and the source of all suffering. For example, because their eye consciousness craves form, moths die in flames. Because their ears crave sound, wild animals are killed by hunters. Because their noses crave scent, bees are entrapped in flowers. Because their tongues crave taste, fish are hooked. Because their bodies crave touch, elephants sink into mud. Furthermore, whenever you are listening to, teaching, or practicing the Dharma, you should avoid retracing past impressions, <14> anticipating future delusions, and indulging your present attention in extraneous matters.

³⁰ touch, sight, sound, taste, smell, and concepts

Gyal-say Rin-po-ch'e said:

**Past pain and pleasure are like drawings on water.
The past leaves no trace; do not try to track it.
If you insist on remembering, consider the decline of
wealth into poverty, and of meeting into separation.
Hark, Mani-wa! Is there anything other than Dharma
on which you can depend?**

**Preparation for the future is like setting a fishing net in
a dry riverbed.**

**Give up ambitious aims that miss the desired end.
If you insist on anticipating, consider the uncertainty of
[the time of] death.
Hark, Mani-wa! Have you time to spare for anything
save Dharma?**

**Present activities are like housekeeping in a dream.
Let them go, for your worldly endeavors will achieve
nothing.**

**The food permitted by Dharma can be gotten by a
hundred unattached means.**

**Hark, Mani-wa! Active involvement [in worldly affairs]
has no intrinsic meaning at all.**

**Until all appearances of thought are transmuted into
the Dharmakāya,**

**Training to recognize the three poisons in the post-
meditative state**

**Cannot be done away with; therefore, remember this
when necessary.**

**Hark, Mani-wa! Do not let illusory thoughts spread
uncontrolled.**

At another time, the same Guru said:

**Do not anticipate the future.
If you anticipate the future,
You will be like Da-wa Drag-pa's father.**

Once upon a time, a poor man found a good deal of barley, which he put into a bag and hung from his ceiling. Lying beneath it, he began to daydream, “Now, based upon this barley, I will acquire a great amount of wealth. <15> Then I will marry. My wife will surely give birth to a son. What name shall I give my son?” Just then, the moon shone. He concluded that his son should be named Da-wa Drag-pa (Renowned as the Moon). At that very moment, having been gnawed through by a mouse, the rope holding up the bag gave way and the bag fell, killing the man.

Thus, the innumerable plans of past and future seldom turn out as expected. Because they waste your time, you should thoroughly abandon them. Listen [to the Dharma] with remembrance, watchfulness, and self-control.

1.2.1.2.5 [INWARD WITHDRAWAL]

If you are inwardly withdrawn to excess and merely attend to an occasional sentence of Dharma, you will listen like a wild dog digging up a nest of rats. As soon as it catches one, it sees another and forgets about the first. [Consequently], it never has time to catch them all. Excessive withdrawal also induces sleep, obscures consciousness, and develops many other defects. Therefore, you should maintain moderate attention, neither too taut nor too slack.

Long ago, Kün-ga-wo³¹ taught Dro-zhin-kyey³² how to meditate. A perfect meditation would not grow in him, for he either would tense his mind too much or relax it too much. When the Buddha was told of Dro-zhin-kyey’s problem, He asked him, “Living man, you were very expert at tuning the lute when you were yet at home, were you not?”

“Yes, Lord, extremely expert.”

“How did you get the melody from your lute—by excessively tightening the strings, or by excessively loosening them?”

³¹ kün.dga’bo. / S. Ānanda

³² gro.bžin.skyes / S. Śroṇa

“By doing neither of those. I obtained it by tightening and loosening the strings in just the proper way.” <16>

“Then your mind should also [be dealt with] like that.”

With this advice, [Dro-zhin-kyey] obtained the result.

Also, Ma-lab-drön said, “Concentrate intensely, yet release yourself and relax. Therein lies a secret of comprehending the doctrinal view.” Just as she said, do not draw your mind in too tensely—attain a moderate equilibrium, and keep your senses relaxed.

1.2.1.2.6 [LISTENING WITH REGRET]

You should not feel regret and lose devotion in listening to the Dharma due to pangs of hunger or thirst on account of the [teaching] session being lengthy, or because you are distressed by wind, sun, or rain. On the contrary, think as follows, “At present, I have a well-endowed human body, have met a recognized Guru, and therefore am happy since I can learn the profound spiritual techniques. This [opportunity] is the outcome of merits earned during innumerable aeons. The chance to hear the Dharma is like a feast which comes only once in a century. For the sake of this Dharma, I am ready to undergo any sort of hardship—heat, cold, whatever.”

Bearing this in mind, you should hear the Dharma with happiness and pleasure.

1.2.1.3 THE FIVE MISAPPREHENSIONS

[The five misapprehensions] are:

1. To apprehend the words, but not the meaning;
2. To apprehend the meaning, but not the words;
3. To apprehend the words, but with a wrong interpretation;
4. To apprehend the words in an inverted order;
5. To apprehend the wrong meaning of the words.

1.2.1.3.1 [NOT TO APPREHEND THE MEANING]

If you pay attention only to beautiful words that are sweet to hear, and neglect to determine the important meaning, you are like a child picking flowers. The sound of the words <17> will not benefit your mind.

1.2.1.3.2 [NOT TO APPREHEND THE WORDS]

You may regard the narrative as the dregs of the discourse, intentionally ignore it, and clutch at the important meaning. But since there is no meaning that is not based on words, the words and the meaning will separate.

1.2.1.3.3 [TO MISINTERPRET THE TEACHING]

There are varieties of teachings that reveal the truth, some systematically or directly, others indirectly.³³ If you interpret the [latter] wrongly [i.e., literally], you will confuse the words and the meanings, and they will be contrary to the pure Dharma.

1.2.1.3.4 [TO INVERT THE ORDER OF THE WORDS]

If you apprehend the words in an inverted order, they will contradict the systematic progression of the Dharma. This contradiction will continue at all times, whether you are listening, teaching, or meditating.

1.2.1.3.5 [TO APPREHEND THE WRONG MEANING]

If you apprehend the wrong meaning, by being continually accustomed to wrong ideas, the nature of your mind will be impaired, and you will bring disgrace to the Dharma.

Thus, you should avoid all these erroneous [ways of apprehending]. The right meaning implied by the words, the

³³ *dem-gong* / *Idem.dgoṇs*

proper sequence—you should learn everything in a correct and orderly way. Do not, through laziness, give up trying to grasp things because they are difficult or extensive. Rather, grasp them with diligence. And do not take lightly whatever is easy or brief; hold it firmly so that you do not forget it. Do not be mistaken with regard to the proper sequence of words, and learn all the words and meanings thoroughly.

1.2.2 CONDUCT THAT SHOULD BE ADOPTED

[The conduct that should be adopted] is threefold:

1. To Make the Four Assumptions;
2. To Practice the Six Pāramitās;
3. To Follow Various Other Modes of Conduct.

1.2.2.1 TO MAKE THE FOUR ASSUMPTIONS

From the Dong-po Kö-pa:

Nobly born child:

- [1] Assume yourself to be the patient; <18>
- [2] Assume the Dharma to be the medicine;
- [3] Assume the spiritual teacher to be a skilled physician;
- [4] Assume constant practice to be the treatment that will certainly cure the disease.

As it is said, you who have been in this ocean of samsaric suffering since time immemorial are like a patient stricken by disease, the causes of which are the three poisons and the results of which are the three sufferings.

For example, a patient stricken with a severe disease will rely on a skilled physician; he will do whatever the physician advises and take whatever medicine is prescribed because he strives for the happiness of being free from disease. Similarly, you must follow the instructions of a true Guru, who is like a skilled physician, and take the medicine of the sublime Dharma in order to be freed from the diseases of karma,

misery, and suffering. Although you may find a Guru, if you do not follow his instructions, the Guru will be like a doctor who has no means to help, since the patient does not follow his instructions. If you do not personally take the medicine of the sublime Dharma and put it into practice, you are like a patient who has piles of medicine and innumerable prescriptions by his pillow, but who does not take the medicine [or use the prescriptions], and thus cannot benefit from them.

In general, people these days harbor great hope in the merciful help of the Guru, while they [continue to] engage in irreligious activities. They think that they need not suffer the results of their demeritorious deeds <19> because the grace of the Guru can transport them to Heaven as easily as the flinging of a stone. However, what is called “being held by the Guru’s grace” is this: he leads you with his compassionate grace; he teaches you the profound techniques; he opens your eyes to discern what is to be adopted and what is to be abandoned; and he shows you the path to liberation in conformity with the teaching of the Buddha. Apart from that, there is no additional grace. Depending on that grace, it is up to you whether or not you travel the path to liberation.

On this occasion, you have obtained the state of a human being with leisure and endowment, and you know the technique for acquiring [virtue] and abandoning [vice]. At this time, the power of decision is in your own hand. This [very moment] is the dividing line between your making a good or a bad choice. Therefore, following the exact instructions of the Guru, it is important that you settle the question of samsara and nirvana.

Village priests [sit] near the head of a corpse and give instructions, saying, “This is the crossroads of journeying up or journeying down; it is like turning a horse with a bridle.” However, unless you were previously well-trained [in meditation], at this time you will be driven from behind by the red wind of karma, led in front by the darkness of fear, pressed on both sides by the long, narrow passage of the *bar-do*,³⁴ and chased by innumerable attendants of Yama, who shout, “Kill,

³⁴ *bar.do* / the intermediate state entered after dying

kill! Hit, hit!” <20> You will fail to find a place to run to, a place to hide, a protector, or one in whom you can place your hope or trust. How can a time when you do not know what to do be a crossroads of journeying up or journeying down?

The great O-gyen Rin-po-ch'e said:

**Conferring initiation on the paper effigy
Comes too late when one's consciousness³⁵
Is running like a mad dog in the bar-do.
Leading [the consciousness] to the higher regions is
indeed a difficult task.**

Therefore, the crossroads of journeying up or journeying down, like turning a horse by its bridle, is this very occasion when you are alive. While in this human state, a meritorious deed done for rising [to a higher region] is more effective in its [degree of] virtue than merits earned in any other state. You should take care that this valuable life is not wasted. Likewise, as for accumulating evil deeds that lead you downward, you are more capable of performing them than any other sentient being. Thus, you certainly can produce the cause for inescapably [entering] the depths of the lower regions. Now is the time when you have met a Guru, who is like an expert doctor, and have found the noble Dharma, which is like the medicine that restores you to life. Thus, now is when you must make these four sublime assumptions and take the road to freedom by putting into practice the Dharma that you have heard.

You must also avoid the four contrary assumptions, their opposites.

From the Yön-ten Dzö:

**An insincere disciple
[1] Deceives with a humble tongue,
[2] Treats the Guru like a musk deer,**

³⁵ *nam-shey / rnam.ses*

- [3] Obtains the sublime Dharma like a booty of musk, and afterwards,
- [4] Forfeits the bond of trust, <21> since he is exceedingly fond of hunting.

As stated, you should not receive and practice the Dharma by assuming the Guru to be a musk deer, the Dharma to be musk, yourself to be a hunter, and the repeated [pretense] of practice to be attempts to kill the musk deer with an arrow or snare. You who do not appreciate the Guru's kindness are earning sins through the Dharma. You are making yourselves into cornerstones of hell.

1.2.2.2 TO PRACTICE THE SIX PĀRAMITĀS³⁶

The conduct to be adopted should have the following characteristics of the six pāramitās. The Ngön-par Tog-pa Tantra, which contains all the secret instructions concerning the conduct aspect of Dharma, states:

- [1] Offer things like flowers and cushions;
- [2] Maintain the place of Dharma instruction and control your conduct;
- [3] Do not harm any living beings;
- [4] Be fully devoted to the Guru;
- [5] Listen attentively to his instructions;
- [6] Pose questions to clarify doubtful points—
The listeners should possess these six aspects [of pāramitā].

Thus, you should set the throne of Dharma with cushions, and offer mandalas, flowers, and the like. This is the offering of alms.³⁷

³⁶ lit. to cross to the other side; i.e., from the conceptual to the non-conceptual

³⁷ *jin-pa* / *sbyin.pa*

Thoroughly clean [the place of instruction], keep down the dust, and correct any errors, such as disrespectful behavior. This is the observation of morality.³⁸

Avoid harming even the smallest insects and bear with endurance hardships such as heat, cold, and so forth. This is forbearance.³⁹

Avoid feeling any antipathy toward the Guru and the teaching, and cheerfully listen to the Dharma <22> with genuine faith. This is perseverance.⁴⁰

Listen to the instructions of the Guru by focusing your attention nowhere else. This is steadiness of mind.⁴¹

Ask questions to clarify all doubtful points. This is transcendent wisdom.⁴²

Thus, the listener should possess the six pāramitās.

1.2.2.3 TO FOLLOW VARIOUS OTHER MODES OF CONDUCT

From the Dül-wa Lung:

**Do not preach to those who have no respect.
Those whose heads are covered although [they are] not sick,
Those who use umbrellas or carry a stick or a weapon,
And those whose heads are wrapped are not to be taught.**

From the Kyey-rab:

**Take the lowest seat,
Manifest the signs of having disciplined [your mind],
And look up with cheerful eyes.**

³⁸ *ts'ül-t'rim* / tshul.khrims

³⁹ *zö-pa* / bzod.pa

⁴⁰ *tsön-drü* / brtson.'grus

⁴¹ *sam-ten* / bsam.gtan

⁴² *shey-rab* / śes.rab

**As if drinking the nectar of the words,
Listen to the Dharma with full attention.**

Thus, as stated, give up all habits which show disrespect.

2 THE CATEGORIES OF THE DHARMA TO BE EXPLAINED

The instruction on the difficulty of attaining leisure and endowment⁴³ is fourfold:

1. Contemplation on Leisure,⁴⁴ the Main Subject;
2. Contemplation on the Special Dharma Called Endowment,⁴⁵
3. Contemplation on Examples Showing the Difficulty of Obtaining [a Human Body];
4. Contemplation on the Numerical Improbability [of Obtaining a Human Body].

2.1 CONTEMPLATION ON LEISURE, THE MAIN SUBJECT

Generally speaking, “leisure” means not to be born in [any of] the eight inopportune⁴⁶ states that permit no leisure, but rather to be born in a state that allows the practice of the noble Dharma. “Inopportune” refers to the eight states in which there is no time [to practice Dharma]. <23>

It is said:

- [1] Hell-beings,
- [2] Pretas,⁴⁷
- [3] Animals,

⁴³ *dal-jor* / dal.'byor

⁴⁴ *dal-wa* / dal.ba

⁴⁵ *jor-pa* / 'byor.pa

⁴⁶ *mi-k'om-pa* / mi.khom.pa

⁴⁷ *yi-dag* / yi.dvags / hungry ghosts

- [4] **Barbarians,**
- [5] **Long-lived gods,**
- [6] **Heretics,**
- [7] **Those born in periods devoid of Buddhas, and**
- [8] **Mutes⁴⁸—**

These eight have no leisure.

Thus, as stated, if you are born in hell, there is no opportunity to follow the Dharma because you must always suffer the pains of heat and cold.

Born in the region of pretas, there is no opportunity to follow the Dharma because you are constantly occupied with the sufferings of hunger and thirst.

There is no opportunity to practice the Dharma in the animal region because animals suffer from being exploited and from harming each other.

The long-lived gods pass their time in a non-perceptive state and have no opportunity to practice the Dharma.⁴⁹

If you are born in a barbarous country, because there is no Buddhism, there is no opportunity to practice the Dharma.

If you are born as one akin to the evil heretics, because your mind is contaminated with antagonistic views, there is no opportunity to practice the Dharma.

If you are born during a dark aeon, you will not hear even the sound of [the words] “Three Jewels.” Because you cannot distinguish virtue from vice, there is no opportunity to practice the Dharma.

If you are born mute, your consciousness is not serviceable. Hence, there is no opportunity to practice the Dharma.

⁴⁸ *kug-pa* / lkugs.pa / lit. mute, one who cannot speak; however, as explained below and in section 2.1.6, this state also includes those whose mental faculties are defective.

⁴⁹ The usual sequence places “barbarians” before “long-lived gods.” In this particular passage, however, the order is reversed.

2.1.1 [THE STATES OF HELL-BEINGS, PRETAS, AND ANIMALS]

Beings born in the three lower regions of these eight inopportune states incessantly suffer from heat, cold, and hunger, the karmic reactions that result from their own wrongdoing in the past. Hence, they have no leisure to follow the Dharma.

<24>

2.1.2 [THE STATE OF BARBARIANS]

The word “barbarian”⁵⁰ refers to the barbarians of the thirty-two [Tibetan] border areas such as Lo-k'a-t'ra and so forth, and [also] those who regard the infliction of pain [on others] as Dharma. Although these barbarians of the border areas are human beings, they do not turn their minds towards the noble Dharma. They follow their ancestral tradition, which has profane practices such as making a bride of one's own mother, and hence their behavior is contrary to the instructions of the Dharma. Because they are especially expert in demeritorious acts, such as killing living beings and hunting wild animals, upon dying there are many who must immediately go to hell. Therefore, [this state] is inopportune.

2.1.3 [THE STATE OF LONG-LIVED GODS]

The long-lived gods live in a non-perceptive state. Those who practice the dhyāna⁵¹ in which neither virtue nor vice is perceived and who regard this as the ultimate liberation are reborn as non-perceptive gods. They enjoy this dhyāna for many great [cycles of] aeons. When the karma that has elevated them to the [god-realms] is exhausted, they repudiate their belief [in liberation]. Because this antagonism causes them to be reborn in hell, they have no opportunity to practice the Dharma.

⁵⁰ *la-lo* / *kla.klo*

⁵¹ *sam-ten* / *bsam.gtan* / steadiness of mind

2.1.4 [THE STATE OF HERETICS]

Those who are outside of the Buddhist faith hold contrary views, for they hold either eternalism or nihilism as their doctrinal view. They have no opportunity to develop pure faith to practice the Dharma because their minds are preoccupied with these contrary thoughts. <25> Because the Second Buddha, O-gyen Rin-po-ch'e, assigned the twelve guardian sisters⁵² to protect Tibet, [until recently] Tibet was impregnable to heretics.⁵³

Being similar to heretics, those who hold views which are antagonistic to the perfect Dharma and to its followers also have no opportunity to follow perfectly the sublime Dharma. They are like the monk Leg-pay Kar-ma.⁵⁴ Although he served Lord Buddha for twenty-five years, because he had not the slightest faith in Him but rather regarded Him with scorn, he was ultimately reborn in a garden as a hungry ghost.

2.1.5 [THE STATE OF THOSE BORN IN A DARK AEON]

A period with no Buddhas is called a dark aeon.⁵⁵ If you are born in a world devoid of Buddhas, you will not even hear the sound of [the words] "Three Jewels." Because you will have no idea of the noble Dharma, it is an inopportune state.

2.1.6 [THE STATE OF THE MUTE]

If you are born mute,⁵⁶ your mind will not be suitable for listening to, teaching, or meditating upon the Dharma. In general, "mute" refers only to one who cannot speak and therefore suffers from an inopportune state, but since human characteristics include [both] knowing words and understanding their meaning, those who on account of the mute-

⁵² *ten-ma chu-nyi* / bstan.ma bcu.gñis

⁵³ *mu-teg-pa* / mu.stegs.pa

⁵⁴ *legs.pa'i skar.ma* / S. Sunakṣatra

⁵⁵ *mün-kal* / mun.bskal

⁵⁶ *kug-pa* / lkug.pa

ness of their mental faculties have become extremely stupid, and cannot understand the implications of the Dharma, are also in an inopportune state. <26>

2.2 CONTEMPLATION ON THE SPECIAL DHARMA CALLED ENDOWMENT

The special Dharma called [favorable] endowment [comprises]:

1. The Five Endowments Found within Oneself;
2. The Five Endowments Resting with Others.

2.2.1 THE FIVE ENDOWMENTS FOUND WITHIN ONESELF⁵⁷

As Nāgārjuna said, they are:

- [1] To be a human being;
- [2] Born in a central country;
- [3] With perfect faculties;
- [4] Engaged in a proper vocation;
- [5] [And] having faith in the abode [of the Dharma].

If you do not obtain a human state, you will have no chance to meet with the Dharma. Therefore, a human body is a [favorable] endowment.

If you are born in a border country, where no Dharma is practiced, you will not meet with the Dharma. Therefore, to be born as you are now—in a central country where the Dharma is currently prevalent—is a [favorable] endowment.

If you are born with defective faculties, they will hinder you. Since you now are free from such defects, you have the endowment of favorable faculties.

A wrong vocation always involves harmful activities, which cause you to turn away from the Dharma. As you now are

⁵⁷ *rang-jor nga / rañ.'byor.lña*

following a proper vocation to earn good merits, you have the special endowment of a reverent mental attitude.

If you have no faith in Buddhist doctrine, the object toward which your faith is to be directed, you will not be attracted to the Dharma. You now are capable of turning your mind toward the Dharma, so you have the [favorable] endowment of faith.

Thus you must possess these five [endowments], which are known as “the five fortunate endowments found within oneself.”

2.2.1.1 [TO BE BORN AS A HUMAN BEING]

Thus, in order to actually practice the real, pure Dharma, you must certainly be a human being.

If you do not obtain a human body, the best of the three lower regions is the animal region. Animals in the human world may be beautiful, valuable, and so on, but no matter how superior <27> they are in quality, if you were to tell them that they would become Buddhas if they were to utter [the mantram] *om mani padme hūm* once, they could neither hear the words, understand their meaning, nor utter them. Even when they are about to die of cold, they merely remain still; they can conceive of no means to keep themselves warm. Yet no matter how weak he may be, a man knows how to go to a cave or the foot of a tree, how to collect firewood, and how to make a fire to warm his hands and face. If an animal cannot do even that, what need be said of its thinking to practice the Dharma?

Divine beings are supposed to have the best physical status, but their systems are unsuitable for receiving perfect, self-liberating vows.⁵⁸ Therefore, the gods have no luck in acquiring the Buddhist doctrine in its entirety.

⁵⁸ *so-t'ar-gyi dom-pa / so.thar.gyi sdom.pa*

2.2.1.2 [TO BE BORN IN A CENTRAL COUNTRY]

What is called a central country has two aspects, geographical and spiritual. The former refers to Bodhgāya in India, which is regarded as the center of the world, a holy place where the thousand Buddhas of the Superior Aeon will be enlightened. [It is said that] it will survive the destruction of the aeon and the cataclysmic forces of the elements, and will remain like a sickle hanging in the air, with the Bodhi tree at its center. With Bodhgāya as their hub, [all] the other cities of India are regarded as geographically central countries.

In the spiritual sense, <28> a central country is one in which the Buddhist Dharma prevails. Countries other than these are called borderlands.⁵⁹ Thus, although India was regarded as a central country both in the spiritual and geographical sense from the time the Buddha appeared on this earth until the Buddha-Dharma disappeared from India, at this time even Bodhgāya has been seized by heretics, and Buddhism is said to be found there no more.⁶⁰ Hence, as regards the Dharma, India too is now a borderland.

As for Tibet, the land of snow-mountains, when Buddha visited this world, it was scarcely inhabited by human beings. Hence it was known as Tibet, the country of borderlands. Later, human beings and miraculous kings gradually appeared.

During the reign of L'a-t'o-[t'o]-ri Nyen-tsen,⁶¹ a religious book called the Pang-kong Ch'ag-gya-pa, a mold for *sa-tsa*,⁶² and other [Dharma objects] were found on the roof [of the Yum-bu L'a-k'ar palace], marking the start of the Dharma [in Tibet]. It was predicted that their significance would be understood during the reign of the fifth king to follow.

⁵⁹ *t'a-k'ob / mtha'-'khob*

⁶⁰ Bodhgāya has since been restored and placed under Buddhist supervision.

⁶¹ approximately 350 C.E.

⁶² a small, cone-shaped image of a stūpa cast in clay from a mould

Accordingly, during his reign, King Song-tsen Gam-po,⁶³ an emanation of Avalokiteśvara, sent the interpreter Tön-mi Sam-bho-ta to India, where he studied Sanskrit, philology, and so on. When [the interpreter] returned, he introduced a system of writing, which Tibet previously had lacked. Twenty-one Sūtras and Tantras dealing with Avalokiteśvara, the Nyen-po Sang-wa, and other [works] were translated into Tibetan. <29> The king, using various miraculous manifestations, and his minister Gar-tong-tsen, using diplomacy, insured the defense of the country by receiving one princess from China and another from Nepal. These queens brought with them, as dowries, two statues of the Buddha as well as many other tokens of the Dharma. Beginning with the main cathedral of Lhasa,⁶⁴ many *t'a-dül* and *yang-dül* temples⁶⁵ were built at important places to subdue demonic forces. Thus the Dharma was established.

It was during the rule of T'ri-song De'u-tsen,⁶⁶ five reigns [later], that he who was unparalleled in the three realms—the great Tantric Guru Pe-ma Jung-ney, Abbot of O-gyen—and 108 other pāṇḍitas were invited to Tibet. Cathedrals, such as Sam-yay Mi-gyur L'ün-gyi Drub-pay Tsug-lag-k'ang, were built as repositories for representations of the Buddha's form. The great interpreter Vairocana and the 108 others were trained as translators. They translated the noble Dharma—principally, whatever Sūtras, Tantras, and Śāstras prevailed in the holy land of India—to represent the Buddha's speech. Seven spiritually awakened people were ordained as members of the Saṅgha to represent the Buddha's mind. Thus Buddhism was made to shine in Tibet like the sun.

From that point until now, although the Buddhist doctrine has passed through various vicissitudes, the Buddha's tradi-

⁶³ born 618 C.E.

⁶⁴ *ra-sa t'rül-nang-gi tsug-lag-k'ang / ra.sa 'phrul.snañ.gi gtsug.lag.khañ*

⁶⁵ Regarding its physical features, Tibet was considered to be a demon lying on her back. The *t'a-dül* and *yang-dül* temples were built to pin down her major and minor limbs.

⁶⁶ born 790 C.E.

tions of oral transmission and insight-experience⁶⁷ have been preserved unimpaired. <30> Hence, in the sense of Dharma, [Tibet] is a central country.

2.2.1.3 [TO BE BORN WITH PERFECT FACULTIES]

If any of your five [sense] faculties is defective, you are not fit to receive the vows of a monk. You do not have the fortune of seeing the forms of the Buddha and the like, which are objects of reverence, or of reading or hearing the holy books, which are objects that facilitate learning and thinking. Therefore, you cannot be regarded as an absolutely perfect receptacle of the Dharma.

2.2.1.4 [TO BE ENGAGED IN A CORRECT VOCATION]

“To have a wrong vocation by birth” refers only to game hunters, harlots, and so forth, who are led on a wrong path from youth. But, in fact, all those whose physical, vocal, or mental actions are irreligiously directed are involved in a wrong vocation. Although you may not be born into a wrongly oriented family, there is every possibility that you may subsequently adopt an improper activity. You must see that your mind is not involved in anything contrary to the sublime Dharma.

2.2.1.5 [TO HAVE FAITH IN THE DHARMA]

If you lack faith in the doctrine of the Buddha, which is worthy of devotion, even deep faith in powerful worldly gods, serpent spirits, and the like, or in heretical teachings, will not be able to save you from samsāra and the sufferings of the lower regions. If you have developed faith in Buddhism by reason of its propounding traditional precepts and insight-experience, you can regard yourself as a perfect receptacle for the sublime Dharma.

⁶⁷ *lung-tog* / luṅ.rtogs

2.2.2 THE FIVE ENDOWMENTS RESTING WITH OTHERS⁶⁸

As it is said, they are:

- [1] The Buddha appears;
- [2] He preaches the Dharma; <31>
- [3] The Dharma abides;
- [4] [The Dharma] is followed; and
- [5] The kindness of [a Guru] who has compassion for others [is found].

If you are not born in an enlightened aeon, during which a Buddha visits the world, you will not even hear the name of the Dharma. At present, having been born during an aeon visited by a Buddha, you have the special endowment of the Teacher.⁶⁹

Although [a Buddha] may visit [this world], if He does not teach the Dharma, you cannot benefit from it. Since [Gautama Buddha] taught the Dharma in three stages, you have the endowment of the noble Dharma having been taught.

Although the Dharma may be taught, if the teaching disappears, you cannot benefit from it. At this time, since the time-span of the Dharma is not complete, you have the endowment of the [present] period.

Although the Dharma may prevail, if [others] have not embraced it, you cannot benefit from it. You who have embraced it [after observing and following their example] have the endowment of this good fortune of others.

Although you may embrace the Dharma, if you are not accepted by a spiritual teacher, which is indispensable, you cannot understand the essence⁷⁰ of the Dharma. Being helped by such a guide, you have the endowment of his extraordinary compassion.

⁶⁸ *zhen-jor nga / gžan.'byor.lňa*

⁶⁹ i.e., the Buddha

⁷⁰ *de-nyi / de.ñid*

Because you must depend on others to acquire these five endowments, they are called “the five endowments resting with others.”

2.2.2.1 [TO BE BORN DURING AN ENLIGHTENED AEON]

An aeon⁷¹ is a time-period measured by the formation, subsistence, destruction, and disappearance of a universe. An aeon during which a Buddha comes into the world is called an enlightened aeon; if no Buddhas come, it is called a dark aeon. <32> In bygone times, thirty-three thousand Buddhas came during the great [cycle of] aeons⁷² called Ngön-par Ga-wa. This period was followed by one hundred dark aeons. After these [aeons], ten million eighty thousand Buddhas came during the Dzog-den aeon. This period was followed by one hundred aeons [suitable only] for the barbarians. After these [aeons], ten million eighty-four thousand Buddhas came during the Zang-den aeon, which was followed by five hundred dark aeons. Then ten million eighty thousand Buddhas came during the T'ong-na Ga-wa aeon, which was followed by seven hundred dark aeons. Then sixty thousand Buddhas came during the Ga-den aeon, which was followed by the present [aeon], the Superior Aeon.

Before the formation[-phase] of the present aeon, the billion world-systems⁷³ were filled with water, in which a thousand-petalled lotus blossom was found. The Pure Land gods, who were disposed to enlightenment, examined it with their foreknowledge and found it to be a sign of the coming of one thousand Buddhas during this aeon. Consequently, they named this aeon Kal-pa Zang-po,⁷⁴ the Superior Aeon. From the advent of the Buddha called K'or-wa Jig, when man's life span was eighty thousand years, until the coming of the Bud-

⁷¹ S. kalpa

⁷² S. mahākalpa

⁷³ *tong-sum* / stoṅ.gsum

⁷⁴ bskal.pa bzañ.po

dha Mö-pa, when men will live <33> an enormous number of years, one thousand Buddhas will visit Bodhgāya in this world, will attain full enlightenment, and will turn the wheel of Dharma. Hence, this is an enlightened aeon. It will be followed by sixty barbarous aeons [populated by beings] of inferior race, and those in turn will be followed by the Drang-den aeon, which will be visited by ten thousand Buddhas. Then will follow ten thousand aeons of inferior race. Thus, enlightened aeons and dark aeons will alternate.

If you are born during a dark aeon, you will not even hear the sound of the words “Three Jewels.” Moreover, the Vajrayāna teaching—Tantric Buddhism—will appear only rarely.

The great O-gyen Rin-po-ch'e said:

During the Kün-kö aeon of the first great [cycle of] aeons, the Buddha Ngön-jung-gi Gyal-po made Tantric Buddhism widely known. Tantric Buddhism [also] prevails during the present time of the Buddha Śākyamuni. One million aeons from now, an aeon called Me-tog Kö-pa will follow. A Buddha named Mañjuśrī, akin to the present Buddha, will then appear; he too will teach Tantric Buddhism widely. Only these three aeons will contain suitable sentient beings. <34> Tantric Buddhism will never be known in times other than these three aeons, because the sentient beings will not be suitable.

As he said, during this Superior Aeon, when the life span of man is one hundred years, Lord Śākyamuni visited this world; hence this is an enlightened aeon.

2.2.2.2 [TO BE BORN WHEN A BUDDHA HAS TAUGHT THE DHARMA]

Although Buddhas may come, if they sit in meditation and do not preach, there is no light of the Dharma. [Therefore, such an aeon] does not differ from a period lacking a Buddha's visit to this world.

After fully attaining Buddhahood at the foot of the Bodhi tree in Bodhgāya, our Lord Buddha said:

**Deep, peaceful, unshaped, luminous, uncompounded,
Ambrosia-like Dharma have I found.
No one to whom I teach it will understand it.
Without speaking, I will remain in the forest.**

After saying this, He remained without preaching the Dharma for seven weeks, until Indra and Brahmā begged him to turn the Dharmacakra.⁷⁵

Furthermore, if [spiritual] leaders who know the Dharma do not teach it and study it, sentient beings cannot really be benefited. For example, Dharmaswami Smṛtijñāna of India visited Tibet to help his mother, who he saw had taken rebirth in <35> an indeterminate hell.⁷⁶ On the way, his interpreter died. Smṛtijñāna wandered over K'am, [a region of eastern Tibet], and since he did not speak the language, he even had to work as a shepherd. Before he could bring any spiritual benefit to sentient beings, he died. When Atīśa Dipaṅ[kara] Śrī Jñāna⁷⁷ later visited Tibet⁷⁸ and heard the story, he said, "Alas! You Tibetans are unfortunate. Both in eastern and western India there are none among the pāṇḍitas greater than Smṛtijñāna." He folded his hands [to show respect] and wept.

During this period, the Buddha Śākyamuni taught the Dharma at three [different] levels; and consistent with the mental development of the beings meant for enlightenment, He showed innumerable physical manifestations to liberate sentient beings by [means of] the nine doctrinal classes of Dharma.

⁷⁵ i.e., to preach the Dharma

⁷⁶ This story is related in Chapter Three.

⁷⁷ known as Jo-wo-je L'a-chig

⁷⁸ 1042 C.E.

2.2.2.3 [TO BE BORN WHEN THE DHARMA ABIDES]

Although Buddhas may come and teach the Dharma, if the Dharma thereafter disappears because its time-span comes to an end, such an age does not differ from a dark aeon. When the teaching of the previous Buddha has come to an end and that of the succeeding Buddha has yet to appear, such a period is regarded as being without a Buddha. Although Pratyekabuddhas visit some fortunate areas endowed with good merits, they do not practice the teaching and hearing of the Dharma.

The present Buddhist period of Śākyamuni will last for five thousand years. Out of this period, the Teaching of the Mind of Samantabhadra, or the Teaching of the Goal, lasted <36> for fifteen hundred years; its [intensive] practice lasted for [another] fifteen hundred years; its oral transmission will last for [still another] fifteen hundred years; and the preservation of its mere symbols will persist for an additional five hundred years. Of this period, we have now passed through thirty-five hundred or four thousand of the five thousand years. Although we have entered the period of the five degenerations,⁷⁹ which are [decreasing] life span, [increasing] perversity in doctrinal views, [increasing] delusion, [decreasing] quality of beings, and degeneration of the aeon], the teachings of oral transmission and insight-experience have not yet actually disappeared. Therefore, we still have the endowment of the sublime Dharma.

2.2.2.4 [TO TRULY ENTER THE DHARMA]

Although the Dharma prevails, if you do not embrace it, you will not be able to realize Buddhahood based on the traditions of oral transmission and insight-experience. For example, [the Dharma] is like the sun: although it shines over the earth, if one is blind, one will not receive the slightest benefit from it. Or, it is like an ocean[-sized lake]: although

⁷⁹ *nyig-ma-nга / sñig.ma.lña*

one may arrive at its shore, if one does not drink from it, one's thirst will not be quenched.

Although you may enter [the Dharma], if you embrace the teaching in order to assuage disease, evil spirits, or other [dangers] in this life, or simply through fear of the sufferings of the lower regions in the next life, this is called "Dharma as a refuge from fear."⁸⁰ [Such a motivation] is not suitable for truly entering the path. Or, if you embrace the teaching in order to obtain worldly goods in this life, or divine and human pleasures in the next life, this is called "Dharma in expectation of benefit."⁸¹ Having known the entire samsara to be essenceless, however, if you enter the door of Dharma in order to attain the path of freedom, this true entering into the path is called "entering the door of the teaching." <37>

2.2.2.5 [TO BE GUIDED BY A GURU]

If you are not led by a spiritual teacher, even entering Buddhism will not help.

From the Dü-pa:

**The Buddha's Dharma depends upon a spiritual teacher;
So said the Buddha, who had the best of all superior virtues.**

Because the Buddha's teachings are vast and the oral traditions innumerable, in fact there is no end to the knowledge that one may acquire. Without the secret instructions of the Guru, you cannot know the technique of putting the essence of all the Buddhist teachings into practice.

When Atisa came to Tibet, three followers—namely K'u, Ngog, and Drom—inquired, "For a person to attain Buddhahood, which is more important: following the main teachings of the Ka-gyur and Ten-gyur or the instructions of the Guru?"

⁸⁰ *jig-kyob-kyi ch'ö / jigs.skyob.kyi chos*

⁸¹ *leg-mön-gyi ch'ö / legs.smon.gyi chos*

"The Guru's instructions are more important," Atiśa replied.

"Why is that so?"

"Although one may be able to recite the Tripitaka from memory and may know the exposition of all the Dharmas, if one has had no practical experience with the Guru's instructions, one will stray from the proper path," responded Atiśa.

"If the Guru's instructions are summed up, which is better: to abide by the three moral precepts, or to engage one's body, mind, and speech in meritorious work?" they again inquired.

"Those would not be of much benefit," said Atiśa.

"Why is that so?" <38>

"Even if one abides by the three vows and practices purification, if one's mind is not withdrawn from the three realms of samsāra, such activity will cause re-entry into samsāra. Although one's three doors of action⁸² may be engaged in meritorious activities day and night, if one does not know how to dedicate this merit for the attainment of Buddhahood, any contrary thought can easily wash away one's entire stock of merit. Although one may be a monk skilled in teaching and meditating, if one's mind has not turned away from the eight worldly dharmas,⁸³ whatever one does will be for this world, and one will not find future liberation," was his reply.

Therefore, as he said, it is very important to have a Guru and spiritual teachers.

2.2.3 [SIXTEEN OTHER INOPPORTUNE STATES]

Thus, if on inspection you find in yourself the eight leisures⁸⁴ and ten endowments⁸⁵—collectively the eighteen leisures and endowments⁸⁶—you are regarded as having a well-endowed human status.

⁸² body, speech and mind

⁸³ attachment to gain, pleasure, praise, good tidings; aversion to loss, pain, blame, and bad tidings

⁸⁴ *dal-wa gye* / *dal.ba.brgyad*

⁸⁵ *jor-pa chu* / *'byor.pa.bcu*

⁸⁶ *dal-jor cho-gye* / *dal.'byor bco.brgyad*

Still, the great, omniscient Dharma-Lord [Long-ch'en-pa], in his Yi-zhin Dzö, mentions other disadvantages which render the mind too preoccupied to practice the Dharma. They are the eight inopportune states due to suddenly arising conditions⁸⁷ and the eight inopportune states due to mental partiality.⁸⁸ It is very important to be free from these influences as well.

From the Yi-zhin Dzö:

- [1] [To be mentally disturbed by] the five poisons;
- [2] To be ignorant and stupid;
- [3] To be influenced by an evil person;
- [4] To be lazy;
- [5] [To experience] the breaking forth of the ocean of bad karma;
- [6] To be in the power of others;
- [7] [To use the Dharma as] protection from danger;
- [8] To feign interest in the Dharma—

These are the eight inopportune states due to suddenly arising conditions.

And also:

- [1] To be fettered by the rope [of attachment];
- [2] To have very bad behavior;
- [3] To have no remorse for samsaric existence;
- [4] To have not the slightest faith; <39>
- [5] To perform unvirtuous and sinful acts;
- [6] To lose interest in the Dharma;
- [7] To violate the vows;
- [8] To rend the bond of trust⁸⁹—

These are the eight inopportune states due to mental partiality.

⁸⁷ *t'ral-jung kyen-gi mi-k'om-pa gye / 'phral.byun rkyen.gyi mi.khom.pa
brgyad*

⁸⁸ *ri-ch'e lo-yi mi-k'om-pa gye / ris.chad blo.yi mi.khom.pa brgyad*

⁸⁹ *dam-ts'ig / dam.tshig*

Thus they are stated.

2.2.3.1 [THE EIGHT SUDDENLY ARISING CONDITIONS]

Those of you who are under the coarse influence of the delusions of the five poisons, such as that of having hate for your enemies and love for your relatives, may have sporadic intentions to practice properly the perfect Dharma. However, since the five poisons in your mind are so powerful, most of you will be largely under their influence. Thus you will not be able to truly practice the Dharma.

You who are extremely ignorant and have not the slightest ray of intelligence will not be able to understand even the slightest meaning of Dharma. Although you may embrace the Dharma, you will have no occasion to hear it, consider it, or meditate upon it.

If you are influenced by a devil of a “spiritual teacher” who follows a contrary theory and practice, you can be led to follow a wrong path that will set you against the noble Dharma.

Although you may desire to learn the Dharma, if you are lazy and without an iota of diligence, you will fall prey to your habits and procrastinate, and so fail to practice it.

Although you may follow the Dharma diligently, if you have sins and obscurations within you that oppose the growth of [spiritual] knowledge, you will lose faith in the Dharma. [When you face] the breaking forth of the ocean of bad karma, you will not understand this to be the result of your own [bad] karma. <40>

Those of you who have no personal independence may intend to pursue the Dharma, but you will not be permitted to do so.

If you adopt the Dharma to earn food and clothing or because you are afraid of being harmed by others, you will not understand the Dharma in the core of your heart. Because of your past habits, you will continue to indulge in irreligious activities.

You who assume the outer trappings of the Dharma in order to amass wealth, respect, and fame are but mere shadows. You may appear religious in the eyes of others, but in your hearts you are concerned only with this life and so are severed from the path of liberation.

These eight suddenly arising conditions are inopportune for practicing the Dharma.

2.2.3.2 [THE EIGHT MENTAL PARTIALITIES]

You who have a deep attachment to the present life's material wealth, children, relatives, and so on are distracted by preoccupation with providing for them. Hence, you will find no time to practice the Dharma.

If, because of ill-nature, your good character is not even the size of a sesame seed, you cannot make any progress. This is like the saying of the great teachers of the past, "The intellect of a disciple can be enriched, but not his intrinsic character." So, even if you meet a proper, virtuous instructor, it will be difficult for him to turn you to the noble path.

If you are not frightened by the instructions on the disadvantages of the lower regions [in particular] and of samsara [in general], or by the [various] kinds of suffering in this life, <41> withdrawal from samsara⁹⁰—the cause for entering the Dharma—will never be born in you.

If you have not the slightest faith in the perfect Dharma and the Guru, the entrance to Buddhism will be blocked, and you will not be able to enter the path of liberation.

If you are fond of sinful habits and thus cannot subdue the actions of your body, mind, and speech, you will lose your noble qualities and turn away from the Dharma.

If you do not see the value of virtue and the nobility of the Dharma, [your interest will be] like that of a dog when a bunch of grass is put before it [as food]. Because you will take no pleasure in following the Dharma, knowledge will not grow within you.

⁹⁰ *ngey-jung / nes.'byuñ* / the strong desire to exit from samsara, being fed up with its endless sufferings and transitory pleasures

If you embrace the general Buddhist teachings and then go against the motivation⁹¹ and vows,⁹² you will go nowhere but into the lower regions, where escape from the inopportune states is impossible.

If you enter Tantric Buddhism and then break the bond of trust between yourself and your Guru and spiritual friends, it will be disastrous for you and for others. The opportunity to obtain the ultimate result⁹³ will end.

These eight [mental partialities] will take you far away from the Dharma; this is known as “the dying of the flame of freedom.”

If you do not properly check [yourself for] these sixteen preoccupations during the present degenerate age, you will possess a mere shadow of leisure and endowment and the pursuit of Dharma. Rulers on thrones, Gurus with umbrellas and followers, meditators in their retreats, renunciate yogis who travel from place to place and regard themselves as great—all are influenced by the causes of these preoccupations. <42> This is why, although they pretend to practice the Dharma, they fail to tread the sublime path.

Therefore, rather than rushing prematurely toward an image of Dharma, first examine yourself thoroughly to see whether or not these twenty-four aspects of leisure and endowment⁹⁴ are fully present within you. If they are, be happy and think, “Now I should not waste this leisure and endowment, which is so difficult to obtain, and should put my effort into practicing the real, noble Dharma.” Think this way from the depth of your heart, again and again. If they are not present, take every possible measure to obtain them. You should always make it a point to see whether or not you have the qualities of leisure and endowment. If you do not make

⁹¹ *sem-kyey* / *sems.bskyed*

⁹² *dom-pa* / *sdom.pa*

⁹³ *ngö-drub* / *dños.grub* / S. siddhi

⁹⁴ The number “twenty-four” refers to having the eight *dal-wa*, as well as to being free from the sixteen other inopportune states.

such an inspection and [thus] lack even a single one, you will not have the fortune to practice the Dharma in its true form.

When fulfilling even the small, immediate requirements of worldly people requires so many causal factors, is there any reason why you would not need as many interdependent factors to follow the Dharma, which leads to the ultimate goal? For example, a traveler may wish to make salted tea. Many factors, such as a pot, water, fuel, and fire are required to boil the tea. <43> Out of these factors, single out the fire. It cannot be produced without many additional contributing factors: a piece of iron, a flint, tinder, a pair of hands, and so on. If out of these, say, tinder is not available, the presence of the rest will not bring about the smallest result, and the idea of boiling tea must be completely abandoned. Similarly, the absence of a single quality of leisure and endowment fundamentally eliminates the opportunity to practice the Dharma. Therefore, if you examine yourself thoroughly, surely it is difficult to find all aspects of the eighteen leisures and endowments within yourself.

The full complement of ten endowments is even rarer than leisure. Although you may be born as a human being, in a spiritual center, and with perfect sense organs, if you have taken a wrong vocation and have no faith in the Buddhist doctrine, you have only three [of the five endowments found within oneself]. Even if you acquire one of the other two factors, you will have only four factors in all. Of these [five endowments], to have a proper vocation is the most difficult. If your three doors of activity are engaged in vice and whatever you do is done for mundane life only, although you may earn the fame of being honorable, learned, and so on, in fact you will have taken a wrong vocation.

Of the five endowments resting with others, you may have the endowments of the appearance of the Buddha, His teaching, and the continued availability of the doctrine. But if you do not undertake [to follow] the Dharma, only those three factors are present. <44> Even if you do undertake [to follow] it, merely learning the Dharma or receiving it does not count as having entered the Dharma. To find the entrance to the path of liberation, you must have the genuine

desire to leave samsāra, having seen it to be essenceless in its entirety.

To follow the Mahāyāna path, you must have genuine—not feigned—bodhicitta within you. Without minimally possessing a heartfelt, strong faith in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, which you are unwilling to abandon even at the pain of death, you should not regard yourself as a follower of the Dharma merely because you chant prayers and dress in a yellow robe. Thus, for the purpose of [self]-examination, it is very important that you correctly understand the exact nature of leisure and endowment.

2.3 CONTEMPLATION ON EXAMPLES SHOWING THE DIFFICULTY OF OBTAINING [A HUMAN BODY]

Lord Buddha said:

It is even more difficult to obtain a human body than it is for a tortoise, living at the bottom [of an ocean] which is disturbed by the turbulence of powerful waves, to pass its neck through the hole of a yoke [drifting] on [the surface of] that ocean.

For example, [assume that] the great oceans of the three realms of samsāra become one, and upon it there floats a single-holed piece of wood, called a yoke, such as is used for keeping oxen horn by horn while ploughing. [The yoke] travels on without ceasing for a moment, for the eastern waves drive it to the west and the western waves drive it to the east. At the bottom of the ocean lives <45> a blind tortoise that rises to the surface once every hundred years. It is extremely difficult to imagine the [two] meeting. The inanimate yoke possesses no mind to find the tortoise. The blind tortoise has no eyes to look for the yoke. There would be a chance of their meeting were the yoke to remain in one place, but it never comes to rest for even a moment. Likewise, were the tortoise constantly to rise to the surface of the ocean, there would be a chance of its meeting with [the yoke], but it rises to the surface only once every hundred years.

Although it is very difficult [to foresee] them meeting, we cannot rule out the possibility that, by chance, the tortoise's neck will enter the hole in the yoke. But it is said in the Sūtras that to obtain a human body endowed with leisure and endowment is even more difficult.

Lord Nāgārjuna explained the meaning as follows:

**For a hole in a wooden yoke tossing on a great ocean
To meet [the neck of] a tortoise is more likely than [for
one] to be born as an animal,
[Compared to which], to be born as a human being is
extremely difficult. Your Majesty,
By having practiced the noble Dharma, be able to reap
its fruit.**

Thus he instructed King De-chö.⁹⁵

Also, Śāntideva said:

**Like a tortoise's neck entering the hole
Of a yoke tossing on a great ocean,
Obtaining the human state is said to be extremely
difficult.**

Other examples—how difficult it is to find a pea remaining on a wall <46> after having been thrown at the wall's smooth surface, how difficult it is for even a single bean [to remain] standing on the tip of an upright needle over which beans have been heaped, and so forth—are mentioned in the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra. They should be referred to and understood.

⁹⁵ bde.spyod / Gautamīputra Śātakarnī, one of the Śātavāhana kings of Andhra

2.4 CONTEMPLATION ON THE NUMERICAL IMPROBABILITY [OF OBTAINING A HUMAN BODY]

If you consider the variety and number of sentient beings, your attaining a human body is only a remote possibility. The number of beings in hell is as great as the [number of] stars seen at night. Comparatively, the number of pretas is [as few] as the [number of] stars seen in the daytime. Considering the pretas to be as numerous as the stars seen at night, the number of beasts is like the number of stars seen in the daytime. If the number of beasts is like the [number of] stars observed at night, [the number] of beings in the upper regions of comfort is comparable to the [number of] stars seen in the daytime.

Again, beings in hell are as [many as] the particles of earth of the great land mass; pretas are as many as the grains of sand of the Ganges Valley; the number of beasts is like the [number of] malt dregs [that remain after] beer is pressed; [the number of] demi-gods is comparable to the number of [snowflakes in] a snowstorm; gods and men are as [few as] the dust particles on the back of a fingernail.

In general, although obtaining a physical body in the upper regions is very rare, to obtain a human body with leisure and endowment is even rarer. If you lift a clod of earth in the summertime, you will observe so many living beings within it. No human family on earth has as many members as ants have in their anthills. Thus, the number of human beings in relation to other animals is obviously [small]. <47> Among human beings also, considering those of the border areas where no idea of Buddhism prevails, those born where Dharma flourishes are extremely few. Even rarer are human beings having leisure and endowment, only one or two among many. Considering these facts, you should feel happy that you have the complete [set of] leisures and endowments.

Thus, if you have the full complement of all the qualities of leisure and endowment, the possibility of calling yourself a

“precious human being”⁹⁶ should be fully obvious from today onward. If any are missing, although you may be well-accomplished with regard to intelligence or cleverness from the worldly point of view, [from the spiritual point of view], you are not a precious human being. You are termed an ordinary human being,⁹⁷ a human being merely in name,⁹⁸ an ill-fated human being,⁹⁹ a heartless human being,¹⁰⁰ or one who returns empty-handed.¹⁰¹ This is like wasting a wish-fulfilling gem that is in your hand, or like returning from an island of gold empty-handed.

It is said:

**Finding a gem does not equal
Attaining a precious human body.
Yet haven't you seen it being wasted
By men who have no remorse?**

**Obtaining a kingdom does not equal
Meeting a noble guru.
Yet haven't you seen him being treated as an equal
By men who have no faith and respect?**

**Attaining mundane leadership does not equal
The shaping of motivation and the taking of vows. <48>
Yet haven't you seen those with no compassion
Throwing them [away] like a stone from a sling?**

**Achieving royal power does not equal
Receiving the tantric initiations.
Yet haven't you seen them being thrown in rivers
By men who do not honor the bond of trust?**

**Seeing a Buddha does not equal
Seeing the Primordial Mind Itself.**

⁹⁶ *mi-lü rin-po-ch'e* / mi.lus rin.po.ch'e

⁹⁷ *p'al-pa* / phal.pa

⁹⁸ *tsam-po-pa* / tsam.po.pa

⁹⁹ *jur-po* / byur.po

¹⁰⁰ *nying-me-po* / sñiñ.med.po

¹⁰¹ *tong-log-k'en* / stoñ.log.mkhan

**Yet haven't you seen men with no diligence
Letting their minds suffer from illusion?**

This type of leisure and endowment is acquired neither accidentally nor by sheer good luck. It is the fruit of dual merit¹⁰² accrued during many aeons.

Pan-ch'en Drag-pa Gyal-Ts'en said:

**This kind of human body with leisure and endowment
Is not obtained because of one's cleverness;
It is the result of the good merits one has earned.**

Although you have obtained a human body merely [in name], if, without any idea of Dharma, you completely indulge in sinful activities, this is even worse than being in the three lower regions.

Je-tsün Mi-la said to [the hunter] K'yí-ra Gön-po Dor-je:

**Generally, it is said that a human body having leisure
and endowment is rare;
However, it is not rare at all to see a human like you.**

As he has said, no power is stronger than the power of humans for laying the foundation-stone of the lower regions. At present, you have the power to do whatever you wish.

It is said:

**If well used, this body serves as the boat of liberation.
If badly used, this body serves as the cornerstone of
samsāra. <49>
This body is the servant of all merits and sins.**

Thus, a human body with the eighteen leisures and endowments is obtained by the force of good merits acquired in the past. Its essential purpose should be to follow the noble Dharma—it is meaninglessly wasted if it is used merely to find food and clothing and to accomplish the eight worldly dhar-

¹⁰² *ts'og-nyi* / tshogs.gñis

mas of this life. One who discovers this mistake at the time of death beats his chest with his fists in remorse. This should not be the behavior of one born as a human being. This is not at all a good outcome.

It is said in the Bodhicaryāvatāra:

**To attain such a basis of leisure,
And then not contemplate on meritorious work:
There can't be any self-deception worse than this.**

Thus, this present life is the crossroads for your attaining a good or bad achievement. If you do not attain realization in this life, it will be difficult to obtain such an opportune human life hereafter. If you take rebirth in the lower regions, you will have no conception of the Dharma. Being ignorant of what should and should not be done, you will fall deeper and deeper into the boundless lower regions. At this time you should determine to work hard in conjunction with the proper mental attitude, non-conceptual meditation, and dedication—the three perfect principles.

Meditate upon [the difficulty of obtaining leisure and endowment] again and again. Having done so, you should measure [the degree to which] it has grown in your mind <50> in accord with [the experience] of Ge-shey Chen-nga-wa. When he even gave up sleeping in order to engage in meritorious activities, Ge-shey Tön-pa said to him, “Son, you had better break for a little rest, else there is the possibility of getting fed up.”

“You are right,” replied Ge-shey Chen-nga-wa, “I should break for a rest. But when I think of how difficult it is to obtain leisure and endowment, I can hardly find any time to rest.”

It is said that he repeated the mantra of Mi-yö-wa¹⁰³ nine hundred million times and hardly slept throughout his life.

¹⁰³ mi.yo.ba / S. Acala

Thus, until the sense of leisure and endowment grows in your mind, you should contemplate on it.

Although I have obtained leisure, I am stricken with a poverty of the essential Dharma.

Although I have entered the door of the Dharma, I am distracted by non-Dharmic activities.

**May I and sentient beings like me, who are deluded,
Be blessed to acquire the essence of leisure and
endowment.**

This is the instruction on the difficulty of obtaining leisure and endowment.

CHAPTER TWO

The Impermanence of Life

Observing the three realms, impermanent and illusory in nature,

He renounced worldly affairs like droplets of spit;

By undertaking ascetic practices, he followed in the steps of his predecessors.

At the feet of my unparalleled Guru, I pay homage.

The instruction on the impermanence of life¹ [consists of] the manner of listening to the Dharma, which corresponds to that of [the previous chapter on] the difficulty of obtaining leisure and endowment, and the Dharma to be explained, which is sevenfold:

1. Contemplation on Impermanence by Considering the Universe, the Outer Container;
2. Contemplation on Impermanence by Considering the Beings, the Inner Contents; <51>
3. Contemplation on Impermanence by Considering Noble Beings;
4. Contemplation on Impermanence by Considering Temporal Leaders;
5. Contemplation on Impermanence by Considering Various Analogies;
6. Contemplation on Impermanence by Considering the Uncertain Causes of Death;

¹ *ts'e mi-tag-pa* / tshe mi.rtag.pa

7. Contemplation on Impermanence by Intensely Remembering It Always.

1 CONTEMPLATION ON IMPERMANENCE BY CONSIDERING THE UNIVERSE, THE OUTER CONTAINER

The outer universe, which is formed by the common good merit of all sentient beings, contains worlds [that consist of] four continents, a cosmic mountain, and divine realms, as well as a very strong [encircling] fence that lasts for aeons. [All] these are impermanent, however, and ultimately seven conflagrations and one deluge² will certainly destroy them.

When this great [cycle of] aeons nears its destruction, all the living beings, the inner contents of the lower regions,³ will gradually migrate [to the higher regions], until not a single being remains [in any region] up to [and including] the first divine region of dhyāna.⁴ Then, in succession, seven suns will appear in the sky. The first sun will burn down all the fruit trees and forests. When the second sun shines, all the brooks and ponds will dry up. The third sun will dry up all the big rivers. The fourth will dry up even such large lakes as Manasarowar. The fifth will evaporate the oceans <52> to a depth of one hundred, two hundred, seven hundred, one thousand, ten thousand, and eighty thousand fathoms—and also the remaining depths—until ultimately [the last remaining bit of] water, a quantity which could be contained in a hoofprint, will evaporate. As the sixth sun rises, the land masses along with the snow-mountains will be burned away. The seventh sun will burn away [in every world-system]: the cosmic mountain,

² In other texts, the conflagrations and deluges are variously enumerated as seven series of seven and one, or eight series of seven and one.

³ Samsāra is divided into three realms characterized by desire, form, and formlessness. Here, “lower regions” refer to the regions of hell-beings, pretas, animals, human beings, demi-gods, and the gods of the first six divine realms, all of which are within the realm of desire.

⁴ The form realm is subdivided into the four divine regions of dhyāna, comprising seventeen divine realms. The formless realm, which has no location, comprises the four infinities of meditative equipoise.

the four continents, the eight sub-continents, and the seven golden mountains, along with the encircling iron fence.

Everything will end up as one tongue of fire. When the tongue of fire whirls around, blazing downward, it will burn away all the regions of hell. When it turns upward, the empty palaces of the Brahmās will also be consumed. The young children of the region called Ö-sel will become frightened and exclaim, "Look, a great fire is burning!" The elder gods will comfort them by saying, "This fire came up to the Brahmā world in the past and then retreated. Don't be frightened." Then, after the universe has been ravaged by fire seven times, a cloud bearing the essence of rain will form in the second divine region of dhyāna. It will produce a shower of raindrops, [with each raindrop] about the size of a yoke and plough, <53> and everything up to [and including] the region called Ö-sel will be destroyed, like salt dissolving in water.

Then, when the seventh destruction of water has taken place,⁵ the crossed vajras of the air beneath [the universe] will turn upright, and the areas up to [and including] the third divine region of dhyāna will be destroyed, like dust scattered by the wind.

Thus, [each world-system consisting of] four continents, the cosmic mountain, the divine regions, and the like—all that is included in the three layers of the one billion world-systems in this universe—will crumble and will ultimately vanish into one void space. When such is the extent of the destruction, you should contemplate from the core of your heart on this question: "What is permanent and on what can I depend in my human body, which is no better than the body of a seasonal insect?"

⁵ implying seven series of destructions, each comprising seven destructions by fire and one by water

2 CONTEMPLATION ON IMPERMANENCE BY CONSIDERING THE LIVING BEINGS, THE INNER CONTENTS

Of the sentient beings that exist between the summit of the world and the bottom of hell, not a single one can escape death.

From the Nya-ngen Sel-way Tring-yig:

**Have you seen, heard, or even doubted
That anyone born on earth or in the upper regions did
not die?**

Thus, when there is birth, death is inherent. From the divine regions downward, no one has ever seen or heard of a person who did not die after being born. <54> There is not even the slightest doubt that anyone born ever failed to die. This is especially true of those born on this earth, where life is uncertain, and where, since the end of the aeon is nearing, one dies [relatively] very young. From the night you are born, you move nearer and nearer to death. Your life admits of no addition: it keeps decreasing. Like an [ever-lengthening] shadow [cast by] the setting sun, the demon of death never rests, not even for a moment; he continuously comes nearer and nearer.

Therefore, you cannot be certain when or where you are going to die. You may die tomorrow or even tonight. You may even die just now, between the inhalation and exhalation of your breath. There is no certainty about [the time or circumstances of] a human being's death.

The Ch'ey-du Jö-pay Ts'om states:

**Who knows, you may even die tomorrow.
Do today what you have to do.
That formidable demon of death
Cannot be taken as your friend.**

Nāgārjuna said:

If one's life, [which faces] many dangers,
Is even more impermanent than a water-bubble buffeted
by the wind,
To have the time to inhale, exhale, and awaken from
sleep
Is a matter of great wonder.

There is no certainty that a person attached to the bliss of sleep will not die between the moments he slowly inhales and exhales. <55> Therefore, it is a matter of great wonder that he has the opportunity to wake up alive. Even if you have a vague idea that you will die one day, the feeling of death's certainty is not sharply present in your mind. Hence, being attached to belief in permanent existence, you lose yourself in the hopes and fears of planning for the future.

While you are deeply engaged in craving for the comfort, happiness, and fame of this life, the demon of death suddenly arrives before you, holding a black rope, biting his lower lip, and showing his teeth with an air of vanity. Then, neither an army of heroes, the force of authority, the wealth of a rich man, the talk of experts, a beautiful figure, nor speed in running can be of any help. You may be enclosed in a seamless iron box that is guarded by hundreds of thousands of armed heroes, the tips of whose arrows and spears point outward, but there is nothing of you they will be able to guard or hide, not even the tip of a hair.

The demon of death places the black rope around your neck and takes you along the broad way to the next life, and you—with your face turning blue, tears in your eyes, and your hands and legs trembling spasmodically—must follow the demon. At that time, mighty heroes can do nothing for you, nor can authority wield power, nor can wealth ransom you. You can neither escape nor hide. There is no protection or protector, <56> nor is there a helper, supporter, friend, means, or favor that can help you anymore. Even if the King of Physicians were to come in person, he would not be able to delay the departure of one who has no more life to live.

So, at this very moment, without being influenced by laziness or procrastination, you must contemplate on the intention to practice the real Dharma—that which will definitely help you at the time of death.

3 CONTEMPLATION ON IMPERMANENCE BY CONSIDERING NOBLE BEINGS

During this present enlightened aeon, seven Buddhas have already appeared—namely, Nam-par-zig, Tsug-tor-chen, and so forth—accompanied by an unimaginable number of Śrāvakas and Arhats⁶ as their followers. Although they helped innumerable suitable beings by preaching three types of doctrines, only the last phase of Śākyamuni Buddha's teaching now remains. All those Buddhas have entered nirvāṇa, and their Dharmas, except for [Śākyamuni Buddha's teaching], have gradually disappeared as well. Also, during the time of the present Buddhist teaching, there have been many great Śrāvakas, each of whom has been followed by a group of five hundred Arhats. Yet all of them gradually attained nirvāṇa, leaving behind no mortal remains.

Besides these, there were the five hundred Arhats in India who held council and compiled the teachings of Buddha, <57> the Six Ornaments⁷ and Two Excellent Ones,⁸ the Eighty Mahāsiddhāḥs, and so on. Although they all attained the wisdoms of the spiritual path, had foreknowing powers, and performed miracles with great ease, the fact that such [great] beings once visited the earth is now known to us only as history. Not a single one of them actually exists anymore.

In Tibet, the land of snow-mountains, at the time when the Second Buddha of O-gyen preached the Dharma that effects spiritual maturity and liberation, the [Second Buddha's]

⁶ classes of practitioners in the Hinayāna Schools

⁷ *gyen-drug / rgyan.drug* / Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, Dignāga, and Dharmakīrti

⁸ *ch'og-nyi / mchog.gñis* / Gunaprabha and Śākyaprabha

twenty-five disciples,⁹ eighty siddhās of the Yer-pa [meditation center], and so forth were eminent. Later, an inconceivable number of exceedingly learned saints appeared in Tibet—So, Zur, and Nub of the Nying-ma¹⁰ tradition, Mar-pa, Mi-la, and Dag-po of the Sar-ma¹¹ tradition, and so forth. Almost all of them were enlightened persons. They had control over the five elements. They worked such incredible miracles as changing the material into the non-material and the non-material into the material. Fire could not burn them, water could not carry them away, earth could not bury them, they did not fall from precipices. They were all beyond the reach of harm by the elements.

For example, when Je-tsün Mi-la was observing silence in the Katya Cave at Nye-shang in Nepal, a band of hunters came and asked him whether he was a man or a ghost. He remained silent, focusing his eyes in a certain manner. <58> First they shot him with many poisoned arrows, which would not pierce him. [Then] they threw him off the cliff into the river, but he floated up the hill and regained his original seat. [Finally], when they piled wood on his body and set it ablaze, the fire did not burn him.

Such perfected persons came, but ultimately they demonstrated the nature of impermanence. If even they now exist only in stories, this stone-pile¹² of an illusory body—created by our bad karma, operated by the bad habits of the air¹³ of bad conditions, tied by the rope of the four elements, the continuity of whose mind depends on an impure mechanism—has no certainty as to when and where it will be destroyed. Therefore, immediately think of engaging your body, mind, and speech in virtuous action.

⁹ lit. the ruler, subject, and great siddhās [who make up] the twenty-five [disciples of Guru Padmasambhava]

¹⁰ lit. ancient; the original school of Buddhism in Tibet

¹¹ lit. new; the later schools of Buddhism in Tibet

¹² *t'o-yor / tho.yor / a cairn used as a boundary marker*

¹³ *lung / rluṇ / flux*

4 CONTEMPLATION ON IMPERMANENCE BY CONSIDERING TEMPORAL LEADERS

Even well-accomplished gods and sages, who can live for aeons, cannot escape death. Powerful lords such as Brahmā, Indra, Viṣṇu, and Śiva can live for aeons, have bodies 5,000 leagues tall, and possess glamour that outshines the sun and moon, but even they cannot escape death. <59>

From the Yön-ten Dzö:

**Brahmā, Indra, Śiva, mighty lords,
Cannot think of the means to dodge the demon of death.**

Others, such as gods and the sages among men who have the five foreknowing powers and the miraculous power to travel through space, ultimately cannot escape death either.

From the Nya-ngen Sel-wa Sūtra:

**Great sages with the five foreknowing powers
Who can fly far away in the sky—
Even they cannot go to that place
Where there is eternal life.**

In this world of human beings as well, there have been extremely wealthy and powerful universal monarchs. In India, the holy land, the [number of] kings of the Mahāsammata dynasty, which ruled the entire world of India, was inconceivable. Furthermore, there were the Three Pālas, the Thirty-Seven Candras, and so on, who were among the many rich and powerful kings who ruled in eastern and western India. In Tibet, the land of snows, Lord Nya-tr'i Tsen-po, an incarnation of the Divine Dynasty, [was followed by six series of kings known as] the Seven Thrones of the Sky, the Six Good of the Earth, the Eight Groups of Space, the Five Who Were Strict with Words, <60> the Thirteen and One-Half Happy Dynastic Successors, and the Five Exceedingly Happy Dynastic Successors. During the reign of Ch'ö-gyal¹⁴ Song-tsen

¹⁴ chos.rgyal / the dynasty founded by Nya-tr'i Tsen-po

Gam-po, the area from northern Nepal up to the Chinese [border] province was subjugated by [the King's] miraculous armed forces. During the reign of Prince Tr'i-song Deu-tsen, two-thirds of that part of the eastern world was dominated [by Tibet]. During the reign of Ch'ö-gyal Ral-pa-chen, an iron pillar was erected on the bank of the River Ganges to serve as an Indo-Tibetan boundary. [Tibet] had great influence over India, China, Ge-sar, Tag-zig,¹⁵ and so on. These countries were obliged to send emissaries to Lhasa, [the Tibetan capital], timed to arrive on New Year's Day, in order to take part in the [New Year's] celebrations.

When we think that even such great prosperity as this is now reduced to a mere fairy tale, and that our present homes, prosperity, servants, power, and so forth—no matter how highly we may think of them—are like a mere beehive compared to those that existed in the past, what permanence can we expect from what we have? Contemplate on this question.

5 CONTEMPLATION ON IMPERMANENCE BY CONSIDERING VARIOUS ANALOGIES

When you consider the evolution and devolution of this aeon, it too is impermanent. <61> In the days when the aeon began, all men radiated their own light, for there were no sun and moon in the sky. They could travel in space by their miraculous power, their bodies were many leagues in height, and for food they had ambrosia. As regards pleasure, happiness, and prosperity, they challenged the gods. The effects of delusion and evil deeds, however, have gradually reduced us to what we are now.

As the delusion in men becomes more and more coarse, our longevity and fortune will continue to deteriorate, until our life span reaches a maximum of ten years. [One after another], three ages of virulent disease, [the invention of new] weapons, and famine will flourish, causing most of the beings of this world to disappear. Then the Dharma prohibiting the

¹⁵ Tadzhikistan, or Persia

killing of animals will be taught by an emanation of Maitreya Buddha¹⁶ to those [beings] who remain. This will cause man's height to increase by a length equal to that of the distance from the elbow to the top of the middle finger, and his life span to increase gradually to twenty years.

Finally, when men live for eighty thousand years, Maitreya Buddha will come, attain Buddhahood, and set the wheel of Dharma in motion. Thus, when eighteen cycles of progress and regress have come to an end, men will live innumerable years. Then the Buddha Mö-pa will come. <62> He will live as long as all his predecessors [lived], the one thousand Buddhas of this Superior Aeon. He will also help beings as much as all those Buddhas [did]. Toward the end, this aeon too will suffer destruction. Thus, when you consider its evolution and devolution, an aeon also fails to transcend impermanence.

When observed, the changeable nature of the four seasons also indicates impermanence. In summer, the grass looks bluish green, drops of rain fall like nectar, and everyone enjoys the splendor of happiness and comfort. Flowers blossom in white, yellow, red, and green, creating a celestial scene. In autumn, a touch of bleak wind arises, the green grass changes color, and all the flowers and crops gradually begin to wither. During winter, the entire earth becomes as hard as stone, all the rivers turn to ice, and the already chill air becomes even colder. Then, even if one searches for many days on horseback, it will be impossible to find even a single blossom such as was found in summer. Thus, autumn follows summer, winter follows autumn, and spring follows winter in progression. The former state of affairs changes into something entirely different in each ensuing phase, thereby revealing impermanence. <63>

Observe the changes between yesterday and today, this morning and this evening, and this year and last year. Everything progressively changes; it is impossible to depend on anything [to remain the same]. Notice this especially in the country or the monastery where you live. Those who once were wealthy and prosperous are now in a condition of

¹⁶ the Buddha who will appear next in this aeon

poverty. Those who formerly were poor and weak now have fame, power, and wealth. All these changes are within the realm of impermanence.

In our individual families as well, all of our ancestors who were ever born are dead, reduced now to mere names. Our own sisters, brothers, and many other [relatives] have passed away. They have fallen prey to [the passing of] time, and it is now difficult to know anything of their whereabouts. There are many powerful and wealthy men who were seen last year waving their fame like a banner and being regarded as the ornament of the country, who this year have completely disappeared, leaving only the traces of their names behind. No one can tell if those of might and wealth who just now are enjoying public appreciation will be found in the same position at this time next year, or even next month! <64>

How many of your domestic animals—goats, sheep, dogs, and so on—have died in the past, and how many have you now? If you consider what ultimately will happen to the remainder, you will find that they too have an impermanent nature. Of those people who were alive one hundred years ago, none can now be found who have escaped death. All the living beings of the present world will also die within one hundred years, without a single one remaining. Therefore, it is obvious that neither the outer container¹⁷ nor the inner contents¹⁸ has a permanent nature or any dependable quality as such.

All that is born is impermanent; it will die.

All that is accumulated is impermanent; it will be depleted.

All that is gathered is impermanent; it will be dispersed.

All that is built up is impermanent; it will collapse.

All that looks high is impermanent; it will fall.

¹⁷ *nō* / snod / i.e., the world

¹⁸ *chü* / bcud / i.e., the sentient beings

Similarly, friends and foes, happiness and sorrow, [perceptions of] good and bad, and all [other] thoughts as well are indeed impermanent. You may be as high as the sky, as mighty as a thunderbolt, as rich as a serpent-spirit,¹⁹ as beautiful as a god, or as glamorous as a rainbow, but whatever may be the case, when death comes, there is no power within you [that can delay it] for even a moment. You must go naked, your bare hands folded under your armpits, leaving behind all your riches, relatives, followers, disciples, subjects, subordinates, food and drink—your entire prosperity—with a strong sense of reluctance in being separated from them.

Leaving them behind, you depart like a strand of hair pulled from butter. <65> You cannot take a single monk, even if you are the Lama of a monastery with thousands of monks. You cannot take a single servant, even if you are the lord of millions of subjects. You may own all the wealth and property in the world, but you cannot take even a needle and thread. You have to go, leaving even your beloved body behind.

At that hour, the body that was dressed in swathes of silk and brocade, and whose mouth was always drenched with tea and other drinks while alive, the body of a great person, the body that may have been as beautiful as the image of a god, is then called a corpse. Dark and terrible merely to look at, it turns into a putrescent, heavy lump.

Je-tsün Mi-la said:

**That thing called “corpse,”
The sight of which causes fear,
Is here with you now.**

At that time, your body will be bound with a cord, hidden behind a curtain, and kept on earth and stone, and your cup will be placed upside-down near your head. However dear and affectionate you may have been, [your body] will then be treated as something fearsome and repulsive. Now, while you live, you lie down on lambskin-lined garments with piles of

¹⁹ *lu / klu*

sleek furs as a pillow, yet you feel discomfort and change sides after every phase of sleep. But when you die, there will be only a lump of stone or mud beneath your cheek, and you will lie on it enveloped in the stench of mud. <66>

You may be the breadwinner or head of a family, and hence worry that, when you die, your survivors will surely also either die of hunger or cold, suffer from enemies, or be killed by flood. You may think that you provide all the happiness and other [comforts] your dependents now enjoy. But after you die, they will seek comfort in anxiously striving to dispose of your dead body quickly, by cremating it, throwing it in water, or bringing it to a cemetery. There is nothing more than that. Then, after death, without any friends and entirely alone, you must roam in the *bar-do*. At that time, only the Dharma can help you. Hence, starting right now, think seriously again and again of how you can practice even a single aspect of the noble Dharma.

Similarly, all that is accumulated [will manifest] the phenomenon of depletion. A universal monarch may reach a day when he becomes penniless. At times, those who were rich earlier in life are later seen dying of hunger; those who last year owned many hundreds of cattle are now begging, due to a heavy snowfall or unforeseen losses; <67> a rich man yesterday may be a beggar today, having suffered at the hands of enemies. Such incidents are known to us. Because no one can control his wealth forever, think again and again of using what you have to earn the merit of charity.

All that is gathered will also disperse in impermanence. At a great world trade center, or at a place where religious sermons are delivered, people from various parts of the world assemble by the thousands or tens of thousands; yet they ultimately break up and return to their respective countries. Similarly, [as for] our present meetings of Guru and disciple, employer and employee, religious friends, family members, and husbands and wives who exchange love and affection—ultimately there is no way for us not to separate. There is no certainty of our not being parted, even at this very moment, by death or a sudden catastrophe. Therefore, religious friends, life partners, and others who now are gathered

together separate moment by moment. Hence, do not be angry, argumentative, and quarrelsome [with others], for there is no certainty of being with them for long. Think of treating them lovingly in this brief present moment. <68>

P'a-dam-pa said:

Family life is impermanent, like friends meeting at a marketplace.

Don't recount bad deeds and quarrel, O Ding-ri folk!

All that is built will also collapse. Prosperous cities and monasteries of the past, now empty ruins, were also [each individually] owned by a noble person. At present, they have become nests for birds and mice. Even the Sam-ye Monastery, which was constructed with three tiers and turrets by miraculous builders during the reign of the Royal Prince Tr'i-song Deu-tsen, and which was blessed by the Second Buddha of O-gyen, was gutted by fire in one night. The Red Palace of [King] Song-tsen Gam-po, which was like a Castle of Victory,²⁰ is now gone, with not even a cornerstone to be seen. Hence, what can you expect from taking special care of your village home and monastic buildings, which are no better than the nests of insects?

Therefore, as mentioned in the biographies of the founders of the Ka-gyü lineage:

**Turn your back on your fatherland;
Readily accept a foreign land;
Prefer the base of a rock for an abode;
Take wild animals for friends.**

Thus, at the cost of your food, clothes, and fame, [follow the famous instructions of the Ka-dam-pas]:

**Take the Dharma as the ultimate resort of the mind;
Take asceticism as the ultimate resort of the Dharma;**

²⁰ a particular architectural style having three different levels, each with a pagoda-like roof

**Take death as the ultimate resort of asceticism;
Take a desolate valley as the ultimate resort of death.**

Think from the core of your heart that you will accomplish these four resorts of the Ka-dam-pa teachers. <69>

The privileges enjoyed by a great person and the might of a heroic force are impermanent. Even so powerful a king as Nga-lay-nu,²¹ who ruled the four continents as a universal monarch of the golden [age], who held supremacy even over the Trāyastriṁśa heavens, who sat on the same throne with Indra, and who had the power to turn away the attacks of the demi-gods, ultimately fell to earth and died with his desires still unsated. No king, official of a spiritual or temporal leader, provincial administrator, or the like has ever constantly enjoyed the same high fame and position. There are many cases when a powerful official who interpreted the law for others the year before, this year finds himself sleeping behind bars! What will you do with impermanent power and prestige? It is better to determine to attain Buddhahood, a state that is never affected by deterioration or degeneration, a state worthy of worship by all sentient beings, including the gods.

Similarly, friend and foe are also impermanent. When Ārya Kātyāyana once went out for alms, he saw a householder holding a baby on her lap, <70> relishing a fish, and throwing stones at a bitch that was snapping at the [discarded] bones. Through his intuition, the Ārya saw that the fish had been her father in this life, her mother had been reborn as the bitch, and that the baby was an enemy she had killed in her previous life,²² who was now reborn as her child for reasons of karmic retribution. So he said:

**While eating her father's flesh and beating her mother,
Her terrible karmic enemy is seated on her lap.**

²¹ S. Māndhāta

²² The text literally refers to the baby as being an enemy who had killed the mother in her previous life, rather than an enemy who had been killed by the mother. The logic of the story indicates the latter reading; hence, the text is assumed to contain a calligraphic error here.

**The wife snaps at her husband's bones.
Worldly dharma makes me laugh!**

Many of this life's enemies later become friends and matrimonially connected relatives, superseding other close friendships. Even parents and brothers will quarrel just for the sake of a tiny bit of wealth or property and then try to harm each other as much as they can. There are instances of people killing each other over a trifling cause, although they are married or related. You must repeatedly think of treating all beings with equal love and compassion, for there is no permanence even as regards friends and foes.

The states of happiness and sorrow are also impermanent. People who are wealthy and happy early in their life are very often found to be poor and unhappy later in life, and many who are unhappy early in their life are found to be happy later in life. <71> Many who begin as beggars become kings towards the end of their lives. There are an unimaginable number of cases like that of Je-tsün Mi-la's uncle, who celebrated the happy reception of his [son's] bride in the morning and ended the day wailing in sorrow. [Many] who have undergone penance and sustained many kinds of suffering ultimately have attained transcendental happiness and pleasure—for example, the enlightened Gurus of the past and Je-tsün Mi-la Re-pa.

You can enjoy the happiness created by wealth questionably earned, but eventually you suffer endlessly. It is said that once in the past, the kingdom of Nyi-ög²³ first received a week-long shower of grain, followed by a week-long shower of clothes, followed by a week-long shower of precious gems.²⁴ But finally a shower of earth followed and buried everyone beneath it, and all the victims were reborn in the lower regions.

Do not, out of hope and fear, be attached to impermanent happiness and sorrow. Discard all the happiness and wealth of this worldly life as you would a droplet of spit. For the

²³ nyi.'og / S. Aparānta

²⁴ The sequence of showers is different in other references to this event.

sake of Dharma, accept suffering cheerfully and patiently, and from the core of your heart contemplate on the intention to follow the path of the Buddhas of the past. <72>

[Perceptions of] good and bad are also impermanent. Even from the worldly point of view, oratory and conversation, intelligence and ingenuity, and bravery and dexterity will all degenerate. When the merit [you have accumulated] in the past is exhausted, perverse thoughts will grow, all the works you undertake will fail, people will criticize you, you will suffer personally, and others will always take advantage of you. There are many who find that the little original virtue they possessed is soon exhausted and that they are left with nothing. Many who were regarded as dunces, thoughtless people, frauds, or liars in the past gain access to wealth and prosperity later in life. There is a saying:

**A veteran swindler becomes a social leader when
fortune returns;
Others will confide in him, and regard him as noble and
wise.**

Even in the religious quarter [there are unfortunate examples, such as in the saying]:

**A spiritually developed old sage becomes a beginner;
An old renunciate becomes an amasser of wealth;
An old [celibate] preacher becomes a family head.**

There are ascetics who completely renounce the world early in life, but later become avid for wealth. There are those who preach the Dharma to others early in life, but later become hunters, thieves, or robbers. There are those who are abbots, upholders of the Vinaya rules,²⁵ early in life, but later become family heads with many children. There are many who do nothing but commit sins early in life, <73> but later, absorbed only in the Dharma, either attain perfection

²⁵ rules governing the ethics and conduct of Buddhist monks, nuns, and novices

or find the path to higher stages of evolutionary rebirth at the time of death. Thus, there is no stability or reliability in our momentary perceptions of good and bad.

One who observes within himself the slight development of both withdrawal from samsāra and the feeling of remorse²⁶ may superficially engage in practicing the Dharma, and thus the world may regard him as holy. Then when benefactors and disciples lift him up from his feet without having first examined his character, he puffs himself up by arrogantly imagining, "I am such and such a person." His thinking becomes confused, and he goes wild with the idea, "I can do whatever I like." Such a train of thought proves that, in reality, he is deceived by Māra.

Root out self-attachment.²⁷ Give birth to the wisdom of non-self.²⁸ Until you attain the transcendental stages [of the Bodhisattvas],²⁹ your conceptions of good and bad will be unstable. Always contemplate on death and impermanence. Know your own defects. Always seek a humble seat. Develop withdrawal from samsāra and the feeling of remorse. Learn to be peaceful, subdued, and discreet. Think of the impermanent nature of all compounded objects. Contemplate on the sufferings of samsāra and learn to have a constant twinge of sadness in you.

Je-tsün Mi-la Re-pa said:

**In a cave at a place without human beings,
The feeling of sadness never leaves, <74>
Nor does devotional feeling for the Guru,
The Buddha of the three times, ever depart.**

²⁶ *kyo-shay* / skyo.śas / the feeling of regret for the sufferings you have experienced hitherto and for the sufferings you will continue to experience until you attain realization

²⁷ *dag-dzin* / bdag.'dzin

²⁸ *dag-me-kyi ye-shey* / bdag.med.kyi ye.śes

²⁹ *p'ag-pay sa* / 'phags.pa'i sa

You should practice as he has said. If you do not, since your present thoughts are also impermanent, you do not know into what form they may change.

Once there was a man who took to the Dharma to escape the harassment of his relatives. He came to be known as T'ang-pa, the well-attained monk. Having achieved full control over his mind and vital air, he could fly in the sky. One day, when many pigeons gathered to eat the *tor-zan*³⁰ he had made, he thought, "If I had formerly had that many troops, I could have routed my enemies." One [such] bad thought caused him to fail [in progressing further], and he later returned to his village and became an army officer.

Similarly, some understanding of the Dharma can appear because of [contact with] Gurus and religious friends. However, since the feelings of unenlightened people are impermanent, you should guide your progress by the light of the Sun of the Dharma. Think of practicing the Dharma for as long as you live.

Thus, when you consider these different analogies, it should be clear that, from the universe's highest summit to its lowest hell, there is nothing that is permanent or reliable. You must believe that [all that exists is subject to] change, transformation, growth, and decay. <75>

6 CONTEMPLATION ON IMPERMANENCE BY CONSIDERING THE UNCERTAIN CAUSES OF DEATH

Although death is certain for the human beings of this earth from the moment of birth onward, the manner, cause, and time of death are uncertain. When, where, how, and from what one will die are indefinite for everyone. There are more causes of death than there are causes to live in this world.

³⁰ *gtor.zan* / small balls made of roasted barley flour that are offered to the pretas, usually accompanied by milk and water

Guru Āryadeva said:

**The causes of death are very many.
The causes to live are very few,
And they too become the causes of death.**

As he has said, there are many causes of death—fire, water, poison, precipices, *yetis*, wild animals, and so forth—but very few causes to live. There are incidents when even food and clothing, which were greedily regarded as means of survival, have turned out to be the causes of death. There are many cases [of people] having eaten poisonous food, or even when the food was not [poisonous], when that which they greedily believed would benefit their health became poisonous or disagreeable and thus caused their death.

Particularly at the present time, almost everyone craves meat. There is hardly any tumorous disease or affliction caused by blood-thirsty evil spirits that is not based on the unrestrained consumption of flesh and blood. <76> Further, innumerable deaths are caused by dropsy,³¹ dyspepsia,³² and tumors, which develop due to bad habits of eating and living. Similarly, innumerable deaths are caused by crossing rivers carelessly, going too close to ferocious animals, and fighting enemies on the battlefield [in an attempt] to gain wealth and fame.

Due to a variety of causes, death occurs at unexpected times. Some die while in their mother's womb; some die as soon as they are born; some die when they start to crawl; some die in their youth; some die after becoming very old; some die instantly, giving neither priests nor doctors the chance [to aid them]; some die after years of being bedridden with illness, their dying eyes still wistfully looking at the living, their bodies completely emaciated; some collapse suddenly while eating, talking, or working; and there are some who kill themselves.

³¹ fluid retention, or heart disease

³² stomach acidity

Thus, amidst so many causes of death, your life is very weak, like the flame of a candle burning inside a cage. There is no certainty that death will not come <77> right now, and that tomorrow you will not find yourself reborn as an animal with a pair of tusks in your mouth or with horns on your head. Therefore, you must firmly believe that the time of death and the place of rebirth are uncertain.

7 CONTEMPLATION ON IMPERMANENCE BY INTENSELY REMEMBERING IT ALWAYS

Under all circumstances, contemplate on death alone. While walking, sitting, and lying down, always think, "This activity may be my last worldly activity." Express this vocally, as well. Mentally also, meditate deeply on it. When you are traveling to another place, think, "It is possible that I may die there and hence never return to my starting place." While you travel, or when you are tired and sit on a roadside bench, think, "I may die at this very place." Wherever you sit, presume that you may die at that very spot. When going to sleep, think, "It is uncertain whether I will wake up tomorrow morning or not, since I may die in this bed this very night." When you wake, think, "It is doubtful whether or not I will sleep again this evening, for I may die during the day." Thus, from the core of your heart, intensely contemplate on death alone.

In the past, when the Ka-dam-pa Ge-sheys went to bed at night, they were never sure if they would need fire the following morning; therefore, they never preserved their fire under ashes. <78> They even kept their cups upside-down. They anticipated death from moment to moment. Do as they did.

However, contemplation on death alone is not enough. It is only the noble Dharma that can benefit you at the time of death. Always [act] in conjunction with remembrance³³ and

³³ *dren-pa / dran.pa /* remembering what should be practiced and what should be avoided

watchfulness,³⁴ and understand the entirety of worldly affairs as impermanent and essenceless. Hence, you should spur yourself on to practice the pure Dharma.

**As, in general, the aggregate of mind and body is
impermanent,**
Do not own the borrowed thing.

**As the road you walk is impermanent,
Move your steps towards Dharma.³⁵**

**As the place in which you live is impermanent,
Think of a Pure Paradise.**

**As the food, drink, and things you use are
impermanent,
Eat the perfect meditative absorption as food.³⁶**

**As the sleep you experience is impermanent,
Transform illusion into clear light.**

**As the wealth you find is impermanent,
Acquire the seven treasures of the Āryas.³⁷**

**As relatives, friends, and worldly establishments are
impermanent,
Encourage withdrawal from samsāra [by being] in
solitude.**

**As great authority and fame are impermanent,
Look for the humbler seat.**

**As uttered words are impermanent,
Use them for reciting [mantra] and prayer. <79>**

³⁴ *shey-zhin* / śes.bźin / knowing if you are actually practicing what should be practiced and avoiding what should be avoided

³⁵ The text here includes this annotation: "From the Dü-pa: 'Your mind will be free from distraction if you keep your gaze at a yoke's length as you walk.'"

³⁶ *ting-nge-dzin* / tiṅ.nē.'dzin / S. samādhi

³⁷ faith, morality, charity, knowledge, modesty, self-control, and wisdom

**As faith and withdrawal from samsāra are
impermanent,
Persevere in maintaining firm vows.**

**As perceptions and concepts are impermanent,
Learn to be good-natured.**

**As spiritual experiences and insight are impermanent,
Reach the fully dissolved, ultimate state.**

Then, at that time, the interfering hand of birth and death will collapse. You will gain confidence in facing death. You will attain the deathless, secure state, which is like a vulture crossing the heights of the sky. From that time onward, you will not have to contemplate on the remorseful thought of death.

Je-[tsün] Mi-la said:

**Frightened by death, I ran to the hills.
Because I continuously meditated on the uncertain time
of death,
I attained the deathless, primordial, secure state.
Now I have abandoned the fear of death.**

Nyam-me Dag-po Rin-po-ch'e said:

**First, being driven by the fear of birth and death, you
should run away, like a stag escaping from an
imprisoning pit.
Second, even if you die, you should have no regret, like a
farmer facing the time of harvesting.
Lastly, you should have the satisfaction of a person who
has accomplished a great task.**

**First, you should know that you have no time, as if an
arrow had struck your vital organs.
Second, your contemplation should be unremitting, like
the sorrow of a mother who has lost her only child.**

Lastly, you should understand that there is nothing to be done, as [in the case of] a cowherd whose cattle have been driven away by enemies.

Until you have this understanding, you should contemplate on death and impermanence alone. <80>

Also, Lord Buddha has said:

If you contemplate more on impermanence, you will be making offerings to all the Buddhas.

If you contemplate more on impermanence, all the Buddhas will inspire you.

If you contemplate more on impermanence, all the Buddhas will give you guiding predictions.

If you contemplate more on impermanence, all the Buddhas will bless you.

For example, of all footprints, that of the elephant is the largest. Similarly, it is said that of all the Buddhist meditative perceptions, the perception of impermanence is the best.

In the Dül-wa Lung, [Lord Buddha further said]:

Rather than offering midday meals along with money to a hundred of my precious disciples — Śāriputra, Maudgalyāyana, and so forth — who are like excellent vases [of Dharma], the best thing to do is to remember the impermanence of an aggregate thing, even for a moment.

Similarly, a certain lay-disciple once asked Ge-shey Pu-to-wa, “Of all the Dharmas, which is the most important to practice?”

“Of all the Dharmas,” Pu-to-wa replied, “the most important is to contemplate on impermanence, for if you contemplate on death and impermanence: first, it offers the cause for turning toward the Dharma; second, it offers the cause for

urging you to do meritorious deeds; <81> lastly, it aids you in understanding the essential sameness³⁸ of all dharmas.³⁹

“Again, if you contemplate on impermanence: first, it offers the cause for breaking the attachments to this life; second, it offers the cause for counteracting attachment to all worldly activities; lastly, it aids you in entering the path to nirvāna.

“Again, if you contemplate on impermanence: first, it offers the cause for generating faith; second, it offers the cause for developing perseverance; lastly, it aids the birth of wisdom.

“Again, if you contemplate on impermanence and it grows in you: first, it offers the cause for searching for the Dharma; second, it offers the cause for practicing the Dharma; lastly, it aids you in successfully accomplishing the Dharma.

“Again, if you contemplate on impermanence and it grows in you: first, it offers the cause for generating the armor-like [motivation] to persevere; second, it offers the cause for applying the perseverance; lastly, it aids you in developing irrevocable perseverance.”

Also, P'a-dam-pa said:

If impermanence is born in the mind:

First, it offers the cause for entering the Dharma;

Second, it works like the whip of perseverance;

Eventually, it makes you attain the enlightened

Dharmakāya.

Thus, unless a genuine sense of impermanence has grown in your mind, whatever effort you make to learn and practice the Dharma will ultimately breed the causes for having contempt for the Dharma. <82>

[P'a]-dam-pa [also] said:

Of the Dharma-practitioners in Tibet, I don't see any who believe they will die. Yet I don't see anyone living

³⁸ *nyam-pa-nyi* / ཡ້ନ୍ୟାମପାନ୍ୟି

³⁹ conceptual ideas with regard to anything in this world

forever. Generally, aren't those in yellow robes who express pleasure in hoarding wealth trying to pay Yama with food and money? The way they acquire the choicest wealth, aren't they trying to bribe Hell? Ha, ha! It is really ridiculous to see the monks in Tibet! He who has learned more has more arrogance. He whose meditation is better hoards [more] food and wealth. He who lives in solitude [becomes involved in] more social gatherings. He who leaves his country loses his sense of shame. Such people are immune to the Dharma. They are fond of sin.

He said that their mistake is not remembering their own death on observing the death of others. Therefore, contemplation on the perception of impermanence opens the preliminary door for practicing all the Dharmas.

When Ge-shey Pu-to-wa was once asked the technique for dissolving unfavorable causes, he said:

You should think more of death and impermanence. If you are convinced of it, you will find no difficulty in avoiding sin, nor will you find any difficulty in doing meritorious deeds. In addition to that, contemplate more on loving kindness⁴⁰ and compassion.⁴¹ <83> If they grow in your mind, you will find no difficulty in working for the cause of living beings. In addition to that, contemplate more on emptiness, the ultimate nature of all phenomena. If [an understanding of this] grows in your mind, you will find no difficulty in dissolving illusion.

Thus, if impermanence is born in your mind, you will withdraw your attachment to all the worldly affairs of this life, as a jaundiced patient [recoils] when served oily food.

⁴⁰ *jam-pa* / byam.pa

⁴¹ *nying-je* / sñiñ.rje

Je La-ma [Jig-me Gyal-way Nyu-gu] too said, again and again:

The reason why I am not attracted to worldly splendor, power, riches, or glamour of any sort, and am instead drawn to the biographies of the great Gurus of the past, is that a small sense of impermanence has grown in my mind. I have no more advice to offer other than this.

The growth of the sense of impermanence [in your mind] should be comparable to that which was found in Ge-shey K'a-rag Gom-ch'ung.

[The Ge-shey] went to meditate at the retreat of Jo-mo K'a-rag in Tsang. At the entrance to the cave there was a thorny bush that snagged his clothes. At first he thought of cutting it, but later he thought that he might perhaps die inside the cave and thus not have to leave it again. He found it more beneficial <84> to engage in meditation. With this idea, he did not cut it. As he walked out, a similar incident occurred, but he doubted that he would live to reenter the cave. Thus, he lived there for many years, and even when he left after attaining perfection, the thorny bush remained uncut.

Similarly, Rig-dzin Jig-me Ling-pa had a pond near his hermitage at Tön-ri-kyi. He experienced great difficulty in crossing over it, for there was no bridge. When he was offered a bridge for it, he said, "I don't know whether I shall sleep here next year or not. What's the use of taking such trouble?" It is said that he always talked about impermanence.

Therefore, until some such thought is born in our minds, we too must: [1] develop the bodhicitta motivation;⁴² [2] as the main practice,⁴³ use all means to contemplate on impermanence until a genuine sense of it is born in our minds; [3] and conclude our practice with the act of dedication.⁴⁴ Thus,

⁴² *jor-wa sem-kyey dam-pa / sbyor.ba sems.bskyed dam.pa*

⁴³ *ngö-zhi mig-me dam-pa / dños.gži dmigs.med dam.pa*

⁴⁴ *je ngo-wa dam-pa / rje bsno.ba dam.pa*

through all available means, follow in the steps of the noble Gurus.

Although impermanence is evident, I regard things as permanent.

Although ranking senior-most in age, I think of myself as young.

May I and sentient beings like me, who have contrary ideas,

Be blessed to have the sense of impermanence born within us.

This is the instruction on the impermanence of life.

CHAPTER THREE

The Misery of Samsāra

He considered worldly activities to be essenceless;
With great compassion he worked solely for the sake of
others;
Unattached to nirvāna and samsāra, he practiced the
Mahāyāna doctrine as prescribed;
At the feet of my unparalleled Guru, I pay homage.

The instruction on the misery of samsāra¹ is also twofold. First is the manner of listening to and teaching the Dharma, which is the same as before, and second is the Dharma to be explained, which is [again] twofold:

1. Contemplation on Worldly Sufferings in General;
2. Contemplation on the Sufferings of Each of the Six Varieties of Beings in Particular.

1 CONTEMPLATION ON WORLDLY SUFFERINGS IN GENERAL

As described in the previous [chapter], even if you acquire the difficult-to-obtain leisure and endowment, [eventually], with no chance to live longer, you will come under the influence of impermanence and death. After dying, if you were like an extinguished fire or evaporated water, that would be the end of it; however, you do not disappear after death.

¹ *k'or-way nyey-mig / 'khor.ba'i ñes.dmigs*

You have to be reborn, and once reborn you will still be in samsāra.

This thing called samsāra (*k'or-wa*) is like a potter's wheel, a water pulley, or like a bee inside a pot, moving from one point to another. When a bee is enclosed within a pot, no matter where it flies, it still remains inside the pot—it cannot go elsewhere. <86> Similarly, wherever you are born, whether in a higher or lower region, you are not beyond the different parts of this samsāra. The upper portion of the pot is like the superior regions of gods and men; the lower portion is like the three lower regions. Worldly karma,² whether meritorious or demeritorious, causes you to travel the six regions, from one to another, in successive births. Thus, [samsāra] is called *k'or-wa*, that which rotates.

You have been lost in samsāra throughout beginningless time. Among all the beings of samsāra, there is not a single one who has not formerly played three different roles with every other being, namely, father or mother, friend or foe, and one who is neutral.

A Sūtra states:

If this entire earth were made into mud pellets the size of an Indian juniper seed, and they were then used to count the number of mothers in a single being's maternal lineage, by saying, "This is her mother, this is her grandmother, this is her great-grandmother . . .," and so on, the earth would be exhausted, but not the members of that being's chain of ancestral mothers.

Lord Nāgārjuna explains the meaning as follows:

**Even if the earth were rolled into pellets as small as
Indian juniper seeds,
There would not be enough to reach the end of one's
maternal lineage.**

² *zag-chay-kyi lay / zag.bcas.kyi las*

Accordingly, throughout the beginningless samsāra up until now, there is hardly any [type of being] in whose form you have not been born. The occasions on which [others, motivated] by desire, cut off your head and limbs are also innumerable. <87> If the limbs of the ants, insects, and other tiny beings in whose [forms] you have been reborn could now be heaped in one place, [the pile] would be even taller than Mount Sumeru. If the tears you shed in the past while suffering from hunger, thirst, and cold had not dried up, their quantity would be greater than [the waters of] the great ocean that bounds [the world].

Although the amount of molten copper alone that you drank during your past rebirths in hell is greater than the waters of the four oceans of the cardinal directions, without even a moment's regret, those of you who are still bound to samsāra by attachment will suffer in this endless samsāra even more than you did before. If by chance you succeed in acquiring a tiny bit of virtuous merit, you may attain the well-accomplished status of Indra, the Lord of the Gods, who enjoys long life, excellent health, power, and wealth; yet your lifetime will still be limited by death, and after dying, you will suffer miserably in the lower regions.

If that is so, the minor pleasures, such as power and health, that this body enjoys for a few years, months, or days are a deception. When the effect of the cause that brought the happiness of the upper regions is exhausted, you will either become very poor and miserable, or you will undergo, against <88> your will, the unbearable sufferings of the lower regions. What essence is there in [experiencing] present pleasure and happiness, which is like waking [momentarily] while having a dream?

The seemingly pleasurable and happy state you are now experiencing is the result of a trifling meritorious deed [done in the past]. But once the transporting power of its karma³ is exhausted, you will be powerless to continue in this state for even a moment. Even the lords of the gods, who sit on precious thrones spread with celestial cloth and whose five

³ *p'en-je-kyi lay / 'phen.byed.kyi las*

sensual desires are entirely fulfilled, reach the limit of their lives. In a mere wink of an eye, they fall head over heels onto the burning iron ground in hell and suffer.

The sun and moon illuminating the four continents with light are also at times eclipsed by the earth's shadow, and then you cannot even see the movement of your limbs. Thus, because seeming worldly pleasure is unworthy of trust, think of escaping from the ocean of samsaric misery, and of attaining, through all means, the eternal happiness of Buddhahood in this very life. Contemplate on the Dharma in the complete sense of the three perfect principles.

2 CONTEMPLATION ON THE SUFFERINGS OF EACH OF THE SIX VARIETIES OF BEINGS IN PARTICULAR

[The six regions are:]

1. [The First Lower Region: Hell-Beings;]
2. [The Second Lower Region: Pretas;]
3. [The Third Lower Region: Animals;]
4. [The First Upper Region: Human Beings;]
5. [The Second Upper Region: Demi-Gods;]
6. [The Third Upper Region: Gods.]

2.1 [THE FIRST LOWER REGION:] HELL-BEINGS⁴

[This region] <89> has eighteen divisions [comprising eight hot hells, one set of neighboring hells, eight cold hells, and one set of indeterminate hells].

2.1.1 THE EIGHT HOT HELLs

The eight hot hells range in descending order, [like the sub-basements of a building], from the Reviving Hell [at the top] to the Maximum Torture Hell [at the bottom]. All their bases and perimeters are like the red-hot iron in a black-

⁴ *nyal-wa / dmyal.ba*

smith's shop, and when one sets foot there, one finds no pleasure. They are a mass of tongues of fire, always burning furiously.

2.1.1.1 THE REVIVING HELL⁵

The Reviving Hell is a mass of impure fire burning on a ground of red-hot iron, upon which the sentient beings of this hell, innumerable as the snowflakes in a blizzard, are gathered together by the force of karma. These beings have been cast there by their deeds done in anger. In agreement with the cause of those deeds, [their anger], they are again motivated by anger and regard each other as enemies. Thus, they fight. Their hands hold innumerable weapons created by their karmic illusion, and they all die by fighting with each other. But when a voice from the sky says, "Come back to life again!"⁶ they immediately revive and fight as before. [Thus], they suffer from successive deaths and resurrections.

Their life span [is calculated as follows]. Fifty human years equal one day⁷ of the Gyal-ch'en Rig-zhi⁸ gods. <90> [Counting] thirty days as one month and twelve months as one year, five hundred years of these gods equal one day of the Reviving Hell. [Counting] thirty of these days as one month, and twelve months as one year, the beings of this hell suffer here for five hundred of their own years.⁹

2.1.1.2 THE BLACK MARKING-THREAD HELL¹⁰

The attendants of Yama place the bodies of the sentient beings of this hell, which are like pieces of charred wood, on a base of red-hot iron. With a black marking-thread they

⁵ *yang-sö / yañ.sos*

⁶ *yang sō-par gyur-chig / yañ sos.par gyur.cig*

⁷ as used here, "day" means 24 hours

⁸ *rgyal.chen rigs.bži / S. cāturmahārājika*

⁹ 1,620,000,000,000 human years

¹⁰ *t'ig-nag / thig.nag*

mark the bodies with lines—four, eight, sixteen, thirty-two, and so on—and then cut them with fiery steel saws. Again and again, the severed portions spontaneously rejoin and are sawed. Thus they are tortured.

Their life span [is calculated as follows]. One hundred human years equal one day of the Sum-chu-tsa-sum¹¹ gods. One thousand years of these gods equal one day of the beings of the Black Marking-Thread Hell. They must remain here for one thousand of their own years.¹²

2.1.1.3 THE COLLECTION-DESTRUCTION HELL¹³

The attendants of Yama cast the countless sentient beings of this hell into [innumerable] iron mortars, each as large as a country, and pound them, brandishing red-hot iron hammers as big as Mount Sumeru. <91> Suffering unimaginably from having their vital organs cut, in an utter chaos of fear and terror, they die with roaring cries. When the hammers are lifted, they revive, only to suffer again as before. All the mountains surrounding the country turn into the animals they killed in the past—stags, antelopes, goats, sheep, and so on—and with horns flaming, the animals butt against each other. The force of karma drives these innumerable hell-beings between the clashes, and they are killed. When the charging beasts withdraw, the [beings] revive, only to be destroyed again as before.

They must suffer for a period calculated by reckoning two hundred human years as one day of the T'ab-dral¹⁴ gods, and two thousand years of these [gods] as one day of the Collection-Destruction Hell. They suffer here for two thousand of their own years.¹⁵

¹¹ sum.cu.rtsa.gsum / S. trāyastrimśa

¹² 12,960,000,000,000 human years

¹³ dü-jom / bsdus.'joms

¹⁴ 'thab.bral / S. yāma

¹⁵ 103,680,000,000,000 human years

2.1.1.4 THE HOWLING HELL¹⁶

The beings in this hell suffer the torture of being roasted in a doorless building made of red-hot iron. They scream, having lost all hope of ever escaping from it.

Calculating four hundred human years as one day of the Ga-den¹⁷ gods, and four thousand years of these [gods] as one day of the Howling Hell, the beings remain here for four thousand of their own years.¹⁸

2.1.1.5 THE LOUD HOWLING HELL¹⁹

Many frightful, armed attendants of Yama drive the innumerable hell-beings [here] into a chamber within a chamber, both made of flaming iron, <92> and beat them with iron hammers. The seams of the doors of both the inner and outer chambers are plastered with molten steel. The beings scream loudly, for they realize that even if they could escape from the inner chamber, they could not escape from the outer.

Their life span [is calculated as follows]. Eight hundred human years equal one day of the T'rül-ga²⁰ gods. Eight thousand years of these [gods] equal one day of the Loud Howling Hell. [Beings are trapped here for] eight thousand such years.²¹

2.1.1.6 THE HEATING HELL²²

The innumerable beings in this hell suffer from being boiled in molten bronze, which is contained in a huge iron pot as large as the one billion world-systems. Whenever [the

¹⁶ *ngu-bö / የኩ.ቦ*

¹⁷ *dga'.ldan / S. tuṣita*

¹⁸ 829,440,000,000,000 human years

¹⁹ *ngu-bö ch'en-po / ክኩ.ቦ chen.po*

²⁰ *'phrul.dga' / S. nirmaṇārati*

²¹ 6,635,520,000,000,000 human years

²² *ts'a-wa / tsha.ba*

beings] appear on the surface, [Yama's] attendants seize them with iron hooks and strike them on the head with hammers, causing them to lose consciousness. Their subsequent insensibility to the pangs of suffering can be regarded as the only slight happiness they experience. They suffer greatly.

Sixteen hundred human years equal one day of the *Zhen-trül Wang-je*²³ gods, and sixteen thousand years of these [gods] equal one day of the Heating Hell. Beings suffer here for sixteen thousand of their own years.²⁴

2.1.1.7 THE INTENSE HEATING HELL²⁵

[In this hell], in a blazing metal chamber, [Yama's] attendants pierce [the beings] with a burning iron trident, which [enters] both soles of the feet and the lower orifice, and which emerges through both shoulders and the crown of the head. <93> They are wrapped in red-hot iron blankets and suffer tremendous torture.

The life span here is half an intermediary cycle of an aeon,²⁶ beyond measurement in human years.

2.1.1.8 THE MAXIMUM TORTURE HELL²⁷

In an iron chamber of blazing fire, surrounded by the sixteen neighboring hells, the attendants of Yama place the innumerable beings of this hell in the midst of iron blocks, which are heaped like red-hot coals as high as a mountain. Using bellows made of tiger and leopard skins, [they make both] the bodies and the flames burn as one. Although [the beings] perpetually desire to escape, there is never a chance. At times, the flames subside a bit. The beings attempt to run away, but [Yama's] attendants strike them with large arrows,

²³ gžan.'phrul dbañ.byed / S. paranirmitavaśavartin

²⁴ 53,084,160,000,000,000 human years

²⁵ *rab-tu t'sa-wa* / *rab.tu tsha.ḥa*

²⁶ an aeon comprises twenty intermediary cycles

²⁷ *nar-me* / *mnar.med*

sticks, and hammers, pour boiling molten bronze into their mouths, and so on. Thus, these beings undergo sufferings that include all the tortures of the seven hells previously mentioned.

The life span here is one intermediary cycle of an aeon. Since no hell can be more torture-filled than this, it is called the Maximum Torture Hell. It is for beings who have committed the [five] deeds of the most serious consequence²⁸ and for those who adopt the tantric path and later develop antipathy towards their Vajra Gurus. <94> No other karma can make one take rebirth in this hell.

2.1.2 THE NEIGHBORING HELL²⁹

[Four sets] of four neighboring hells surround the Maximum Torture Hell, [one set] at each of the four [cardinal] directions:

1. A Burning Bed of Live Coals;
2. A Marsh of Putrefied Corpses;
3. A Meadow of Weapons;
4. A Forest with Leaves Like the Blades of Swords.

A set of these four is located at the eastern, southern, western, and northern directions, [making sixteen altogether]. At each of the southeastern, southwestern, northwestern, and northeastern points there is also:

5. A Hill of Iron Trees That Have Sharp, Pointed Leaves.

²⁸ *ts'am-me-pa* / *mtshams.med.pa* / killing one's mother, killing one's father, killing an Arhat, intending to shed the blood of a Buddha, and causing a schism in the Saṅgha / The reactions of these sins cause one to suffer in this lowest hell without any intermediary *bar-do* stage.

²⁹ *nye-k'or* / *ñe.'khor*

2.1.2.1 THE BURNING BED OF LIVE COALS³⁰

As those who have less karma left to suffer emerge from the Maximum Torture Hell, they observe a far-off, dense shadow of darkness. They go happily towards it, but they fall into a hot bed of ashes that has an impure fire burning furiously beneath it. This burns their flesh and bones, and thus they suffer.

2.1.2.2 THE MARSH OF PUTREFIED CORPSES³¹

In the same way, these [beings then] observe a far-off river. As they have been roasting in fire since the disintegration and destruction of the previous great [cycle of] aeons, they are very thirsty. They are happy to see the water, but when they approach it to drink, they do not find water. Instead, they sink head deep into a marsh composed entirely of dead bodies—human corpses, the carcasses of horses and dogs, and the like—which are rotting, putrid, and crawling with maggots. They are eaten by insects that have sharp, iron mandibles, and thus they suffer.

2.1.2.3 THE MEADOW OF WEAPONS³²

Again, <95> after escaping [from the marsh] they see a delightful green meadow. Approaching it, they come upon a field of weapons and find the entire meadow overgrown with red-hot, grass-like, iron blades. When they put down their right feet, their right feet are pierced. When they put down their left feet, their left feet are pierced. [Their feet] heal when lifted, but when they put them down, they are cut as before, and thus [these beings] suffer.

³⁰ *me-ma-mur-gyi öb / me.ma.mur.gyi 'obs*

³¹ *ro-nyag-kyi dam / ro.myags.kyi 'dam*

³² *ts'ön-ch'ay t'ang / mtshon.cha'i thañ*

2.1.2.4 THE FOREST OF SWORDS³³

Again, after escaping [from the meadow] they see a delightful forest. They run towards it, but they do not find an inviting forest there. Instead, they come upon a forest with leaves made of swords: on iron trees, many swords grow like leaves. As the wind moves them, the swords cut the beings' bodies into pieces. The [pieces] rejoin as before, and thus they suffer the pain of being [repetitively] cut.

2.1.2.5 THE HILL OF IRON TREES THAT HAVE SHARP, POINTED LEAVES³⁴

This is where adulterers and reprobate monks who have broken their vows of celibacy are born. As the force of their karma draws them before the dreadful Hill of Iron Trees, they see their former lovers calling to them from the top of the hill. As they ascend, all the leaves of the iron trees point downward and pierce them. <96> On reaching the top of the hill, hawks and vultures pluck out their eyes. Again [they hear] enticing voices, but [this time] at the foot of the hill. When the [descending] victims approach as before, all the leaves of the trees point upward and pierce straight through the center of their chests and out their backs. As they move towards the foot of the hill, dreadful male and female iron figures embrace them and chew their heads in their mouths. The beings suffer the torture of seeing their own white brain tissue oozing from the corners of these monsters' jaws.

Thus, you should thoroughly examine the afflictions meted out in these eight [hot] hells, the sixteen complementary neighboring hells, and the Hill of Iron Trees. Then, after going to a solitary place, close your eyes and visualize that you are actually in these hells. When you actually feel the fear and suffering, then tell yourself, "I have not even been born there now, yet even the mere thought of the suffering of

³³ *ral-dri lo-may nag-ts'al / ral.gri lo.ma'i nags.tshal*

³⁴ *chag-kyi shal-ma-ri dong-po / lcags.kyi šal.ma.ri'i sdon.po*

these places is terrifying and tormenting. Right now, innumerable sentient beings have been born there. All of them were my parents in previous births. There is no certainty that my parents, relatives, friends, and other [acquaintances] of this life who have died, have not been reborn there. <97> The principal cause for their having taken rebirth in these areas is the action of deep hostility.³⁵ In my present and former lives, I too have committed innumerable acts motivated by deep hostility.³⁶ Hence, there is every possibility that in a future life I will take rebirth in the hell regions. At present, I have obtained a human state with leisure and endowment, met an authentic Guru, and learned the profound techniques of the Dharma. Therefore, when the possibility of attaining Buddhahood now exists, I should endeavor to find the ways and means to see that henceforth I shall never have to be reborn in the regions of hell."

Thus you should think, again and again. With deep repentance, atone for the bad deeds you have committed in the past. Take a strong vow that, in the future, even at the cost of your life, you will not commit any sin that will cause you to be reborn in these hells. Contemplate on having extreme compassion³⁷ for the sentient beings who have been born there now, offer prayers, such as "Let all attain instantaneous freedom from these infernal regions," and put the instructions into practice by keeping the three perfect principles intact.

2.1.3 THE EIGHT COLD HELLSS³⁸

The eight cold hells all have similar physical features. They are basically lands composed of snow-[covered] moun-

³⁵ *zhe-dang / že.sdañ*

³⁶ N.B. Although the quotation in this paragraph begins and ends in the first person singular ('I'), in this sentence it shifts to the first person plural ('we'). For uniformity, this translation has used 'I' throughout the quotation.

³⁷ *nying-je / sñiñ.rje*

³⁸ *drang-nyal-gye / grañ.dmyal.brgyad*

tains and ice-filled valleys, where a constant blizzard furiously rages.

2.1.3.1 THE BLISTERING HELL³⁹

Afflicted by the cold in this hell, the naked beings grow weaker physically, and blisters rapidly appear on their bodies.

2.1.3.2 THE BLISTER-BURSTING HELL⁴⁰

[Here it is so cold that] <98> the blisters burst and ulcerate.

2.1.3.3 THE TEETH-CHATTERING HELL⁴¹

The unbearable, biting cold [in this hell] makes the beings' teeth chatter. Hence the name.

2.1.3.4 THE OH! COLD! HELL⁴²

[It is so called because the beings here] scream ceaselessly, [owing to the affliction of cold].

2.1.3.5 THE UTTERING-OF-“ALAS!” HELL⁴³

Losing the strength of their voices, [in this hell] the victims can produce only sighs of “Alas! Alas!”

³⁹ *ch'u-bur-chen* / chu.bur.can

⁴⁰ *ch'u-bur döl-wa* / chu.bur rdol.ba

⁴¹ *so t'am-t'am-pa* / so tham.tham.pa

⁴² *a-ch'u-ch'u* / a.chu.chu

⁴³ *kyi-hü dön-pa* / kyi.hud 'don.pa

2.1.3.6 THE CRACKING-LIKE-A-BLUE-POPPY HELL⁴⁴

The outer skin [of the beings here] turns blue and cracks into four parts, like [the petals of] a blue poppy.

2.1.3.7 THE CRACKING-LIKE-A-LOTUS HELL⁴⁵

[In this hell], frozen by the cold, the inner red flesh beneath the [beings'] skin is exposed and cracks into eight parts, like [the petals of a red] lotus.

2.1.3.8 THE CRACKING-LIKE-A-LARGE-LOTUS HELL⁴⁶

Since the skin [of the beings here] further turns red and black, and cracks into sixteen, then thirty-two, and then innumerable parts, [this hell is called] “Cracking-Like-[the-Petals-of]-a-Large-Lotus.” Many maggots with iron mandibles enter the wounds caused by the cracks and feed there. Thus, the [beings] suffer from the tortures of the cold.

These eight different kinds of suffering are known by eight different names; hence, they are called “the eight cold hells.” The life span of those [who dwell here] can be reckoned by taking a platter which holds twenty measures of ten *dray* of Kosala City⁴⁷ and filling it with sesame seeds. When the dish has been entirely emptied by removing one seed every hundred years, the life span of [an inhabitant of] the Blistering Hell comes to an end. The life span and miseries of the rest of the cold hells increase progressively by a factor of twenty. That is, the beings of the Blister-Bursting Hell live twenty times longer than those of the Blistering Hell, the beings of the Teeth-Chattering Hell live twenty times longer than those of the Blister-Bursting Hell, and so on. <99>

⁴⁴ *ut-pal tar gay-pa / utpal ltar gas.pa*

⁴⁵ *pe-ma tar gay-pa / padma ltar gas.pa*

⁴⁶ *pe-ma ch'en-po-tar gay-pa / padma chen.po.ltar gas.pa*

⁴⁷ one Kosala *dray* equals approximately one pint

As before, you should mentally take the sufferings [of these beings] upon yourself and contemplate on the miseries of these [cold hells]. When, in the winter of this human world, you cannot bear even for a mere moment the torture of the cold wind on your naked body, how could you stand to be born there? Think of this, confess your mistakes, and vow [not to repeat them]. Contemplate on having compassion for the sentient beings born in these regions, and practice as before, abiding by the three perfect principles in full.

2.1.4 THE INDETERMINATE HELL⁴⁸

[Here], neither the place nor the type of suffering is certain. [Beings born into these hells may be] pressed between rocks, embedded in stones, frozen in glaciers, cooked in boiling water, or burned in fire. When a tree is cut, such beings feel as if their limbs and vital parts are being cut, and thus they suffer. Because they regard pestles, broomsticks, pots, doors, pillars, hearthstones, ropes, and the like—things that are always in use—as their bodies, they experience suffering. They are like the fish that Dro-gön Ling-je Rey-pa saw in Yar-drog Lake, for example, or the frog that Drub-tob Tang-tong Gyal-po observed in a stone.

In the past, when K'a-dro Ye-shey Ts'o-gyal was perfecting her meditation, <100> a Bön-po tossed one *zho*⁴⁹ of red gold [at her]. It turned into Yar-drog Lake, one of the four famous lakes [of Tibet]. Its beginning touches the Lung-gang-chen snow-mountain, and its end touches Zay-ma Gya-ru. It takes many days to walk around the lake.

Once, looking into the lake, the great yogi Ling-je Rey-pa broke into tears and said, “Oh! Alas! Don't take any remuneration from others! Don't take any!”

“Why is that?” he was asked.

⁴⁸ *nyi-ts'e-wa / ñi.tshe.ba*

⁴⁹ 1/10th of a *sang*, a unit of currency; less than one ounce

"The mind of a Lama who took much remuneration has taken rebirth in an indeterminate hell in this lake and is experiencing many sufferings," he replied.

Being requested to show this, he wrought a miracle that dried up the lake in an instant, revealing a huge fish that spanned the length of the lake. Innumerable insects were eating it from all sides, and it was writhing in unbearable pain.

When the yogi was asked whose bad rebirth it was, he replied, "It is the rebirth of Tsang-la Ta-nag-chen. That Lama had tremendous vocal power to effect blessings. He could cure those who were possessed by spirits simply by looking at them. Because of this, he became a priest of the Ü-Tsang-Ru-Zhi provinces of Tibet. But whenever [he was asked] to help [the consciousness of] a deceased person, he just uttered [the mantram] '*Phet*' and took away many horses and other objects [as remuneration]. And there he is now."

[Similarly], <101> the yogi Tang-tong Gyal-po was once performing his yogic exercises atop a huge boulder. The stone broke in two, and he found a large frog being eaten by countless, small, clinging insects, its mouth gasping with unbearable pain. Asked what that meant, he said it was the rebirth of a priest who had performed animal sacrifices.

There are Lamas whose benefactors now entertain them by killing stout, fat sheep. The gullet, spleen, and other [internal] parts are cooked with the flesh and blood, and placed on the rump portion of the mutton. When it is offered, the Lamas pull their shawls up over their heads and eat the entrails, as if they were infants sucking at the breast. Picking up a knife, they slowly consume the outer portion of the flesh. When they have finished eating, the area around their mouths looks as if it had been lavishly oiled. Steam rises from their heads! With beards now glistening unlike before, they seem to raise their heads [with full confidence]. Since the debt they incur by eating [others] in this life will have to be paid for with their [own] bodies in the future, [they should remember] the great hardships that exist in the indeterminate hells.

Similarly, when Ngor K'en-ch'en Pal-den Chö-kyong was living in De-ge, he [once] said, "Whatever floats down the Ngül-da River today should not be allowed to pass by."

Having said this, <102> he sent many monks to wait there. Towards evening they saw a huge log floating down the river. They took it to him and said, "Other than this, there was nothing else."

"That is it," he said, and asked them to split the log. Within the split log there was a huge frog, which was being eaten by many insects. He performed purifying ceremonies and so on for it, and said that it was the rebirth of Po-gyay, a steward of De-ge.

Thus, influential officials who enjoy the income of provinces may be quite powerful just now, but they should ponder over these hells and take care.

Similarly, during the time of Lord Buddha, a butcher from a certain village took a vow not to slaughter any animals at night. He was [subsequently] reborn in an indeterminate hell. By night he found himself in a delightful, palatial building tended by four attractive girls who entertained him with food and drink and made him exceedingly happy. By day the building turned into a house of red-hot iron, and the four women changed into four ferocious dogs which devoured him.

Again, there was an adulterer who vowed to abstain from sex during the day. [When he was reborn in an indeterminate hell], he therefore experienced happiness and sorrow in the opposite way. This was observed by Dro-zhin-kyey Na-wa Je-wa-ri. <103>

Again, some five hundred monks [were seen] in a beautiful temple. At midday the sound of the beating of the *gandī*⁵⁰ was heard. As they gathered for lunch, the temple changed into a red-hot iron house; their begging bowls, cups, and so on turned into weapons; and they began to fight with each other. When the lunch hour was over, they reverted to their

⁵⁰ A hardwood beam, approximately 6'x4"x2", which is struck with a wooden stick. It is used in a monastery like a gong for gathering the monks in the monastery's assembly hall.

original states. This is explained as the karmic reaction of the debates that formerly took place during the lunch hour among the monks in the time of [the Buddha] Ö-sung.⁵¹

Such are [the stories that are told].

Thus, the eight hot hells and the eight cold hells make sixteen, and the two [sets of] indeterminate and neighboring [hells] make eighteen. They are thus called “the eighteen hell regions.” You should thoroughly comprehend their number, the life spans [of their beings], their sufferings, the causes of taking rebirth in them, and so forth. Develop compassion for the beings who have been born there, and adopt the means that will prevent you [and all others] from taking rebirth in these regions. Otherwise, if you leave what you have heard and learned at this and do not put it into practice, it will become the cause of generating [both] contempt for the Dharma and arrogance. [You who do this] will become the objects of reproach by the Noble Ones and of disapproval by the learned.

A monk who had excellent manners and a large ego once came to visit Lama Zhang Rin-po-ch'e, who asked him, “What Dharma do you know, monk?” <104>

“I have attended many religious discourses,” he replied.

“Well then, what are the eighteen hells?”

“The eight hot hells and the eight cold hells make sixteen, and the two Kar-ma-pas [who respectively wear] red and black hats make eighteen,” answered [the monk].

It is not that he counted the Kar-ma-pas along with the hells because he had no reverence for them. He simply forgot the names of the indeterminate and neighboring hells. Since both the Red Hat and Black Hat Kar-ma-pas were at the height of their fame, he seems to have [remembered their names and] replied at random. If that sort of thing happens, it is shameful evidence that not a word of Dharma has been understood, to say nothing of its having been practiced.

⁵¹ 'od.sruṇ / S. Kāśyapa Buddha

2.2 THE SECOND LOWER REGION: [PRETAS]⁵²

Considering the sufferings of the pretas, [you should know that], in general, [pretas] are of two kinds:

1. The Pretas That Dwell on Earth;
2. The Pretas That Travel in Space.

2.2.1 THE PRETAS THAT DWELL ON EARTH

The pretas that dwell on earth [are of three kinds]:

1. The Externally Obscured;
2. The Internally Obscured;
3. Those Obscured by Being Used by Others.

2.2.1.1 THE EXTERNALLY OBSCURED⁵³

For many hundreds of years, [these pretas] do not even hear the name of water. Suffering greatly from hunger and thirst, they wander constantly in search of food and drink, but cannot get a bit of it.

At times they see blue water flowing at a great distance. Even though their frail limbs cannot support their enormous bellies, they walk [towards it with great hope] until they are thoroughly exhausted, and thus they suffer. <105> On nearing it, they find that the water has evaporated, leaving only pebbles, and so they suffer all the more. Again, they see green trees nine stories tall and approach them as before. Nearing them, they find the trees withered and changed into large, dried trees. Again, they see food and drink in great quantity. As they approach it, however, they see that it is guarded by many armed people who drive them away with weapons that cause tremendous suffering. Even the moon turns hot and burns them in summer. Even the sun turns cold and freezes them in winter, torturing them all the more.

⁵² *yi-dag* / yi.dvags

⁵³ *chi-yi drib-pa-chen* / phyi'i sgrib.pa.can

Once, when he visited the region of the pretas, Dro-zhin-kyey was afflicted by the heat of the pretas' poison of avarice and became very thirsty. Standing at the door of a huge iron house was a terrible-looking, dark person with red eyes.

"Where can one find water?" [Dro-zhin-kyey] inquired.

Looking like burnt blocks of wood, many pretas gathered together and said, "Great man, highly accomplished one, do find [us] some water."

"Even I cannot find water. Why don't you search for it?"

"What are you saying?" they replied. "Although we have been in this country for twelve years, <106> we have not even heard the name of water until now."

So, this is their situation.

2.2.1.2 THE INTERNALLY OBSCURED⁵⁴

With mouths as tiny as the eye of a needle and necks as narrow as a strand of hair from a horse's tail, these [pretas try to] drink water from the great ocean. But before the water can enter their throats, their oral poison causes it to evaporate. Even if a little water does enter their throats, it cannot fill their bellies, which are as large as a whole country. If a tiny bit of food gets into their stomachs, at night it creates a fire that burns their hearts, lungs, and all their entrails, causing them enormous suffering. As they try to walk about, their limbs, as frail as blades of grass, cannot support their enormous bellies, and so they suffer.

2.2.1.3 THOSE OBSCURED BY BEING USED BY OTHERS⁵⁵

These pretas [are the victims of] other pretas who use their bodies as an abode, and who [ultimately] eat them. Besides this, the various indeterminable sufferings [they undergo] are unimaginable.

⁵⁴ *nang-gi drib-pa-chen* / naṅgi sgrib.pa.can

⁵⁵ *gö-k'ur-gi drib-pa-chen* / sgos.khur.gi sgrib.pa.can

Once, when visiting the region of the pretas, Dro-zhin-kyey Na-wa Je-wa-ri saw a celestial building in which there was a woman. She was physically well-formed, beautiful, attractive, fully ornamented with precious jewelry, and had four pretas tied to the four legs of her throne. Giving Dro-zhin-kyey some bread, she told him, "Don't give a bit of it to the pretas, even if they beg for it."

As he ate the bread, the pretas pleaded with him. <107> To one he gave a piece which, [when eaten], turned to husks. Again, to another he gave a piece which turned into an iron hammer when eaten. Similarly, the bread [he gave to the third preta] changed into its own flesh, and [that which he gave to] the fourth [changed] into pus and blood.

The woman returned and said, "Didn't I tell you not to give it to them? Is your compassion greater than mine?"

"How are they related to you?" he asked.

"This was my husband. This was my son. This was my daughter-in-law. This was my maid-servant."

"What karma brought them here?"

"It will be difficult for a man of the human world to believe," she replied. "In fact, he won't."

"When I am actually seeing it, why shouldn't I?"

"I was a Brahmin woman in my village. Items of fine food had been prepared on a certain astrologically auspicious day. [That day,] the great Arya Katyayana came for alms. I was overcome with devotion and offered him alms.

"Thinking that it would be better if my husband were [also] to offer alms with full appreciation, I asked him to offer alms to the great Bodhisattva Arya Katyayana. But he became angry, saying, 'Before the Brahmins have been fed and the relatives entertained, have you offered the first part of the food in alms? <108> Why doesn't the shaven-headed monk take husks?' When I told my son to do the same thing, he also became angry and said, 'Why shouldn't this shaven-headed monk take a red-hot iron hammer?'

"That night my relatives sent us dishes of excellent food. My daughter-in-law helped herself to the best of it and gave me what was not good. When I asked her if she had eaten the best food and given me the worst, she lied to me and said,

'I would rather eat my own flesh than eat your food.' Similarly, the food I sent to my relatives was eaten by my maid-servant. When I questioned her, she said, 'Why shouldn't I take my own pus and blood rather than steal your food?'

"I thought, 'May I be reborn in the same place [as they] to watch these beings reaping the fruit of their individual karma.' So I was born as a powerful female preta. Otherwise, since I had offered alms to the Ārya, I would have been reborn as a god in the Trāyastriṁśa Heaven.

"If you happen to visit the village where I lived, please speak to my daughter, who leads an indecent life. Tell her that you saw her parents, who asked you to inform her that the fruits of her karma will be ugly, and that she should give up her unwholesome and sinful vocation. If she does not believe that you [really spoke with me], tell her that in the house of her former father are [hidden] four iron pots filled with gold, a gold walking stick, <109> and a water-purification vessel.⁵⁶ From time to time, she should offer [portions of] that [wealth] as alms to the great Ārya Katyāyāna [and request him] to dedicate the merit by calling our names. That will make this karma lessen and exhaust it entirely."

This was what she said.

In the same way, when Guru Dze-ta-ri went to the countryside, an ugly female preta, the mother of five hundred children, said to the Guru, "My husband left for Bodhgāya twelve years ago in search of food but has not yet returned. If you go that way, please tell him that if he does not return at once, all the children will die of hunger."

"What does your husband look like? Since all pretas look alike, how will I recognize him?"

"You will never mistake him," she replied. "He has a big mouth, a dented nose, [half-]blind eyes, and he is branded with the nine marks that make a body ugly."

⁵⁶ *chi-lug* / *spyi.blugs* / A small, long-necked flask containing pure water, which is used by monks for purification after answering a call of nature.

At Bodhgāya, when a novice monk walked off after disposing of a *ch'u-tor* offering,⁵⁷ many pretas pounced on it. Among them the Guru saw her husband, to whom he delivered the message. The preta replied, "Except for a small quantity of spit which a perfect monk once expectorated, I have not found anything, despite having searched for the past twelve years. <110> Even this I obtained only after squabbling over it with many other pretas."

The Guru later related that this preta had sustained many injuries meted out to him by other pretas during that wrangling.

In the same way, wherever [beings] are born in this region of the pretas, they are tortured principally by hunger and thirst, [as well as] by various other kinds of misery. Mentally visualize the way in which they suffer. Appreciate how miserable you are if you merely miss your breakfast! What would you do if you were born in a place where even the mere name of water was not heard for many years? The principal causes of taking rebirth in this region are avarice and miserliness. Think thus, "Since I also have committed such sins innumerable times, I must now make up my mind to act in such a way that I may never take rebirth in that kind of region." Contemplate on this from the core of your heart, in accord with the three perfect principles.

2.2.2 [THE PRETAS THAT TRAVEL IN SPACE]

The sky-travelers are the demonic spirits called *tsen*, *gyal-po*, *shi-dre*, *jung-po*, *ma-mo*, *teu-rang*, and so forth. These spirits live continually in fear, terror, and illusion. They always have evil thoughts and endeavor to bring harm to others. Immediately upon their death, many of them drop to the bottom of the lower regions. In particular, at the end of each week, they suffer the same pain they experienced earlier when they died from illness, weapons, strangulation, and so on, whatever the cause. <111>

⁵⁷ *tor-ch'u-dang tor-zen* / gtor.chu.dan gtor.zan / an offering consisting of water and balls of dough, made to the thirsty and hungry pretas

These pretas try to transfer their sufferings to others. No matter where they go, they cause harm to others without finding any relief for themselves. Even when they happily approach their former friends and relatives, they bring them disease, insanity, and many other hateful miseries. Powerful tantric [practitioners] perform ceremonies to bury them, burn them, and chase them away. When they are buried under the earth, they remain buried for aeons. They are burned in sacrificial fire ceremonies. When they are exorcised by being hit with charmed mustard seeds and granules of stone, their heads crack into a hundred pieces and their bodies into a thousand. They constantly suffer from such miseries. They also experience the reversed feelings typical of all pretas; e.g., they perceive the sun to be cold in the winter and the moon to be hot in the summer. Some pretas [also] exist in the forms of birds, dogs, and the like that possess very ugly bodies.

[Thus], the kinds of suffering that pretas must endure are unimaginable. Take their sufferings upon yourself, and contemplate on [developing] loving-kindness, compassion, and the like for the beings born in this [region], in the full sense of the three perfect principles.

2.3 THE THIRD LOWER REGION: ANIMALS⁵⁸

[Animals] are of two kinds:

1. [The Animals] That Live in Water;
2. [The Animals] Scattered [Elsewhere].

2.3.1 [THE ANIMALS] THAT LIVE IN WATER

In the great oceans, <112> fish, crocodiles, mollusks, frogs, insects, and so on are [as numerous] as the dregs of wheat that are discarded after beer has been pressed. [In size, they range from] the largest snakes, crocodiles, and so on, which

⁵⁸ *dü-dro / dud.'gro*

can wind around Mount Sumeru many times, [to beings] as small as an atom or the tip of a needle.

The larger ones devour the smaller ones whole, and the smaller ones feed on the larger ones by gnawing through their bodies. Many smaller ones make nests in the body of a larger one and then feed on it. Many of them are born in areas between the continents, where sunlight cannot penetrate [the lower depths of the water]. Thus they suffer, for they cannot even observe the extension and contraction of their primary and secondary limbs.

Stupid, ignorant, and incapable of discriminating between what is to be accepted [as virtue] and rejected [as vice], these animals are born in a state where suffering is endless.

2.3.2 [THE ANIMALS SCATTERED ELSEWHERE]

The [animals] found in the human and divine realms are also stupid and foolish. They always suffer miserably from servitude and exploitation.

Serpent-spirits suffer from the predatory actions of the garuda.⁵⁹ They receive showers of hot sand and are foolish, ignorant, malicious, and venomous. Hence they are distressed.

In particular, the undomesticated, wild animals found in the human realm live only in danger and fear. While taking even a morsel of food, they eat anxiously. They devour each other, and there are many [beings that seek] to kill them—human hunters, predators, and so forth. For example, falcons prey on birds, and birds on insects. <113> [Animals] continually accumulate only the bad karma of killing each other.

Hunters and others are proficient in the task of killing [animals] in a painful way, using nets, snares, traps, guns, and many other harmful means to end the [animals'] lives instantaneously. Some animals are killed for the sake of things that grow on their bodies, such as horns, fur, and skin: oysters are killed for pearls; elephants are killed for tusks, bones, and so

⁵⁹ a mythical bird of enormous size

on; tigers, leopards, otters, and foxes are killed for fur; musk deer are killed for musk; wild asses, wild yaks, and so on are killed for flesh and blood. It is exceedingly miserable for them to be born in bodies that simply provide the cause of their death.

Those animals that are dependent on human beings are so foolish and stupid that even when butchers approach them with knives in order to kill them, the [animals] simply look at them with innocent eyes, and do not even have the sense to run away. Similarly, they are milked, loaded with burdens, castrated, pierced through the nose, used for ploughing, and subjected to many other kinds of servitude and exploitation.

In fact, not a single animal escapes experiencing all of these tortures. Although the backs of pack horses may be entirely covered with sores, they are still used for carrying loads and for riding. <114> When they are unable to walk [any further], they are beaten with whips and stones. That they might have difficulty or pain is not even considered. Cattle and sheep are exploited until they are on the verge of death due to old age. When they grow old, they are either killed by their owners or sold to butchers. Thus, almost all of them are slaughtered, and hardly any of them die a natural death.

[The extent to which animals] experience these kinds of suffering is inconceivable. Therefore, when you see these suffering beings, imagine that you are they, and consider carefully the magnitude of their suffering. In general, contemplate on having strong compassion for those born in the animal region, and, in particular, if you have dependent domestic animals, treat them with love and affection. There are no [animals], including tiny beings like insects and flies, that fail to feel pleasure and pain, and all have played the role of your parent. Hence, practice the development of loving kindness and compassion towards all of them, in the full knowledge of the three perfect principles.

Thus, wherever [beings] are born in the three lower regions, they suffer many different kinds of severe torture for long periods of time. Since such beings are foolish and igno-

rant, they have no notion of Dharma, and so they do nothing but earn further causes for visiting the lower regions again. <115> If you are born in these areas, it will be difficult to attain liberation in the future.

You have done many things in this life and in previous lives that will certainly cause you to be reborn in the lower regions. Therefore, from the core of your heart, try to confess your past sins with regret, and vow not to repeat them. Contemplate with strong compassion on the living beings born there. Dedicate all the virtuous merit you have earned in the three times to all the sentient beings born in the lower regions. Offer prayers for them, so that they can free themselves from those unwholesome realms, and develop your motivation by thinking, "I am in contact with Mahayana Buddhism in this life. Therefore, I have the opportunity to work for others as well as for myself. I should accept hardship and practice the Dharma diligently in order to deliver the beings in the lower regions to the transcendental regions of purity."

Think of the Guru and the Three Jewels, and invoke their blessings to enable you to do so. Offer prayers to the Deva and the Guru for their friendly assistance, and dedicate the merits you earn thereby to the cause of [liberating all] sentient beings, in the full sense of the three perfect principles.

You may tend to think that, since there is nothing but suffering when one is born in the three lower regions, the three upper regions must be [filled with] comfort and happiness; <116> however, there is no happiness even in the upper regions.

2.4 [THE FIRST UPPER REGION: HUMAN BEINGS]

The sufferings of human beings are:

1. The Three Great Basic Miseries;
2. The Four Great Rivers of Misery: Birth, Old Age, Sickness, and Death;
3. The Misery Caused by the Possibility of Meeting Aggravating Enemies;

4. The Misery Caused by the Possibility of Separation from Loved Ones;
5. The Misery Caused by Not Achieving What Is Desired;
6. The Misery Caused by Encountering Undesired Calamities.⁶⁰

2.4.1 THE THREE GREAT BASIC MISERIES

The three great basic miseries are:

1. The Misery of Change;
2. The Misery That Follows Misery;
3. The Misery That Gathers Misery.

2.4.1.1 THE MISERY OF CHANGE⁶¹

The misery of change is the first of the three [great] basic miseries. Momentary happiness may suddenly change into misery. While enjoying the happiness of eating nourishing food, an acute pain may develop due to a parasitic worm in your stomach, and suddenly cause misery. While enjoying happiness, enemies may take your cattle, your house may catch on fire, you may suddenly fall ill or be seriously afflicted by malevolent forces, or you may hear extremely bad news. All of these instantly cause misery.

In the regions of this *samsāra*, none of what seems to be pleasure, happiness, or fame contains even an iota of permanence or reliability. You should feel deep sorrow for all those who cannot ultimately transcend misery. <117>

2.4.1.2 THE MISERY THAT FOLLOWS MISERY⁶²

This is the additional misery which develops before the first misery has come to an end. For example, consider a

⁶⁰ N.B. The last two subsection headings have been interchanged so that they correspond to the order in which the subsections appear in the text.

⁶¹ *gyur-way dug-negal* / 'gyur.ḥa'i sdug.bsñal

⁶² *dug-nagal-gyi dug-nagal* / sdug.bsñal.gyi sdug.bsñal

leper who suffers from boils that subsequently break open, the death of your father followed by that of your mother, the death of your loved one while you are being chased by your enemies, or other such [circumstances]. In whatever part of samsara you may be born, your entire life will be spent suffering misery after misery, with hardly a moment free for happiness.

2.4.1.3 THE MISERY THAT GATHERS MISERY⁶³

Although it does not appear as such, whatever we greedily regard as present pleasure is, in fact, a cause for future misery. The food we eat; the clothes we wear; our houses, wealth, and ornaments; the feasts we offer—all are gathering the causes of misery. All of our movements and engagements are nothing but sinful, and their results will be nothing but misery.

For example, take Tibetan tea and barley meal. Tea is a plant grown in China. Countless insects are killed when the tea seeds are planted and when the leaves are cut. Up to the province of Dar-tse-do [in China], men are used as the means of transport, with each man carrying a load of sixty bricks of tea. Since they carry it on their backs with the help of a rope around their heads, the skin on their foreheads gradually wears through. <118> Even when white bone is visible, they must continue to carry their loads. From Dar-tse-do onward, *dzo*,⁶⁴ yaks, mules, and so on are used as the means of transport. During the journey, all of them develop sores on their backs and sides, their hair falls out, and they undergo unimaginable torture due to their state of servitude and exploitation. When the tea is sold, the traders pay no heed to oaths or a sense of honesty. The trade is transacted in a spirit of deception and argument, and they barter for [the tea] mostly with sheep's wool, lambskin, and the like, [which are also causes of misery].

⁶³ *du-je-kyi dug-ngal* / 'du.byed.kyi sdug.bsñal

⁶⁴ the offspring of a yak and a cow

[The story of sheep's wool is as follows.] In the summer, many insects, such as lice, and those called *zho-kyey*, breed in such great number that their population [per sheep] becomes no less than the number of [hairs of the sheep's wool]. When the wool is sheared, most of these insects are killed by having their heads chopped off, their waists cut, or their entrails ripped out. Those left alive are cruelly suffocated to death by being rolled up in the wool.

It is the same with lambskin. Soon after [the lambs] are born, when they have fully-developed sense organs, can feel pleasure and pain, and their bodies have just started to grow—in short, when they are just enjoying the first pleasures of their life—they are immediately killed. Dumb though animals are, they nonetheless feel reluctant to die and rejoice in living. They must suffer from the experience of having their vital organs cut. It is evident that the ewes whose lambs are killed suffer sorrow just as a [human] mother suffers when her only child dies. Thus, when you think of that kind of substance, [i.e., tea], even a swallow <119> provides a cause for descending to the lower regions.

It is the same with barley meal. First, when the field is ploughed, all the worms beneath the earth are brought to the surface, and all the worms on the surface are buried under the earth. The crows and birds follow wherever the pair of oxen go, their never-still beaks busily plucking up the worms. Similarly, when the field is irrigated, all the aquatic insects are exposed on dry land, and all [the insects] that live on dry land are killed by the water. In the same way, countless insects are killed when the seed is sown, when the crop is harvested, and when the grain is threshed. When these circumstances are reviewed, it is clear that we are simply eating a powder of insects and flies.

Similarly, the three white [substances]⁶⁵ along with the three sweet [substances]⁶⁶ are [usually] considered to be pure and without sin. [However], most of the *to-le*,⁶⁷ young calves,

⁶⁵ butter, milk, and yogurt

⁶⁶ honey, molasses, and sugar

⁶⁷ the calves of a female *dzo*

and lambs [whose mothers are being milked in order to make dairy products] are killed. As for those that are not killed, a string is tied around their necks as soon as they are born, denying them the chance to suck a mouthful of their beloved mothers' sweet milk. While they live, they are [kept within a pen], tied by the leg with a long rope, and when they are let out, they are linked to each other, again with a rope, [in order to prevent them from drinking their mothers' milk].

They are robbed of their mouthful of milk, which is their food and drink, and we use it as our own essential drink. The mothers are robbed of the essence of their body and the children of the strength of their life, thus making it difficult for them to die and equally difficult to live. <120> The old *dri*⁶⁸ becomes so weak in the spring that she can hardly regain her legs after sitting down to sleep. Most of the sheep become famished and die. Those who survive become emaciated, frail, weak, and move in a fumbling manner, with bodies that resemble a *yog-tö*,⁶⁹ as if they were about to die.

Thus, if you think about wealth and property, the food you eat, the clothes you wear—whatever you regard as the source of all your present happiness—you will find that all of it has been acquired through wrongdoing. The outcome of all this wrongdoing is the boundless misery that you will ultimately have to suffer in the lower regions. Thus, all that you presently perceive as happiness is the misery that gathers misery.

2.4.2 [THE FOUR GREAT RIVERS OF MISERY]

[The four great rivers of misery are:]

1. [The Misery of] Birth;
2. [The Misery of] Old Age;
3. [The Misery of] Sickness;
4. [The Misery of] Death.

⁶⁸ a female yak

⁶⁹ a thin stick wrapped with cloth at one end, used as a stirrer for roasting barley

2.4.2.1 THE MISERY OF BIRTH

The human beings of this world are born from the womb;⁷⁰ therefore, your *dri-za*⁷¹ consciousness, [one of the five] skandhas, enters into the center of your parents' semen and blood. As you undergo the different stages of gestation—oval, oblong, lumpish, solidifying, circular,⁷² and so forth—you experience suffering. At the stage when all your limbs, members, and sense organs are fully developed, you find the interior of your mother's womb confining and evil-smelling; in darkness, you experience suffering as though you were being thrown into prison. <121> When your mother eats hot food, you suffer as though you were being burnt in fire. When she eats something cold, you suffer as though you were being thrown into cold water. When she sleeps, you suffer as though you were being crushed by a mountain. When she has eaten fully, you suffer as though you were being pressed between [two] rocks. When she is hungry, you suffer as though you were being dropped from a precipice. When she walks, sits down, or moves about, you suffer as though you were being carried away by the wind. Such are [the sufferings you experience in the womb].

When the months [of gestation] are complete and the time of birth arrives, the karmic wind of *samsāra*⁷³ turns you head over heels and forces you through the birth canal. You suffer as though a man of great strength had seized you by the legs and slammed you against a wall. When you are passing through the pelvic girdle, you suffer as though you were being drawn through the hole of an iron slab.⁷⁴ You may even die if the birth canal is too narrow, or both mother and child may

⁷⁰ the four types of birth are birth from a womb, birth from an egg, birth from warmth and moisture, and miraculous birth

⁷¹ S. gandharva / a non-corporeal being that feeds on odors / An analogy is being made between a *dri-za* and the consciousness skandha, both of which are devoid of a physical body.

⁷² *mer-mer* / *mer.mer* // *nur-nur* / *nur.nur* // *tar-tar* / *ltar.ltar* // *t'rang-gyur* / *mkhrañ.gyur* // *gor-mo* / *gor.mo*

⁷³ *si-pa lay-kyi lung* / *srid.pa las.kyi rluñ*

⁷⁴ such an iron slab is used for making leather thongs

die together. Even if both of you do not die, you will experience suffering equivalent to death.

The great O-gyen Rin-po-ch'e said:

**Both mother and child take half a step towards the land
of the dead.**

**Except for the mother's jaw, all the other joints of her
body will open.**

Even after the delivery, when you fall onto the mattress, [you suffer as though you were] being dropped into a thorny ditch. When the membranes are removed from your back, [you suffer as though you were] being skinned alive. <122> When your excrement is cleansed, [you suffer as though you were] being lashed with a thorny whip. When your mother takes you in her lap, [you suffer as though you were] a bird being carried away by a hawk. When your head is anointed with butter, [you suffer as though you were] being tied up and thrown in a ditch. Thus, you experience all these kinds of misery. Later, when you are kept upright, you are enveloped in a slush of filth. Whether you are hungry, thirsty, or sick, whatever sufferings you may have, you can do nothing but cry.

Once you have been born and have entered the prime of youth, you feel as if you are physically growing. But, in fact, your life is growing shorter day by day, as you come nearer and nearer to death. You then engage yourself in worldly business that has no completion or end, like ripples of water that follow one after the other. Since all such activities are connected with sin, they offer the cause for visiting the lower regions, and hence they bring nothing but extreme misery.

2.4.2.2 THE MISERY OF OLD AGE

While thus engaged in essenceless and endless worldly activities, unaware that your life is being exhausted, you encounter the miseries of old age. All your physical strength gradually deteriorates, and you cannot digest the delicious food that you eat. The organ of sight deteriorates; hence, you cannot see distant or small objects. The organ of hearing

deteriorates; hence, you cannot hear sounds clearly. <123> The organ of taste deteriorates; hence, you cannot sense the taste of food, and your speech becomes incoherent. The organ of memory deteriorates; hence, the power to remember becomes dull, and forgetfulness and the feeling of drowning in unconsciousness increase. Your teeth fall out; hence, you cannot chew your food, and your speech becomes indistinct. You lose the power of bodily warmth; hence, if your clothes are thin, you feel cold. You lose the power to lift; hence, you cannot bear any weight. Although fond of sensual stimulants, you are powerless to enjoy them. The nerves and psychic air of the body deteriorate; hence, you become oversensitive emotionally, and your capacity for patience diminishes. Since people look down on you with scorn, you grow dejected and miserable. Since the five elements of the body become disturbed, you suffer from various diseases and ailments. You walk, sit, and move about haltingly and with difficulty.

Je-tsün Mi-la said:

**One, when the style of rising resembles pulling a peg
[from the ground];**

**Two, when the style of walking resembles crouching to
catch a bird;**

**Three, when the style of sitting down resembles the
falling of stone and earth—when these three
conditions become obvious, at that time,**

**Grandmother, the deterioration of your transitory body
makes you sad.**

**One, when externally there are wrinkles of gathered
skin;**

**Two, when internally there are protuberances caused by
decaying flesh and blood;**

**Three, when medially a dumb, idiotic, deaf, blind,
confused and tottering state [appears]—when these
three conditions become obvious, at that time,**

**Grandmother, you show ugliness with your wrathful
wrinkles.**

One, when clothes become heavy and tattered; <124>
Two, when food and drink become cold and mashed;
Three, when the bed is made with four pillows for
support—when these three conditions become
obvious, at that time,
Grandmother, you behave as if realized, for men and
dogs walk over you [without your protesting].

As he stated, when you are unable to rise in a natural way and must place your hands on the earth in order to get up, [rising] is like pulling the peg [of a tent] from hardened ground. Since your back is bent [with age], when you walk, you cannot lift your head. You cannot walk rapidly, but [must] move stealthily as do children trying to catch birds. Because you have pains in all the joints of your legs and hands, you cannot sit down slowly when you take your seat. Instead, when you sit down, you collapse the way [a pile of] earth and stones would collapse.

Your flesh wears out, so the outer layer of your skin puckers up, and your entire face and body become covered with wrinkles. Your inner flesh and blood decay; hence, all your joints become visible. Your jawbone and the balls and sockets of your joints protrude. Mental awareness diminishes, so you become dumb, idiotic, deaf, and blind. With a clouded mind, you sit in a semi-conscious state.

Since your physical strength is gone, and your aspiration for beauty has waned, your clothes become heavy and tattered. You consume cold, dirty, leftover food and drink, without any taste on your tongue. Your body becomes heavy, and you find no comfort no matter what you do. <125> You must depend on support from four sides and can never rise from your bed. At that time, since your external, transitory body has deteriorated, inwardly you feel dejected and very miserable. The beauty and glamour of your face have faded away. The wrinkles of your skin are so numerous, you display a wrathful, ugly mask of furrows. Everybody treats you disrespectfully. You cannot rise [in protest], even when others walk over your head: you must remain as though you had

transcended the concept of purity and impurity, like a realized saint.

Being unable to bear the miseries of old age, you yearn for death; however, at the same time, you are very much terrified by the nearness of death. Thus, you must endure the miseries of old age in much the same way that the beings in the lower regions must endure their sufferings.

2.4.2.3 THE MISERY OF SICKNESS

The body is an assemblage of four elements.⁷⁵ When their balance is disturbed, various ailments like weakness, biliousness, and acidity⁷⁶ develop, and a sense of misery arises. You may be a giant of a man in the prime of youth, enjoying a good physique, sound organs of sense, strength, and glamour. Yet as soon as you fall ill, like a bird hit by a stone, you lose your strength and fall onto your bed. Even to move your body becomes difficult. When you are asked from what you are suffering, you do not even have the strength to give an immediate reply. [When you do], <126> you speak from the depths of your bowels, as though the sounds will not emerge. On whichever side you are placed, right or left, front or back, you find no occasion to feel comfortable. You lose your appetite for food and drink, and you cannot sleep at night. You find the day longer during the daytime and the night longer at nighttime. The bitter, hot, and sour tastes of medicines, the puncturing of veins, the placing of fire on the body, and other such [medical treatments]—you must endure all these sufferings, no matter how much you [wish to] recoil from them.

Because of the illness, you also think that death may come suddenly, and you [experience] fear and terror. Because of the influence of inflicting, interfering, and instigating evil spirits, you cannot control your thinking. Usually preoccupied with illusory thoughts, your mind [now] becomes wholly

⁷⁵ earth, wind, fire, and water

⁷⁶ *lung* / rluñ // *t'ri-pa* / mkhris.pa // *bay-ken* / bad.kan

involved in illusory mental conceptions; hence, among other things, you may even commit, or attempt to commit, suicide.

Those who have leprosy, paralysis, and other such [diseases], although alive, are almost dead. Dropped from human society, they [can only] observe their own [deplorable] condition.

In general, patients cannot look after themselves. Their illness makes them angry, and they dislike the things done [for them] by others. Their temper becomes worse than before. If you are sick for a long time, the nurses become vexed and disobedient. Always afflicted with pain, you suffer.

2.4.2.4 THE MISERY OF DEATH

Your body sinks into the bed, and you cannot rise. Although you see food and drink, you dislike them. Tyran-nized by perceptions of death, you feel unhappy. Human vanity and arrogance <127> give way. Illusory visions greet you. A great transference is about to take place. Even the relatives and friends who surround you cannot hold you back. You must suffer the pain of death alone. You may possess a great deal of wealth, but you have no power to take it [with you]. You cannot bear to leave it behind, but it cannot possibly follow you. As you remember your past sins, you feel regret. On comprehending the sufferings of the lower regions, you become terribly frightened. Because death has come suddenly, you are shocked and full of despair. As the living thoughts subside, your conscience becomes chilled.

A sinful man dies reproachfully, beating his chest with his fists and covering it with marks from his nails. He does this because he remembers his past sinful karma and is frightened by the tortures of the lower regions. He deeply regrets that, when he had the opportunity in the past, he did not practice the Dharma, which could have helped him at the hour of death. He suffers a shooting pain in his heart, claws his breast with his hands, covering his chest with marks from his nails, and dies.

It is said:

**When one sees a sinner dying,
[It works like] a Guru showing the cause and effect of
karma.**

Such a person is greeted by visions of the lower regions even before his death. His only conceptions are of terror and fright. Everything that he perceives is misery. The physical elements of his body withdraw. His breathing becomes strained. <128> The limbs of his body move at random. His senses suffer from illusion. As his eyes roll up and the whites of the eyes appear, he crosses into the next world. The attendants of Yama receive him. The visions of the *bar-do* dawn. At that point he has neither protector nor defender.

There is no certainty that the very moment when you go naked and empty-handed may not confront you this very day. If anything can help you at that moment, it is the noble Dharma. Nothing else can offer protection.

It is said:

**While in your mother's womb, develop a feeling for the
Dharma.**

As soon as you are born, think of the Dharma of death.

Because death comes suddenly to everyone, young or old, from the time you are born, you should practice the Dharma that will be helpful at the time of death. Previously, you did not think of death, and so you engaged in subduing enemies, looking after relatives, caring for the place in which you lived, and gathering material wealth. You spent your time entirely under the influence of greed, hatred, and stupidity. You should now think that it was really all a colossal waste of time.

2.4.3 THE MISERY CAUSED BY THE POSSIBILITY OF MEETING AGGRAVATING ENEMIES

Although you are busy being a guard during the day, a watchman at night, and a breadwinner always, this cannot really benefit you. All your wealth and property will eventually be shared with enemies, for robbers, thieves, wild dogs, wolves, and other wild animals may suddenly come and deprive you of it. <129> In general, no matter how much wealth you may have, you must suffer [a corresponding] amount of misery to acquire, protect, and increase it.

Nāgārjuna said:

**Stricken by acquisition, protection, and multiplication,
Be it known that wealth is an endless source of disaster.**

Also, Je-tsün Mi-la said:

**At first, wealth makes one happy and others envious;
But the desire for it is insatiable, however much one
owns.**

**In the middle, it ties one with knots of avarice;
One cannot afford to spend it on meritorious projects.
Being the beckoner of enemies and ghosts,
Whatever one earns will be enjoyed by others.**

**Ultimately, it is a devil in one's life;
The custodian of his enemy's wealth has a worried
mind.**

**I abandon the deceptive stone of the world;
I do not like the devil's deception.**

As he has said, the more wealth you have, the greater the worry you suffer. For example, suppose you have a horse. You must concern yourself [with the possibility] that it may be taken away by an enemy, stolen by a thief, or that grass and fodder may be in short supply. Misgivings like these create worries as large as the horse itself. Similarly, if you have a sheep, you will have misery as large as the sheep. Even if you have only a piece of brick tea, you will certainly have

misery of that size as well. [It is said], “Have no wealth and you are free of foes.”

If you possess no wealth, as expressed in this saying, you will be both free from enemies and happy. <130> As recorded in the biographies of the Buddhas of the past, attachment to wealth and property should be severed at the root. Taking what is available, as do the birds, contemplate on the need to practice only the noble Dharma.

2.4.4 THE MISERY CAUSED BY THE POSSIBILITY OF SEPARATION FROM LOVED ONES

All the sentient beings of samsāra love their own circle of associates and hate the opposite circle. You are attached to relatives, followers, subjects, lovers, and friends. For their sake, you suffer many miseries. However, associates, relatives, and friends are impermanent and subject to separation. In general, when they die, leave for other places, suffer at the hands of enemies, or come to other harm, the misery you suffer on their account is greater than if you had to face the situation yourself.

Parents have special love and affection for their children. They always suffer the anxiety of thinking that their children are cold, hungry, thirsty, sick, or are going to die. They love them so much that they prefer their own death to that of their children. Similarly, beings also suffer because they are afraid they will themselves be separated from their relatives and loved ones.

Also, if you examine them closely, relatives are not necessarily beneficial. Although parents claim to have affection for their children, their affection takes a wrong turn and eventually causes <131> harm to the children. Parents provide their children with wealth and property, and find them their life partners, binding them with the rope of samsāra. They teach them how to commit many demeritorious deeds—how to subdue enemies, how to defend relatives, how to increase their wealth, and so forth—making it impossible for

them to get free from the depths of the three lower regions. Nothing can be more harmful than this.

As for the children themselves, first they take the physical essence [of their mothers' milk], then they take the food from [their parents'] mouths, and finally they take the wealth from their parents' hands. You may show them affection, but you will be rebuffed. Even if you give them, without attachment, all the wealth you have earned throughout your life by undergoing suffering, misery, and enduring hostile words, they will not be grateful. If you give your son the gift of a silver ingot as large as a teapot, he will not feel the amount of happiness a common person feels over the gift of a handful of tea leaves. He will only think, "Sure it's mine, it's my father's wealth." Also, sons and daughters vie for their own family's wealth. You receive no gratitude for giving them wealth. If you give them wealth, they will demand more. They will even take a beautiful glass bead counter from your rosary by begging for it. If things turn out well, a daughter brings glory to others and no benefit to her own family. If things go wrong, she flops at the door of her parents or cousins and creates misery. <132>

All your other relatives look on you as a god when you are wealthy, happy, and have everything. They help you as much as they can. Even if you do not want anything, they offer you food and wealth. But if your fortune diminishes, even though you have not done them wrong in the least, they will look on you as an enemy. They will harm you [in return] for the help you gave them. Thus, in sons, daughters, and other relatives there is not the slightest essential value.

Je-tsün Mi-la said:

**In the beginning, a son is a handsome, heavenly child;
The affectionate mind has no way to restrain itself.
In the middle, he is a pressing creditor,
Insatiable even if one gives him all,
Bringing someone else's daughter in,
Driving his gracious parents out,
Not even answering his father's calls,
Not responding even if his mother calls.**

**In the end, he is an unaffectionate neighbor;
 Disaster comes from having a deceitful neighbor.
 The enemy born of oneself breaks one's heart.
 I abandon the delaying rope of samsāra:
 For worldly sons and nephews I have no desire.**

And also:

**A daughter at first is a smiling celestial child,
 A powerful female who takes whatever wealth one has.
 In the middle, she is the unrepayable karmic creditor,
 Taking from her father by begging,
 Stealing from her mother unnoticed,
 Unappreciative of whatever she is given,
 Creating mental disturbance for her kind parents.
 In the end, she is a red-faced ogress. <133>
 At best, she promotes others' glory;
 At worst, she gathers one's misfortune.
 The disastrous ogress breaks one's heart.
 I abandon this never-ending misery:
 A daughter, the cause of disaster, I don't desire.**

And also:

**At first, meeting relatives brings happiness, and seeing
 them brings smiles.
 The air is filled with, "Here, come this way, be seated!"
 Later, they [reciprocate by exchanging] meat and wine:
 If you give them one, they will return one.
 Lastly, they become a contesting ground for greed and
 hatred.
 Miserable friends, the root of contention, break one's
 heart.
 I renounce the friend who shares food in happy days:
 For worldly kin I have no desire.**

It is just as he has said.

2.4.5 THE MISERY CAUSED BY NOT ACHIEVING WHAT IS DESIRED

In samsāra, everyone wants their own comfort and happiness, yet no one gets what they desire. Some build houses hoping for pleasure, but are killed when the building collapses. Some eat with the hope of eliminating hunger, but the food causes a life-endangering illness. Some go to the battlefield with the hope of victory, but instead are instantly killed. Some journey on business stirred by the hope of gain, yet they are plundered by enemies and find themselves in poverty.

<134>

No matter what efforts you make to gain comfort, happiness, and prosperity in this life, unless you have favorable karma, it will be impossible for you to find even enough food to satisfy your immediate hunger. Your efforts will only bring suffering to you and to others. You will achieve nothing but the certainty of creating conditions that make escaping from the lower regions impossible. Therefore, to acquire a speck of merit is better than to put forth enormous mundane effort.

What will you accomplish with never-ending worldly activities? However much effort you have spent in this sort of work throughout the beginningless time of samsāra, the result you have achieved [thus far] is nothing but suffering. If you had put the worldly effort you previously made into practicing the noble Dharma, even if you had not been able to attain Buddhahood, by now you certainly would have achieved the power to release yourself forever from suffering the miseries of the lower regions. At this time, when you know the distinction between what should be followed and what should be avoided, instead of hoping for unattainable worldly goals, you should contemplate on following the real, noble Dharma, the goal of which is attainable.

2.4.6 THE MISERY CAUSED BY ENCOUNTERING UNWANTED CALAMITIES

No single being in this world wants to suffer all the different kinds of misery described above. Yet everyone, no matter

how much they may dislike them, must suffer nothing but these. Because of their past karma, royal subjects, serfs, and the retinue of the wealthy have not a moment of independence. <135> Against their wishes, they are dominated by their masters. If they are tortured enormously for a trifling mistake, they have no recourse. Even if they are led to the gallows, they cannot help going along, as they are powerless to run away. One always meets with things one does not want.

The great Kün-k'yen [Long-ch'en-pa] said:

**Eternally unseparable association with [your] mate and relatives is desired,
But separation is inherent.**

**Eternally unseparable use of [your] excellent abode and bed is desired,
But departure is inherent.**

**Eternally unseparable enjoyment of comfort, happiness, and wealth is desired,
But separation is inherent.**

**Eternally unseparable [life for your] well-endowed human body is desired,
But death is inherent.**

**Eternally unseparable hearing of the Dharma from [your] noble Guru is desired,
But separation is inherent.**

**Eternally unseparable association with [your] best friends is desired,
But separation is inherent.**

**From today onward be armed with diligence, for the time has come to depart
For the Land of Great Bliss.**

**Friends who feel regret [for samsāra] from the core of their hearts are thus reminded,
By this beggar who has no Dharma.**

Therefore, if you have previously earned merit, which is the cause for having wealth, possessions, pleasure, happiness, fame, and so on, <136> even if you do not desire [such results], they will come automatically. If you do not have [such merit], no amount of effort and search will fulfill your desire; you will only encounter things you dislike. Therefore, if you do not practice the completely pure Dharma by relying on the inexhaustible wealth of contentment, but embrace the Dharma and then engage in acquiring worldly achievements of this life, you will suffer and be viewed with disfavor by the Noble Ones.

Je-tsün Mi-la said:

In general, the Buddha, supreme among men,
Taught the Dharma in order to destroy the eight
worldly dharmas.
But [consider] those who currently proclaim themselves
learned—
Haven't their eight [worldly] dharmas grown bigger?

What the Buddha [said about] observing morality
Was said so that one would renounce worldly activities.
But [consider] present-day monks who observe the
moral laws—
Haven't their samsaric affairs increased?

The behavior of the ancient sages
Was intended to sever the bond with relatives.
But [consider] the behavior of present-day sages—
Isn't it an attempt to strengthen the bond?

In short, without remembering death,
Whatever you practice of the noble Dharma will be of
no use.

In general, human beings born in all the worlds having four continents—and in particular, those born in [our] world during this degenerate aeon—always suffer. They do not have even a hair's breadth of [real] happiness to enjoy. <137>

In addition, you can see progressive decay in everything—in time, in aeons, in the Buddhist faith, in the happiness and comfort of living beings—with the passing of the years and months, the nights and days, and the mornings and evenings. Develop remorse by contemplating this. This world operates on karma. Hence, noble and ignoble, happy and unhappy, good and bad, high and low, Dharma and non-Dharma—all these are uncertain. Having actually seen their [ephemeral] nature, you should discern which activities you should adopt and which you should abandon.

The Guru Kün-k'yen [Long-ch'en-pa] said:

At times, watch the friendly causes that agree with your concepts;

When you know your own concepts, friendly experiences will dawn.

At times, watch the concepts that are unfriendly and harmful;

This teaches a great technique for withdrawing attachment to illusion.

**At times, watch your friends, and the Gurus of others;
This is an incentive to meditate, for you know the good from the bad.**

At times, watch the phenomenal display of the four elements in the sky;

You will know how industry and endeavor disintegrate in the Mind-Itself.

**At times, watch your country, home, and property;
You will know them as hallucinatory, and you will dislike attachment to illusory ideas.**

**At times, watch others who have wealth and property;
You will know them as [objects of] compassion, which will make you give up desire for samsāra.**

**In short, on knowing the nature of all the phenomenal things,
Belief in their true existence dissolves.**

You should practice <138> in accord with what he has said.

2.5 THE SECOND UPPER REGION: DEMI-GODS

Consider the miseries of the demi-gods⁷⁷ in the second upper region. In general, they have wealth and prosperity comparable to that of the gods. Because they were formerly habituated to demeritorious deeds of jealousy and fighting, the force of karma has flung them into this region. The moment they assume the demi-god form, their sense of jealousy grows strong [again]. Even within their own realm, there is fighting between countries and communities. Since there is no unity, all their time is spent in arguing and in fighting among themselves.

As the demi-gods look [up] towards the gods, they see them fully accomplished in valor, wealth, and prosperity, and getting whatever they desire from the Wish-Fulfilling Tree.⁷⁸ When the demi-gods see that the tree is rooted in their own country, jealousy grows in them. Girding themselves with armor and taking up their weapons, they go to fight with the gods.

Then the gods go to their armory, the Thicket of Roughness, and obtain their arms. On the thirty-two [secondary] heads of Rab-ten, the divine elephant, ride thirty-two of Indra's ministers.⁷⁹ Indra, the king of the gods, rides the central head. Surrounded by an unimaginable number of divine warriors, they proceed with war cries and unbearable splendor. <139>

As the battle starts, the gods hurl showers of vajras, wheels, short lances, and giant arrows. With their miraculous power, the gods move huge mountains onto their laps and

⁷⁷ *lha-min* / lha.min

⁷⁸ *pag-sam-shing* / dpag.bsam.shin

⁷⁹ *nye-wang* / ñe.dban

fling them [at the demi-gods]. Because of the force of past karma, the gods are seven times larger than the demi-gods. The gods do not die until their heads are severed, because with the help of ambrosia they can recover from any wound they receive on their bodies. Like human beings, the demi-gods die when any vital point is hit; for the most part, they lose the battles. Kün-kyong, the mad elephant of the gods, is let loose with a wheel of swords tied to its trunk, and many hundreds of thousands of demi-gods are killed. The dead bodies roll down the side of Mount Sumeru and fall into the great cosmic ocean,⁸⁰ turning the water red with blood.

Thus, the [demi-gods] are constantly engaged in fighting and arguing. That even the region of the demi-gods is not free from misery should be contemplated from the core of your heart.

2.6 THE THIRD UPPER REGION: GODS

During their lifetime the gods indulge only in the pursuit of happiness, pleasure, and prosperity; they have no desire to practice the Dharma. Although they live for aeons, <140> because of their habit of indulging in an oblivious state of mind, they do not have even a moment's thought [about the Dharma]. Their life wears away, and they come to the stage of death. Counting from Gyal-ch'en Rig-Zhi, [the first], to Zhen-t'rül Wang-je, [the sixth], in whichever of the six realms of the sensual gods they may be [living], they must suffer the miseries of transference and death.

As the gods near death, they notice the following [five] changes in themselves. Originally, [1] the radiance of their own [body] cast light for a distance of a *pag-ts'e*⁸¹ to a *gyang-drag*,⁸² but now their body's splendor and radiance decrease; [2] there was no unhappiness in sitting on their divine cushion for any length of time, but now they do not feel like sitting on

⁸⁰ *röl-pay ts'o* / rol.pa'i mtsho

⁸¹ *dpag.tshad* / approximately one mile

⁸² *rgyan.grags* / approximately two miles

it, for it creates discomfort and makes them unhappy; [3] their divine flower garlands never aged over any length of time, but at this point the garlands fade; [4] the clothes worn by the gods never smelled bad no matter how long they were worn, but now the clothes have a bad odor; [5] the gods otherwise did not sweat, but at this stage they do. When these five signs of death occur in them, they understand that the end is coming; hence, they become miserable.

A god's wife and lovers also know that he is going to die, so they dare not go near him. From a great distance they throw flowers, and after praying, "May you be reborn in the human realm after passing away from here. May you earn merit so that you may again take rebirth in the divine realms," they depart.

The dying god is then left alone in extreme misery. He looks with his divine eyes to see where he is going to take rebirth. <141> If he sees that he is going to be reborn in a region of suffering, before he can recover from the sorrows of approaching death, he suffers from the sorrows of approaching rebirth. In a state of depression in which his sorrows double and triple, he remains wailing for a god's week. A week in the Trāyastriṁśa region of the gods is equal to seven hundred human years. During that period, although he remembers the comfort and happiness he enjoyed in the past, he knows that he has no power to remain [a god]; therefore, he suffers from the sorrows of transference. Upon seeing the place of his future birth, he becomes terrified; hence, he suffers from the sorrows of rebirth. These two types of sorrow that he suffers mentally are even more terrible than [the tortures] of hell. Although a god in the two upper regions does not actually experience the sufferings of [the physical process of] death and transference, when the power of the karma that transported him [to these higher regions] is exhausted, he is, as it were, awakened from sleep to find himself dropped into the lower regions. Thus, he suffers from misery.

Nāgārjuna said:

**Brahmā, having attained the bliss that is free from lust,
Again becomes the firewood of the Maximum Torture
Hell,
Showing the unending continuity of misery.**

Thus, in whichever of these six regions of samsāra you may be born, their nature is misery, their movement is misery, and their whole mechanism is nothing but misery. They are like a bed of fire, a country of ogresses, the wideness of oceans, the tips of weapons, <142> or a house of filth in which there is not even a hair's tip of happiness.

The Dren-pa Nyer-zhag states:

**Hell-beings are destroyed by hell-fire,
Pretas are destroyed by hunger and thirst,
Animals are destroyed by eating each other,
Humans are destroyed by the shortness of life,
Demi-gods are destroyed by fighting and arguing,
Gods are destroyed by heedlessness.
Samsāra is like the tip of a needle:
No happiness has ever existed there.**

Lord Jam-pa⁸³ said:

**Just as no sweet smell is found in a latrine,
No happiness is found within the five types⁸⁴ of beings.**

The great O-gyen Rin-po-ch'e said:

It is said that "this samsāra has never contained even as much as a needle's tip of happiness," and even that tiny [bit of] happiness contains the misery of change.

You should contemplate on these instructions. You should think and understand that in this samsāra, from the

⁸³ byams.pa / S. Maitreya

⁸⁴ The gods and demi-gods are treated as one here.

summit of the universe above to the bottom of hell below, no matter where you may be born, there is not the least chance for you to enjoy pleasure and happiness. [Samsara] is void of essence. Therefore, you must feel a strong sense of repugnance from the core of your heart, just as a person suffering from jaundice is repelled by greasy bread. Do not treat the sufferings of samsara casually by thinking that you have heard them and learned them. You must sincerely take these sufferings upon yourself mentally and actually feel their torture in order to develop a firm belief in them. If you believe in them, you will give up sinning <143> and will automatically develop the feeling of happiness in doing things which are meritorious.

Long ago, when Chung-ga-wo⁸⁵ refused to take the monk's ordination because of his deep attachment to his wife, the Buddha used various methods to ordain him. But he refused to follow the teachings on the moral laws and was about to run away. Then, through a miracle, the Buddha took him to the Himalayas and showed him a female ape with defects in her eyes.

"How do you compare this female with your wife, Pundarika?" asked the Buddha.

"She is not even worth a hundred-thousandth part of my wife. My wife is more attractive," he replied.

"Well then," said the Buddha, "let's visit the divine region."

So saying, the Buddha took him to the realm of the gods. The Buddha stayed aside and told Chung-ga-wo to go look around. Chung-ga-wo saw the gods enjoying themselves with many celestial girls in the midst of the pleasure, comfort, and luxury of their palaces. He also noticed a palace with many celestial girls who had no god with them.

"Why is this so?" he asked them.

"Chung-ga-wo, a follower of Lord Buddha, is observing the moral laws in the human world and therefore will be reborn among the gods; hence, this palace is reserved for him," they replied.

⁸⁵ gcuṅ.dga'bo / S. Nanda

Very pleased, he returned to where Lord Buddha was.

"Have you seen the country of the gods?" asked the Buddha. <144>

"Yes," [he answered].

"Who is more beautiful, your wife or a celestial girl?" the Buddha then asked.

"Of course, the celestial girls are prettier," he replied. "The difference is as great as that which I noticed earlier between the female ape and Pūṇḍarīka."

Thus, Chung-ga-wo came back to earth and observed the moral laws very closely.

The Buddha said to the other monks, "Chung-ga-wo took the monk's ordination in order to take rebirth in the upper regions. You all took the monk's ordination with the thought of attaining nirvāṇa, and so you have taken a separate course. You must not converse with Chung-ga-wo. You must not have friendly dealings with him. You should not even sit on the same carpet."

All the monks did as they were bidden. At this, Chung-ga-wo became very miserable. He told himself, "Other monks may shun me, but since Kün-ga-wo⁸⁶ is my brother, perhaps he will have affection for me."

Thinking thus, he went to see him. But Kün-ga-wo, too, arose from his seat. He was about to leave when Chung-ga-wo asked him the reason. Kün-ga-wo told him what the Buddha had said. Chung-ga-wo was overwhelmed with grief.

Then the Buddha appeared and inquired, "Chung-ga-wo, would you like to see the hell region?"

"Yes, I would like to," he said.

Miraculously, he was taken to the hell region. <145> Chung-ga-wo visited and saw all the hells. In one corner he observed an empty copper pot. It was in blazing flames and surrounded by many of hell's executioners.

"Why is there no being in that pot?" asked Chung-ga-wo.

"Chung-ga-wo, a follower of the Buddha, is observing the moral laws only in order to enjoy celestial pleasure. After he takes rebirth in the region of the gods and his enjoyment

⁸⁶ kun.dga'.bo / S. Ānanda

there terminates because of the exhaustion of the meritorious fruit, he will be reborn in this pot," they responded.

[Chung-ga-wo] was terribly frightened to hear this and came back. He then came to understand that it is worthless to take birth in heaven, since ultimately one will be reborn in hell. This [insight caused] the thought of withdrawal from samsara to develop in him. Since he had actually seen hell, he carefully observed even the minutest moral laws.

The Buddha taught that this is the best of all the controllers of the doors of the five senses. If you have actually seen hell, infractions of the moral laws become out of the question. Even looking at mere paintings of hell, let alone actually seeing it, can develop the fear which urges you to leave samsara. Therefore, the Buddha ordered the five-part wheel of life⁸⁷ to be painted next to the door of the monasteries where the monks lived.

Also, Nāgārjuna said:

**If merely seeing pictures and hearing descriptions of
hell can create such fear,
What about those who are there, experiencing the
unbearable karmic nemesis?**

In this way, <146> from various points of view, you should consider the miseries of samsara again and again, so that from the very core of your heart you develop antipathy for samsaric activity. If you do not absolutely free yourself from mundane thoughts while practicing the Dharma, you are not [actually] practicing the pure Dharma.

As Atīsa was dying, a yogi asked him, "After you depart, should I meditate?"

"Of course, meditation is also counted as practicing the Dharma."

"Then should I preach?" he inquired.

Atīsa answered as before.

"Then what should I do?"

⁸⁷ depicting the regions of hell-beings, pretas, animals, humans, and demi-gods and gods combined

"All of you should follow the Buddha and give up attachment to this life," was Atīśa's reply.

Once, while circumambulating at Ra-dreng, a monk met with Ge-shey Tön-pa.

"O monk!" said Tön-pa, "Circumambulation is quite good, but wouldn't it be better if you practiced the Dharma itself?"

The monk thought, "Perhaps it might be more profitable to read the Mahāyāna Sūtras than to circumambulate," and thus he began to read from the Sūtras in the courtyard.

"Reading the Dharma is also good," said Tön-pa, "but wouldn't it be better for you to practice the Dharma itself?"

Again the monk thought, "Instead of reading, perhaps meditation would have a wider scope." Giving up his reading, he sat on his bedding with half-closed eyes. <147>

Tön-pa again remarked, "Meditation is good, but wouldn't it be better if you practiced the real Dharma?"

The monk, finding nothing else to be done, said, "Ge-sheyla, if that be the case, what sort of Dharma should I now practice?"

"O venerable one, forget about this life. Forget about this life," said Tön-pa.

The affairs of this worldly life will permanently involve you, never giving you a chance to escape from the miseries of the different regions of samsāra. Except for well-attained Gurus, no one can advise you on how to cut the string of attachment to this life and how to realize ultimate Buddhahood. You should discard attachment to your parents of this life, your relatives and friends, and your wealth and property as you would discard a droplet of spit. Be content with whatever food and clothes you have, and spend your time accomplishing the practice of Dharma.

Dam-pa of India said:

**Since material things are like clouds and mist,
Do not regard them as permanent.**

**Since all fame is like an echo, it should not be sought;
Search instead for the Dharmadhatu.**

Since beautiful clothes are like a rainbow,
Wear ordinary clothes and practice meditation.

Since the body is a bag of blood, pus, and serum,
Do not have affectionate attachment to it. <148>

Since even when delicious food is eaten, it ends up as
filthy excrement,
Do not be choosy about food.

Since your conceptions will create problems,
Sleep in the monastery of the mountains.

Since the thorn of illusion pricks the mind,
Practice having an equanimic attitude towards
everything.

Since all your desires come from within yourself,
Rule your mind.

Since the priceless gem is within you,
Do not hanker after food and wealth.

Since talkativeness is the cause of contention,
Remain mute.

Since your mind gets involved in action,
Do not let your mind run after food.

Since blessings come from your mind,
Pray to the Guru and tutelary deities.

Since, if you stay too long in one place, you will find
defects even in the Buddhas,
Do not dwell long in one place.

Behave humbly and cast off the pride of a great man,
And as you cannot live for a long time, attain perfection
quickly.

Since this life is like a guest [who will depart],
Do not construct a house at a resting place.

**Since, in general, nothing you do is of any help,
Meditate to obtain perfection.**

**Since the worms will devour your body, and it is
uncertain when it will vanish,
Do not occupy yourself with thoughts of this life.**

**Since relatives and friends are like birds on a tree,
[ready to fly away],
Do not be attached to them.**

**Since faith built on firm belief is valuable, like good,
fertile soil,
Do not let delusion allow it to lie fallow.**

**Since human life is like the priceless wish-fulfilling
gem, <149>
Do not dispatch it to hostile enemies.**

**Since the [tantric] bond is like a watchtower,
Do not let it be stained by the breach of vows.**

**When the Vajra Guru is alive, do not leave the Dharma
due to laziness.
Do you understand?**

Thus, in order to practice the noble Dharma perfectly, at the very least you must understand that the entire realm of samsāra is essenceless.⁸⁸ That kind of understanding will develop in your mind only under one condition, and that condition is found only in contemplating on the miseries of samsāra. You should contemplate on them until you understand them from the core of your heart. The standard by which you judge the result of your contemplation on the miseries of samsāra should be the attainment of Ge-shey Lang-ri Tang-pa.

Lang-ri Tang-pa was told by his disciples that other Lamas had nicknamed him Lang-ri Tang-pa (Gloomy Faced). He

⁸⁸ *nying-po me-pa / sñiñ.po med.pa*

inquired, "Can you have a cheerful face when you think of the sufferings of the three realms of samsāra?"

It is said that once a mouse was tempted by a piece of turquoise that he had on his mandala, but the mouse could not lift it. It then signaled another mouse, saying, "Tsig! Tsig!" One of the mice pulled the turquoise from the front, and the other pushed it from the rear. That is said to be the only occasion on which Lang-ri Tang-pa was forced to smile in his whole life!

Therefore, contemplation on the miseries of samsāra helps you to enter the noble Dharma. <150> It leads you to develop faith in the cause and effect of karma. It detaches you from this transitory life. It generates love and compassion in you for other sentient beings, and so on. It is the foundation for all the virtues of the path.

Even Lord Buddha, who preached the Dharma at three levels, first of all began by saying, "Hark, monks! This is suffering." Thus, He started His preaching by asking them to know what suffering is. You should contemplate upon it until you understand it thoroughly.

**Although I see the sufferings of samsāra, my love for it
and my attachment to it grow.**

**Although I fear the precipice of the lower regions, I
indulge in demeritorious activity.**

**May I and those beings like me, who have mistaken the
path,
Be blessed to renounce the activities of this life.**

This is the instruction on understanding samsāra to be misery.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Cause and Effect of Karma

He accepted virtue and rejected vice in conformity with
the teaching of cause and effect;
His conduct was in agreement with the doctrine of
gradual ascent from below;
Having the pure doctrinal view, he had no attachment
to anything.
At the feet of my unparalleled Guru, I pay homage.

The instruction on the cause and effect of karma¹ [consists of] the manner of teaching and listening, which is the same as before, and the Dharma to be explained, which is threefold:

1. Demeritorious Actions to Be Abandoned;
2. Meritorious Actions to Be Undertaken;
3. Everything Shown to Be the Nature of Karma. <151>

1 DEMERITORIOUS ACTIONS TO BE ABANDONED²

Rebirth in the upper or lower regions of samsara is caused by the accumulation of your own meritorious or demeritorious actions. Because samsara arises from action and operates through the effects of action, no other agent [is responsible] for your going to the upper or lower regions, nor is your going to the upper or lower regions due to chance.

¹ *lay gyu-dray / las rgyu.'bras* // The cause and effect of action (S. karma).

² *pang-ja mi-ge-way lay / spañ.bya mi.dge.ba'i las*

Therefore, you must always observe the cause and effect of meritorious and demeritorious [actions], abandon those [actions] that are demeritorious, and strive to perform those that are meritorious.

1.1 THE TEN DEMERITORIOUS ACTIONS³

There are ten demeritorious actions that must be abandoned.

Three are committed through physical actions:

1. Killing;
2. Taking What Is Not Given;
3. Sexual Misconduct Due to Lust.

Four are committed through vocal actions:

1. Lying;
2. Slander;
3. Harsh Words;
4. Idle Talk.

And three are committed through mental actions:

1. Covetousness;
2. Ill Will;
3. Contrary Views [Regarding the Dharma].

1.1.1 KILLING⁴

Killing implies the intentional destruction of another's life, human or animal. Like a warrior slaying an enemy in battle, some kill out of anger. Desiring to eat the flesh of wild animals, or to ornament themselves with furs, some kill out of attachment. Not knowing the cause and effect of merit and sin, or, like heretics, thinking that to kill is a virtue, some kill out of stupidity. Worse than these [acts] are the killing of

³ *mi-ge-wa chu / mi.dge.ba bcu*

⁴ *sog-chö / srog.gcod*

one's father, the killing of one's mother, <152> or the killing of an Arhat. Such acts are called "[those that permit] no gap between [this life and the next],"⁵ because [the perpetrator] goes directly to the Maximum Torture Hell [upon dying].

At present, since we do not destroy any lives with our own hands, we feel that we are not stained by the sin of killing. But on the whole—whether of high or low [position], rich or poor—each of us has committed innumerable sins by killing tiny sentient beings under the soles of our feet.

In particular, when Lamas and their monks visit the homes of their benefactors, they are fed with the meat and blood of animals [that the benefactors] have killed. With no compunction or compassion whatsoever for the animals thus slaughtered, [but with] attachment to the taste of meat and blood, they voraciously devour them. Without distinction, both benefactors and Lamas will suffer for [having committed] the sin of destroying life. [Similarly], wherever they go, great lords and high officials are entertained with the flesh of innumerable slaughtered animals. The sheep of the flocks owned by the wealthy are ultimately slaughtered one by one, and only one or two die a natural death. Thus, innumerable lives are destroyed.

Furthermore, during the summer, <153> sheep and cattle in turn kill flies, ants, fish, and frogs, devouring them with the grass [they eat] and trampling on them with their hooves; those killed by being buried under horse dung, urine, and so forth are innumerable. The sins these [animals] commit fall on their owners as well.

Compared to horses and cattle, sheep in particular should be viewed as inexhaustible sources of sin, for they eat many snakes, frogs, nesting birds, and tiny insects along with their fodder. When their wool is sheared in summer, some one hundred thousand insects living on their backs are also killed. When their lambs are born in winter, about half [of them] are immediately killed [for fleece]. The ewes are exploited, milked, and bred for lambs until they grow old and feeble, whereupon all are slaughtered for their flesh and skin. The

⁵ *ts'am-me-pay lay / mtshams.med.pa'i las*

castrated rams and the like are also destined solely for slaughter. When sheep are infested with lice, about one billion insects on the back of each sheep are killed. Thus, one who owns a flock of one hundred sheep will surely take rebirth in hell at least once.

Countless sheep are killed for a girl when she celebrates her wedding, when the dowry is offered, and when she is taken to the bridegroom's home. <154> Thereafter, whenever she visits her parents' home, [a lamb or other] sentient being is invariably killed. Accordingly, if she is served any vegetarian food when her friends and relatives entertain her, the hypocritical girl shows displeasure, eating it as though she does not know how to move her jaws. But when a fat sheep is killed, and a considerable quantity of its breast, entrails, and so forth is placed before her, with great pleasure she picks up a knife and begins to eat, making loud munching noises, like a red-faced ogress. On the following day, she returns to her home, carrying the bloody carcass like a hunter. She is even worse than a hunter, though, for when she goes out, she never returns empty-handed.

Also, intentionally or otherwise, children kill countless living beings while playing. During the summer, innumerable beings are killed during the various steps of cultivation. Hence, like demons, we human beings spend our time killing. Think about the *dri*,⁶ who are exploited throughout their lives, to whom you owe gratitude for having been fed with their milk, as though from your own mother. Even they are eventually killed so that humans can enjoy their flesh and blood. Thus, we are even worse than demons.

The act of killing is accomplished by the four conditions of sin. <155> For example, take a hunter killing an animal. When he actually sees a wild animal, such as a stag or a musk deer, he makes no mistake in discerning that it is this or that animal. Thus, [1] he knows that the object [to be killed] is a sentient being. Developing the desire to kill it, he generates [2] the intention to kill. The bullet, arrow, or the like that strikes the vital point fulfills [3] the means adopted for killing.

⁶ female yaks

The vital mechanism of the animal in question is instantly stopped, separating its mind from its body, which ultimately is known as [4] the act of killing.

As a further example, take the killing of a domestic sheep. When the master tells his servant or a butcher to kill a sheep, he is [1] fully conscious of the fact that the object to be killed is an animal called a sheep. When he thinks of the particular sheep to be killed, he has generated [2] the intention to kill. The butcher then grabs hold of a rope and goes to catch the sheep that is to be killed instantly. Throwing it to the ground and onto its back, he ties the sheep's legs and mouth with the rope; this entire process is [3] the means adopted to kill it. At that time, along with the severe suffering [the sheep experiences in] having its life cut off, the continuity of its breathing is broken. Its eyes turn blue <156> and run with tears, and its body is dragged inside the house. This is called [4] "blocking the mechanism of life," [i.e., the act of killing]. When its skin is immediately removed with a knife, the flesh can be seen to quiver. This is a sign that its all-pervading psychic air⁷ has not yet had a chance to unlock itself from the body; it is as if the sheep were still alive. If you consider the effort that is made to eat it immediately, by burning it on a fire or cooking it on a hearth, [eating it immediately] is equivalent to eating it alive. Thus, we are no different from ferocious animals.

Suppose you think, "I want to kill an animal today," or you go on to express this vocally, even though you take no further action. At that moment, since you are aware that the object [to be killed] is an animal and you have generated an intention to kill it, two factors of the sin are already complete. Although the reaction will not be as serious as if you had completed the main action of killing, nonetheless, like the appearance of an image in a mirror, you are already contaminated by [the idea of] the sin.

In addition, it is [generally] assumed that the actual killer—and not the one who has asked him to kill—suffers for the sin, or that even if [the instigator] does [so suffer], he suffers less.

⁷ *k'yab-je-kyi lung / khyab/byed.kyi rluñ*

Not only are people who ask someone else to kill equally responsible [for the sin], but so also are all those who express satisfaction over the accomplishment of the action. Understand that the sin of killing one animal is not divided among many people: rather, each individual involved bears the total sin of killing that animal. <157>

1.1.2 TAKING WHAT IS NOT GIVEN⁸

Taking what is not given is threefold:

1. Taking by Force;
2. Taking by Stealth;
3. Taking by Deceit.

1.1.2.1 [TAKING BY FORCE]⁹

Any illegitimate appropriation [of another's property] by violent means, outright seizure [of another's property] by force of war, or other similar [actions] are called "taking by force that which has not been given," or, "taking by might."

1.1.2.2 [TAKING BY STEALTH]¹⁰

Acquiring and appropriating another's property without the owner's knowledge, such as is done by thieves, is called "taking by stealth that which has not been given."

1.1.2.3 [TAKING BY DECEIT]¹¹

Telling lies to deceive others while doing business, or acquiring others' wealth by using incorrect measuring instru-

⁸ *ma-jin-par len-pa* / ma.byin.par len.pa

⁹ *wang-gi len-pa* / dḥāñ.gis len.pa

¹⁰ *jab-bü len-pa* / 'jab.bus len.pa

¹¹ *yo-gyü len-pa* / g-yo.sgyus len.pa

ments, is called “taking by deceit that which has not been given.”

These days, we [tend to] think, “As long as I do not openly steal, there is no penalty for obtaining something through [unscrupulous] business [practices] or through other deceptive means.” However, whatever profit there is in business that is earned through deceptive means is no different from [money] that is actually stolen.

In particular, at present, there are priests and monks who fail to regard their involvement in business as wrong and defective. They engage their entire lives in it, presuming themselves to be shrewd, but there is no force more powerful for wasting the minds of priests and monks than their indulging in business. <158> Because they tend to engage in it constantly, they lose interest in studying and in the performance of penance to dissolve their sins. They do not even have the time. Since they must think of their business accounts until they fall asleep at night, the very roots of faith, repentance, compassion, and so forth break within them. They are constantly under the influence of external illusory thoughts.

Once Je-tsün Mi-la visited a monastery. He passed the night in the vestibule of a monk’s cell. Inside, lying in bed, the monk was calculating the selling price of the flesh and hide of his cow, which was to be killed the following morning. He was estimating that the head would fetch this much, the shoulder of this front quarter would bring that much, the haunch of this shoulder, the foreshank of that shoulder, and so forth. Thus he was appraising all the parts of the cow. He was so busy that he did not get a wink of sleep. Day broke when he had assessed all but the tail of the cow. Immediately rising from his bed, he began to say his prayers and to perform the ritual called *tor-ma*. Je-tsün Mila was still asleep.

The monk approached Je-tsün Mi-la and hurled a sarcastic remark: “What an ambitious monk you are! Have you no prayers to say or beads to count? Are you still asleep?”

“Ordinarily, I don’t sleep so late,” Je-tsün Mi-la replied, “but last <159> night I was thinking about how to dispose of a cow I have, and there was no time to sleep. So I overslept this morning.”

This struck at the heart of the monk's mistake.

As in that example, you who are involved day and night solely in business are even now completely deluded by your accounts, and when you die, you will die in the same deluded state. Furthermore, although the goods you sell may be bad, you still must praise them in every way. You must say, "Some days ago, such and such a person offered me so much for this, but I did not exchange it for that, because when I purchased it, I paid such and such." Thus you are forced to tell nothing but lies. Similarly, if you see two people doing business over an object, and you are interested in acquiring it for yourself, you must disrupt the others' business with slanderous talk. You must use derogatory words to disparage the things that belong to others. Using harsh words, you must dispute over goods given on credit. You must indulge in idle talk, demanding unreasonably high prices [for your goods] and inquiring about the prices [of others' goods], even though you do not intend to make a purchase. Because you desire others' property, you commit the sin of covetousness. Because you intend to outdo others, you commit the sin of bearing ill will towards others. If you buy livestock and sell it to butchers, you commit the sin of killing. With the exception of [holding] contrary views and [indulging in] sexual misconduct, in doing business, you actually are committing all of the ten demeritorious actions. <160>

If your business proves a failure, it wastes both your own and others' wealth, and causes suffering. Ultimately it brings harm to you and to others; you may even die of hunger. If [your business] is slightly successful, the more wealth you acquire, the more discontented you become. Even if you command the wealth of Kubera, the God of Wealth, you still feel like indulging in wrongful business. Being entirely seduced by it, you waste your entire life. At the time of death, you will beat your chest with your fist [in remorse]. Later you will become a cornerstone in hell. Therefore, nothing is as powerful as business for propagating continual wrongdoing and for wasting your life. You always have to think cunningly, making your desire to deceive others as sharp as the point of a dagger, awl, or needle, whichever is

the sharpest. Indulging constantly in evil thoughts, you have to act contrary to the benevolent thought called bodhicitta, and your demerit increases boundlessly.

The act of taking that which is not given also has the four components of sin mentioned previously, [with regard to the act of killing]. Even those who contribute the least assistance to one who hunts or robs are equally accountable for the offense of destroying life or [the offense of] taking that which has not been given.

1.1.3 SEXUAL MISCONDUCT¹²

This is the law for householders.

In ancient times in Tibet, when the ten meritorious laws were framed during the reign of the Dharma-King Song-tsen Gam-po, there were laws that were observed by householders and [laws] that were observed by monks. <161> This section pertains to those [laws] that constrain the conduct of householders. Thus, even if you are a householder, you must have rules to go by, while those who are ordained must fundamentally give up sexual activity.

The most serious sexual transgression is that which causes the destruction of another's vows. Other prohibitions include masturbation; [relations] with someone else's spouse; [relations] with one who has already been hired or paid for by another; [relations] in the daytime, even with your own partner; [relations] with one observing a retreat; [relations] with one who is sick, pregnant, in mourning, menstruating, or not fully recovered from delivery; [relations] at a place where there are monuments of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha; [relations] with one's parents and relatives; [relations] with one who is too young for sexual activity; oral and anal intercourse; and so forth. Thus the sin of sexual misconduct includes various aspects of the action, such as the partner, place, time, and circumstance.

¹² *log-yem / log.g-yem*

1.1.4 TELLING LIES¹³

[Lies are of three types]:

1. Ordinary Lies;
2. Great Lies;
3. Lies Told by “Lamas” for Mundane Gain.

1.1.4.1 [ORDINARY LIES]¹⁴

An ordinary lie is anything said to another with the intention to deceive.

1.1.4.2 [GREAT LIES]¹⁵

Saying that virtue brings no benefit, vice has no bad consequences, the Pure Lands have no happiness, the lower regions have no suffering, and Buddhas have no accomplishment <162> are called “great lies,” since there are no greater untruths than these.

1.1.4.3 [LIES TOLD BY “LAMAS” FOR MUNDANE GAIN]¹⁶

Telling others that one has attained the spiritual stages, although one has not attained them; pretending that one has the power of foreknowledge, although one does not possess it—in fact, all claims to spiritual attainment which one pretends to have acquired, even though one has not—are known as “lies told by ‘lamas’ for mundane gain.”

At present, impostors have greater market value than noble persons. People have very suggestive minds, which are very easily influenced. Some renowned, so-called “lamas” or “yogis” are particularly interested in cheating others through

¹³ *dzün* / *rdzun*

¹⁴ *dzün p'al-pa* / *rdzun phal.pa*

¹⁵ *dzün ch'en-po* / *rdzun chen.po*

¹⁶ *mi-ch'ö la-may dzün* / *mi.chos bla.ma'i rdzun*

[various] deceptive means. Some say that they have seen the gods, and therefore the gods should be worshiped. Some say that they have seen the evil spirits, and therefore these [spirits] should be punished. Almost all these [statements] are lies, entirely intended to deceive others.

Do not heedlessly place your confidence in impostors. Rather, with regard to the problems of this life and the next, it is vital that you depend on a knowledgeable and simple Dharma practitioner who manifests externally what he is internally. While a slight foreknowing power of the worldly type can be attained at the mundane level, its [manifestation] will be of an intermittent nature and its accuracy will vary. Transcendental foreknowing power is only possessed by those who have attained the higher spiritual levels. Such persons are extremely rare.

1.1.5 SLANDEROUS SPEECH¹⁷

Slanderous speech is of two types:

1. Slanderous Speech Made Openly;
2. Slanderous Speech Made Secretly.

1.1.5.1 [SLANDEROUS SPEECH MADE OPENLY]¹⁸

In general, a powerful person can openly tell one of two people, [when both are present], “He secretly said this and that against you and did this and that to damage you. But today he is behaving as if nothing had happened between you, isn’t he?” Such slanderous speech <163> made quite directly is called “slanderous speech made openly.”

¹⁷ *t'ra-ma / phra-ma*

¹⁸ *ngön-t'ra / mñon.phra*

1.1.5.2 [SLANDEROUS SPEECH MADE SECRETLY]¹⁹

[This is committed] by going to one of a pair of good friends and telling him, “Although you value [your friend] very much, he says this and that about you.” Thus, slanderous speech is used to create conflict between two people. This is called “slanderous speech made secretly.”

The heaviest offenses [of slanderous speech] involve creating disunity among monks, and, in particular, using slander to separate Gurus who teach the Tantric Dharma from their disciples or from their religious friends and associates.

1.1.6 HARSH WORDS²⁰

An example of the sin of using harsh words would be to criticize directly the defects of an ugly person, or, for example, to call a person with defective eyes “blind,” one who is hard of hearing “deaf,” and so forth. Finding fault with others, speaking ill of them in any way that disturbs them mentally—even if your words are mild—all come under the category of using harsh words. Saying various unpleasant things in the presence of Gurus, spiritual teachers, and noble persons is also sinful.

1.1.7 IDLE TALK²¹

All irrelevant talk—discussing non-Buddhist, Brahmanic tantra as though it were the Dharma; talk concerning harlots; the singing of lustful songs; <164> talk of war and robbery; and so forth—breeds attachment and aversion, and is idle talk. In particular, engaging in irrelevant talk with those who are reciting prayers and mantra makes them forget what they

¹⁹ *kog-t'ra* / lkog.phra

²⁰ *ts'iig-tsub* / tshig-rtsub

²¹ *ngag-kyal* / ñag.kyal

are doing and hinders them in earning good merits. Therefore, it is a heavy transgression.

Idle talk of various kinds may seem to be simple, harmless recreation, but if you examine it closely, it is mostly motivated by lust and hatred. The more you rouse these in yourself and others, the heavier the transgression. If the saying of prayers and the reciting of mantra are mixed with gossip, no matter how many times you pray and recite, you will achieve no result. In particular, if you talk idly in an assembly of monks, the good merit that should have been earned by the entire congregation is blocked by one single person, and the benefactor's expectation of earning good merit [as a result of sponsoring the recitation] is ruined.

In India, and indeed [elsewhere], one who is entitled to [receive] donations²² should in general either be a suffering being or a realized being. Although the Buddha has not permitted it other than [in these two cases], at present, soon after you learn to conduct one or two tantric ceremonial rites, you seem to swallow the offerings of black²³ donations indiscriminately. <165> You who accept donations for performing tantric rituals must have received initiations,²⁴ have observed the [tantric] bond of trust, be expert in Mahāyoga²⁵ and Anuyoga²⁶ meditation, and have perfected the recitation of mantra. Otherwise, the improper practice of the Tantra distorts it into Bön;²⁷ that is a great transgression. A black donation is like a pill [made] of red-hot iron. Unless you are no longer an ordinary person, but rather one who has a bronze jaw

²² *kor / dkor*

²³ i.e., wrongfully acquired

²⁴ *wang / dbañ*

²⁵ *kye-rim / bskyed.rim* / to create systematically from emptiness and to withdraw again into that very emptiness towards the end; the process of Mahāyoga meditation

²⁶ *dzog-rim / rdzogs.rim* / to deal with the already existing psychic air (*lung*) as the basis of practice, dissolving finally into emptiness; the process of Anuyoga

²⁷ the pre-Buddhist, indigenous religion of Tibet

made by the unification of Mahāyoga and Anuyoga meditation,²⁸ it will burn your mind and bring destruction upon you.

It is said:

**Black donations are a razor to your life;
If you take too many, they cut the artery of liberation.**

Thus, not to speak of knowing what Mahāyoga and Anuyoga meditation means, you do not utter properly even the words you do know! Although the most important moment in a ritual ceremony occurs when the mantra are repeated, when this juncture arrives, you open a bag full of idle talk. You waste the entire period with various kinds of irrelevant talk stained with lust and hatred. This brings disaster on yourself and on others. Thus, Lamas and monks should always refrain from idle talk. It is important that you stop talking, and that you devote yourself to offering prayers and counting your beads.

1.1.8 COVETOUSNESS²⁹

To covet is to think repeatedly of possessing attractive things that belong to others, and also, to contemplate on ways to acquire those objects. <166> It includes even the smallest mental hungering for another's property.

1.1.9 ILL WILL³⁰

Ill will, motivated by hatred and anger, is thinking that you would like to bring specific harm to other people; feeling unhappy when you see others enjoying power and prosperity; desiring that others not be so comfortable and happy; considering how wonderful it would be if others did not have so

²⁸ *kye-dzog zung-du jug-pa / bskyed.rdzogs zuñ.du 'jug.pa / the yogic process in which both Mahāyoga and Anuyoga are practiced simultaneously*

²⁹ *nab-sem / brnab.sem*

³⁰ *nö-sem / gnod.sem*

anyone; that thorns that have sharp points are not sharpened by anyone; and that the colored spots of peacock plumes are not painted by anyone—these [things] exist this way on their own. Similarly, whatever one perceives in this world—good or evil, happiness or unhappiness—[must also] exist this way on its own.

According to this faith, previous karma, previous life, life hereafter, and so forth, do not exist. To hold such scriptures as authentic and to follow them, or even if one does not, to harbor the doubt that any of the teachings of the Buddha, the oral traditions of the Guru, or [their transcriptions] in the literature of the learned might not be true, and to disparage them, are all contrary views.

Thus, of these ten demeritorious actions, killing and the holding of contrary views are the greatest sins.

It is said:

**Above the action of killing, there is no other sin.
Of the ten demerits, holding contrary views is the
heaviest.**

With the exception of hell-beings, no one welcomes death. <168> Nothing is dearer to you than your own life. Hence, killing is all the more sinful. For taking the life of one animal, you must repay the [karmic debt] five hundredfold: “For killing a single animal, one must remain in hell for an intermediary cycle of an aeon,” states the Dren-pa Nyer-zhad Sūtra.³⁶ The sin committed by killing animals under the pretext of constructing monuments to the Three Jewels is even heavier. P'a-dam-pa said: “One who constructs representations of the Three Jewels through sin and suffering throws his future life into the air.”

Similarly, enthusiastic to be earning good merits, benefactors invite Lamas to their homes and feed the congregation of monks on the flesh and blood of slaughtered sentient be-

³⁶ S. Saddharmasmrtyupasthānasūtra

ings. Both monks and benefactors alike will bear the penalty for killing. The food offered by the benefactor should be regarded as impure charity; [subsequently] it becomes improper food for those who accept it. It brings more demerit than merit. Unless one has achieved the power of instantaneously restoring life to the dead, there is no way to escape being contaminated by the sin of taking life. [Accepting such offerings] will certainly bring harm to the lives and prosperity of the Lamas. <169> Unless they can guide the consciousness [of the slaughtered animal] to the Heaven of Great Bliss, they should try their best to shun the karma of killing.

If you hold contrary views even for a moment, all your vows will be destroyed. You will not be admitted into the Buddhist fold. Your body [that enjoys] leisure will change into one without [leisure]. Once your mind has been affected by contrary views, even meritorious deeds will not take you on the path to liberation, and there will be no one from whom you can ask pardon³⁷ for the sins you have committed.

1.2 THE EFFECTS OF THE TEN DEMERITORIOUS ACTIONS³⁸

Each of the ten demeritorious actions has a fourfold effect:

1. The Fully-Matured Effect;
2. The Effect That Corresponds with Its Cause;
3. The Effect That Matures as the Environment;
4. The Effect of the Generative Power of Karma.

1.2.1 THE FULLY-MATURED EFFECT³⁹

Whichever of the ten demeritorious actions you commit, being motivated by hatred will cause you to be born as a hell-

³⁷ the Guru, Vajrasattva, the Buddhas of Confession, etc.

³⁸ *mi-ge-way lay chu-po de-dag-gi dray-bu / mi.dge.ba'i las bcu.po de.dag.gi 'bras.bu*

³⁹ *nam-min-gyi dray-bu / rnam.min.gyi 'bras.bu*

being; being motivated by lust will cause you to be born as a preta; and being motivated by stupidity will cause you to be born as an animal. Having been born in these lower regions, you must then suffer the miseries found in each of them.

Furthermore, there is what is called “the great [demeritorious] motivation.” If you have been accumulating [bad] karma for a long time under the very strong influence of the three poisons,⁴⁰ you will take rebirth in hell; under less influence, among the pretas; under still less influence, among the animals.

1.2.2 THE EFFECT THAT CORRESPONDS WITH ITS CAUSE⁴¹

Once you have completed your stay in the lower region into which you were thrown by the fully-matured effect [of your demeritorious actions], <170> you experience this [effect] in the human world. However, even in the lower regions, there are innumerable varieties of suffering which correspond with each individual action.

The effect that corresponds with its cause is twofold:

1. Behavior That Corresponds with Its Cause;
2. Experience That Corresponds with Its Cause;

1.2.2.1 BEHAVIOR THAT CORRESPONDS WITH ITS CAUSE⁴²

This means that you are reborn behaving as you behaved previously. For example, if a man was accustomed to killing in a former life, he will enjoy killing in this life as well; if he was accustomed to taking what was not his in a former life, he will delight in stealing in this life; and so forth. Thus, beginning at an early age, some people kill whatever worms and

⁴⁰ lust, hatred, and stupidity

⁴¹ *gyu-t'ün-pay dray-bu / rgyu mthun.pa'i 'bras.bu*

⁴² *je-pa gyu-t'ün / byed.pa rgyu.mthun*

flies they happen to see. This fondness for killing corresponds with their previous actions of killing.

Similarly, from childhood on, people differ because of the influence of their former actions. Some like to kill, others like to steal, while still others are uninterested in such behavior and instead take pleasure in [performing] deeds of virtue. These facts reveal either an uncompleted portion of their former activities, [which they continue to perform in this life], or [behavior which is] the effect that corresponds with their [previous] actions.

It is said:

**What you have done in the past is known by examining
your present life;
Where you will be reborn in the future is known by
observing your present activities.**

Furthermore—even among animals—falcons, wolves, and the like are fond of killing, while rats and the like are fond of stealing. Thus, an individual's behavior corresponds with his previous actions.

1.2.2.2 EXPERIENCE THAT CORRESPONDS WITH ITS CAUSE⁴³

Each of the ten demeritorious actions produces two different effects. <171>

Due to acts of killing in the past, you will live a short life and suffer from many illnesses. That some babies die immediately after being born is the reaction of their past sins of killing. In most cases, they will have to die as soon as they are born, over many [successive] lives. Similarly, there are people who suffer from many kinds of disease, right from childhood. They will suffer from illness until they die of old age. This is due to the maturation of their acts of killing and beating others in the past. Instead of thinking of many ways of immediate treatment, they should rather ask pardon for,

⁴³ *nyong-wa gyu-t'ün / myoñ.ba rgyu.mthun*

and regret, their past sins, and vow not to repeat them in the future. As an antidote for bad karma, you should endeavor to earn merit, avoid committing sin, and so forth.

Because you took what was not given, you suffer from poverty. Even if you have a little wealth, it will be snatched away or stolen, or you will have to share it in common with your enemies. Hence, it is better that those who have no property and wealth earn a spark of good merit, rather than make mountain-like efforts to [obtain] wealth. If, in the past, you did not give in charity—which would have provided the enjoyment of wealth in this life—at present, even great efforts [to obtain wealth] will not help.

Consider the amount of wealth that most robbers and thieves obtain on a single occasion. If they were always successful, they could not possibly find a place on earth to store it [all]; <172> but professional robbers and thieves ultimately die of hunger. Similarly, we see that those who engage in business or who live on gifts for spiritual services, no matter how great an amount [they may collect], do not find [their wealth] to be of much help. [On the other hand], since they have the fruits of previous charity to enjoy, many people make no effort at all, yet throughout their lives their wealth never leaves them. If you seek wealth, you should make offerings [to those who have transcended samsāra], and give charity [to the needy].

In this world of karma, whatever you do in the early part of your life will largely bear fruit in the later part of your life. If your action is connected with something extraordinary, you can experience an instantaneous effect as well. Therefore, if you engage in unfair business practices, stealing, and so forth with the hope of gaining wealth, this is called “action contrary to your wishes.” You will not escape the region of the pretas for many aeons. Eventually, in this very life as well, you will experience in advance the [future] effects of your bad actions. You will become poorer and more unfortunate. Even if you have some wealth, you will be powerless to enjoy it. Because of greed, the more you get, the more you will feel your poverty and need. Your wealth will become the cause for

further sinning. You may have wealth, but, like a preta guarding a store of treasure, you will not be able to use it.

Although some people may appear to be wealthy, <173> if on close inspection you find they do not use their wealth for happiness and comfort in this and the next life, spending it neither for food, clothes, rest, nor leisure, then they are even poorer than paupers. From this very moment onward, those who behave like pretas are experiencing the effect of the improper use of wealth.

It is said that the effect of sexual misconduct motivated by lust is that you will have an ugly, lazy, and hostile partner. We usually attribute the constant quarreling, arguing, bearing grudges, and fighting of most married couples to the ill-nature of either the husband or wife; but, in fact, this is a reaction experienced in accord with their sexual misconduct in the past. Rather than hating each other, they should recognize the maturation of their past bad karma, and exercise patience.

Je Dam-pa Rin-po-ch'e said:

**Married life is impermanent, like the meeting of
acquaintances at a marketplace.**

**O Ding-ri folk! Don't recount past mistakes and
quarrel.**

Due to telling lies, the experience that corresponds with its cause is that you will suffer often from being criticized and deceived by others. Therefore, if you suffer from undue blame or criticism, you should realize that this is the effect of the lies you told [in the past]. <174> Neither hate those who criticize you, nor quarrel with them. Feel happy, and be grateful to them for enabling you to dissolve the effects of many evil deeds.

Rig-dzin Jig-me Ling-pa said:

**The antagonism of enemies promotes one's meditative
experience.**

**The undue blame [of enemies] acts like a whip, urging
one to virtue.**

They are like Gurus, destroying attachment and prejudice.

Please understand that their kindness can never be repaid.

The effect that corresponds with the cause of slanderous speech is that there will be no unity among your followers or servants. They will revolt against you. Among monks in the monastery of a Lama, attendants of officials, and paid servants of a family, there will, in general, be no unity. No matter how much you instruct them, they will disobey you and revolt against you. When most of the paid domestic servants are asked to do some easy work, they will pretend two or three times not to hear [the order]. Eventually, when their employer becomes angry and rebukes them harshly, they will slowly and unwillingly attend to the task. They will never even report that the work has been done, and they will always be ill-tempered. These are the matured effects of the slanderous speech that the master himself committed in the past. Therefore, you should repent your evil deeds, and strive to reconcile the disunity between yourself and others. <175>

Because you spoke harsh words, you will always hear unpleasant things. [Similarly], whatever words you speak will also be perceived as quarrelsome. The use of harsh words is the worst of the demeritorious deeds committed vocally. Even the worldly saying says, “Although words have neither arrows nor swords, they cut the human mind to pieces.” [Harsh words] can instantly create anger in the minds of others. In particular, if you utter even a single bad word to a realized person, you will not be able to escape from hell for many rebirths.

Long ago, a Brahmin named Ser-kya⁴⁴ called the monks of Ö-sung Buddha many names, saying, “You horse heads! You bull heads!” and other, similar things. He was therefore born as an alligator-fish⁴⁵ with eighteen heads. He could not attain

⁴⁴ *ser.skya* / S. Pāṇḍu

⁴⁵ *ch'u-sin nyay-rig* / chu.srin ña'i.rigs / a creature having the upper body of an alligator and the tail of a fish

freedom for aeons, and even after leaving that life, he is said to have been reborn in hell. Again, one nun called another [nun] a bitch. As an effect, she was reborn as a bitch five hundred times. There are many such instances.

Learn how to speak gently at all times. In particular, [remember that] it is difficult to say where extraordinary beings and Bodhisattvas are to be found. Therefore, it is advisable that you learn to treat everyone as a pure being, to speak of their virtues, and to praise their good qualities. <176> If you criticize or speak badly of a Bodhisattva, the penalty incurred is said to be even heavier than that [incurred] for killing the beings of the three realms.

It is said:

**Greater than killing all the beings of the three realms,
Is the sin of backbiting Bodhisattvas.
Ask pardon for grave sins committed for no reason.**

The effect that corresponds with the cause of idle talk is that your words will carry no weight, and you will lack courage. Others will not believe you, even when you speak the truth, and you will have no courage to speak in a large gathering.

The effect that corresponds with the cause of covetousness is that your wishes will [remain] unfulfilled; instead, you will receive undesired things.

Ill will results in danger, fear, and many afflictions.

Contrary views will keep you attached to a wrong doctrinal theory, the deceptive [outlook of which] will disturb your mind.

1.2.3 THE EFFECT THAT MATURES AS THE ENVIRONMENT⁴⁶

Because of killing, you will find yourself reborn in an unpleasant, frightful land filled with precipices that endanger your life.

⁴⁶ *wang-gi dray-bu / dhañ.gyi 'bras.bu*

Because of taking that which was not given, you will be reborn in a land where crops are exposed to constant blight and hailstorms, where trees do not bear fruit, and where famine prevails.

Because of sexual misconduct, you will live in a place where things are unsanitary, and where there are swamps and unwholesome conditions. <177>

Because of telling lies, your wealth will be unstable, your mind will always be nervous, and you will meet with threatening conditions.

Because of slanderous speech, you will live in a place that has precipitous gorges, making it difficult to travel.

Because of harsh words, you will be reborn in an unpleasant place where there are rocks, rubble, and things such as thorns.

Because of idle talk, you will be reborn in a place that yields no harvest, despite cultivation, and where the seasons are irregular and undependable.

Because of covetousness, you will be reborn in a place where harvests fail, and where many sufferings arise because of bad circumstances.

Because of ill will, you will be reborn in a country that always suffers from many dangers and afflictions.

Because of contrary views, you will have a life with little wealth and few protectors and friends.

1.2.4 THE EFFECT OF THE GENERATIVE POWER OF KARMA⁴⁷

The effect of the generative power of karma is that you repeatedly perform whatever [demeritorious] act you have committed, thus causing an endless chain of suffering during the course of countless rebirths. It further makes [the scope of your demeritorious] activities grow greater and greater, and it leads you to wander the boundless samsāra.

⁴⁷ *kyey-bu je-pay dray-bu / skyes.bu byed.pa'i 'bras.bu*

2 MERITORIOUS ACTIONS TO BE UNDERTAKEN⁴⁸

In general, it is said that knowing the penalties for the ten demeritorious actions and earnestly vowing not to commit them comprise the ten meritorious actions. Thus, they are not to kill, not to take what is not given, and so forth. It is not necessary that you take a vow [to practice them] before a Guru or an Abbot. <178> [For example], you can decide for yourself that you will not kill forever, or at certain places and times, or that you will not take the life of a particular sentient being, and so forth. [All] these are meritorious deeds. If you do undertake [a vow] in the presence of a Guru, spiritual teacher, or symbol of the Three Jewels, it will be exceptionally powerful; [however], a general thought such as, “I will not kill,” will not do. Whatever the case may be, you must vow with the intention of not committing the demeritorious act. For this reason, householders who cannot avoid killing forever should vow not to kill during a certain time of the year, such as the first month of the year, the month of miracles,⁴⁹ or the fourth month, called Sa-ga.⁵⁰ Or, one can vow not to kill during the full moon and new moon days, and so on, of every month. If you take vows for a period of years, months, or days, you can reap greater benefits.

It is as in the [following story]. Long ago, a butcher of the village where Ārya Katyāyana lived took vows not to kill at night. When he was reborn in an indeterminate hell, although he was put into a burning iron house to suffer by day, at night he enjoyed a palatial building attended by four heavenly maidens. <179>

⁴⁸ *drub-ja ge-way lay / bsgrub.bya dge.ba'i las*

⁴⁹ *ch'o-t'riil da-wa / cho.'phrul zla.ba*

⁵⁰ *sa-ga da-wa / sa.ga zla.ba*

2.1 [THE TEN MERITORIOUS ACTIONS]⁵¹

Thus, [to perform] the ten meritorious actions means to avoid the ten demeritorious actions and to practice their antidotes.

Therefore, you must give up killing and protect the lives of sentient beings. This is the first physical merit.

You must give up taking that which is not given and practice charity. This is the second physical merit.

You must give up sexual misconduct and practice the moral precepts. This is the third physical merit.

You must give up telling lies and speak the truth. This is the first vocal merit.

You must give up slanderous speech and reconcile those who oppose each other. This is the second vocal merit.

You must give up using harsh words and speak gently. This is the third vocal merit.

You must give up idle talk and recite prayers. This is the fourth vocal merit.

You must give up covetousness and practice generosity. This is the first mental merit.

You must give up ill will and contemplate on benevolence. This is the second mental merit.

You must give up contrary views and hold the purest doctrinal view in mind. This is the third mental merit.

2.2 [THE EFFECTS OF THE TEN MERITORIOUS ACTIONS]

[As with the ten demeritorious actions, each of the ten meritorious actions has a fourfold effect.]

2.2.1 THE FULLY-MATURED EFFECT

[The fully-matured effect] causes you to be reborn in any of the three upper regions, [the regions of humans, demi-gods, and gods].

⁵¹ *ge-way lay chu / dge.ba'i las bcu*

2.2.2 [THE EFFECT THAT CORRESPONDS WITH ITS CAUSE]

[As with the ten demeritorious actions, the effect is twofold.]

2.2.2.1 BEHAVIOR THAT CORRESPONDS WITH ITS CAUSE

[The behavior that corresponds with your previous actions] is that you will be happy to perform meritorious deeds throughout your entire course of rebirths, and this will increase your merit even more.

2.2.2.2 EXPERIENCE THAT CORRESPONDS WITH ITS CAUSE

By giving up killing, you will live long and have little illness. <180>

By giving up taking that which is not given, you will be wealthy and undisturbed by enemies and thieves.

By giving up sexual misconduct, your partner will be beautiful and will have little hostility.

By giving up telling lies, you will gain praise and affection from all.

By giving up slanderous speech, your servants and followers will show obedience.

By giving up harsh words, you will hear sweet words.

By giving up idle talk, your words will have weight.

By giving up covetousness, your wishes will be fulfilled.

By giving up ill will, you will obtain deliverance from danger.

By giving up contrary views, sublime views will grow in you.

2.2.3 THE EFFECT THAT MATURES AS THE ENVIRONMENT

[The effect that matures as the environment] reverses the effects of previous demeritorious actions, changing them into the three accomplishments⁵² and enriching them with all virtues.

2.2.4 THE EFFECT OF THE GENERATIVE POWER OF KARMA

[The effect of the generative power of karma] is that it increases enormously whatever meritorious deeds you have done. Virtue will flow without stopping.

3 EVERYTHING SHOWN TO BE THE NATURE OF KARMA⁵³

From the summit of samsāra down to the base of hell, each of all the inconceivable varieties of pleasure and suffering that beings individually experience evolves entirely from the effects of those beings' previously accumulated meritorious and demeritorious karma.

The Lay-gya-pa Sūtra states:

The happiness and unhappiness of beings
Is caused by karma, the Buddha said. <181>
Since karma is of various kinds,
It creates a variety of sentient beings,
Setting them off on various incessant wanderings.
So huge is this karmic net!

However great your power, prestige, wealth, or prosperity may be now, not one of these will follow you when the time of death comes. Only the merit and demerit you have earned

⁵² grace, glory, and wealth

⁵³ *t'am-che lay-kyi rang-zhin-du ten-pa / thams.cad las.kyi rañ.bzin.du bstan.pa*

throughout your life will accompany you, and it is the power of their [effects] that will determine whether you are born in the upper or lower regions of samsāra.

The Gyal-po-la Dam-pa Sūtra states:

**When the expiration of time forces the king to depart,
Wealth, friends, and acquaintances will not follow him.
From wherever and to wherever a man goes,
Karma, like a shadow, follows him.**

Thus, when you now perform meritorious or demeritorious deeds, although an effect may not immediately manifest as a result of a particular action, an action never goes to waste: at the right moment, when the [necessary] factors coincide, each individual will experience the corresponding effect.

The Lay-gya-pa states:

**The actions of embodied beings
Never go to waste, even for a hundred aeons;
In due course, when the [necessary] factors coincide,
These [actions] mature into effects. <182>**

The Yön-ten Rin-po-ch'ey Dzö states:

**The shadow of a vulture soaring high above the earth
May not be seen for some time;
But since a shadow never leaves the body [that casts it],
In due course, when the [necessary] factors coincide, it
manifests its prominence all the more.**

For example, when a bird flies very high in the sky, its shadow seems to be invisible; however, it is not that the shadow does not exist. Eventually, wherever [the bird] alights, there the dark shadow will appear. Similarly, the effects of good and bad actions may not be evident at the moment; but, eventually, inevitably, they will descend upon you. When even Buddhas and Arhats, who have dissolved all the obscurations of karma and delusion, must suffer for their

[former demeritorious] actions, there is no possibility that we ordinary beings will not also have to do so.

In the past, when the soldiers of King P'ag-kyey-po⁵⁴ entered Kapilavastu and killed eighty thousand Śākyas, the Buddha also suffered, [but only] from a headache. His followers inquired about the cause. The Buddha said, "When the Śākyas were fishermen in the past, they killed many fish and ate them. One day they caught two large fish that they did not kill immediately, but fastened to a pillar. The fish, out on dry land and gasping in pain, thought, <183> 'As these fellows are killing us although we have done no wrong, let us be able to kill them although they will have done no wrong.' The effect of that action was that the two large fish took rebirth as King P'ag-kyey-po and his minister Ma-la-nö, and the [other] fish that [the Śākyas] had killed were reborn as the soldiers. The Śākyas have been wiped out today. Born then as a child among those fishermen, I laughed at the two large fish as they gasped in agony on the earth. That has resulted in my headache today. If I had not attained a virtuous Dharma of this sort, I too would have been slain by P'ag-kyey-po's soldiers today."

Similarly, when the Buddha was a Bodhisattva in the past, a splinter of acacia wood pierced his leg. This was attributed to his having killed [the pirate] Mi-nag Dung-t'ung.

In the past, Ārya Maudgalyāyana was the foremost of all the Śrāvaka followers of Lord Buddha. Despite the fact that he could perform miracles, he was killed by the Kün-tu-gyu⁵⁵ heretics because of his karma. It is said that both Ārya Sāriputra and the great Maudgalyāyana at times used to pay visits to hell and to the regions of the pretas, in order to work for the sentient beings there. One day they visited hell. <184> They saw that the heretic teacher Ō-sung Dzog-je⁵⁶ had been reborn there after his death and was suffering various kinds of tortures. He said to them, "Should both of you great beings return to the human world, please give my disciples this

⁵⁴ 'phags.skyes.po / S. Virūḍhaka

⁵⁵ S. parivrājika / a sect of wandering mendicants

⁵⁶ 'od.sruṇ rdzogs.byed / S. Purāṇa Kāśyapa

message: ‘Your teacher Ö-sung Dzog-je, who is now reborn in hell, says that the Kün-tu-gyu have no ascetics. They are found among the Śākyas. Our religion proves to be wrong. You should abandon your religion and follow the path shown by the prince of the Śākyas. When you worship the stūpa made from my bones, I receive a shower of red-hot iron here.’ Please tell them to stop doing that.”

The two superior ones returned to the human world. Śāriputra went first. Although he conveyed the message, the heretics did not have the karmic connection to hear it. Maudgalyāyana came after Śāriputra and inquired if he had delivered Ö-sung Dzog-je’s message. Śāriputra said that he had, but that no one had responded to it. Maudgalyāyana said, “Probably they did not hear it. I will tell them.” He went to give the message sent by Ö-sung Dzog-je. <185> The heretics became furious at this and said, “Not only is he talking profusely against us, but he is also insulting our teacher. Let’s finish him.” So saying, they crushed his body like a reed.

Previously, it would have been impossible for the Kün-tu-gyu to strike him; the united might of the three worlds could not have moved [so much as] the tip of a hair on his head. But this time he was overwhelmed by the effect of his past actions, and he failed even to think of dodging [their blows], to say nothing of performing miracles; he proved to be no different from an ordinary human being. Wrapping him in a monk’s robe, Śāriputra brought him to the Jetavana Park, and said, “When even hearing of the demise of a friend is unwanted, how can one stand to see him dying?” and with that Śāriputra expired, along with many Arhats. Instantly, Maudgalyāyana also passed away.

Again, there once was a Kashmiri monk named Rawati who had obtained foreknowing and miraculous powers. He had many followers. Once, in a forest, he was boiling his monk’s robes. A nearby householder went in search of a lost calf. Noticing smoke in the forest, he approached and found the monk making a fire. <186>

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“I’m boiling my robe,” replied the monk.

The householder lifted the lid of the pot, looked in, and said, "It's meat!"

The monk also saw it as meat. Taking the monk and handing him over to the king, the householder said, "He has stolen my calf. Punish him."

The king put the monk into a pit. Some days later [the householder's] cow found her calf. The householder requested the king to release the monk, for apparently he had not stolen the calf. But the king forgot to pass the orders, and Rawati was not released for six months. Many of his disciples, who had obtained miraculous powers, then flew in the sky, came to the king, and said, "This monk is free from blame. Please release him."

The king then went to release him. When he saw the monk suffering terribly, he became very regretful.

"My delay has made me earn a great sin," he said.

"It's all right. The mistake was my own," replied the monk.

"What sort of bad action did you perform?" inquired the king.

"When I was born as a thief in the past," said the monk, "I stole a calf. As its owner chased me, I ran away and left the calf in front of a Pratyekabuddha meditating in the forest. The Pratyekabuddha was arrested and put into a ditch for six days. The fully-matured [effect of my bad action] caused me to experience the miseries of the lower regions for many rebirths. In this life, too, I have experienced misery. <187> This is the last of the fully-matured [effect]."

Likewise, in India, the son of King De-chö was given a seamless brocade cloth by his mother. At this he said, "I won't wear it yet. I'll wear it when I obtain the kingdom."

"You will have no occasion to acquire the kingdom," his mother replied. "Normally, when a king dies, his son gets the kingdom; but your father has the same life span as Guru Nāgārjuna. As long as Nāgārjuna does not die, neither will [your father]. Since Nāgārjuna has control over his life, his life is unlimited. Hence, many of your grandchildren will die without acquiring the kingdom."

"Is there any remedy for this?" asked the son.

"Since Nāgārjuna is a Bodhisattva, if you beg him to give you his head, he will give it to you. Other than that, there is no way."

The son went to Nāgārjuna and asked for his head. Nāgārjuna said, "Cut it off and take it."

He struck Nāgārjuna's head many times with a sword, but the sword ran through his neck without cutting it, as if through space. At this the Guru said, "I already dissolved the sins committed through the use of weapons five hundred births ago. Therefore, weapons cannot cut me. However, I still have an as yet undissolved sin, due to my killing a worm while cutting *kuśa* grass. Use *kuśa* grass. That will work."

When the *kuśa* grass was collected and used, his head fell to the ground. Nāgārjuna said, "I will go from here to the Heaven of Great Bliss <188> and will re-enter this body afterwards." So saying, he passed away in peace.

Thus, if extraordinary persons had to suffer these kinds of effects from their actions, why not we, who have been wandering through the various regions of *samsāra* since beginningless time, committing countless evil acts? If you continue to accumulate demeritorious reactions, you will have no possibility of escaping from the lower regions, not to speak of escaping from *samsāra*! Therefore, always, at every moment, avoid demeritorious actions, no matter how infinitesimal they may be. If you do not do this, it is possible to commit a demeritorious act in a second that will cause you to remain in hell for many aeons. Hence, you should not underestimate a demerit because of its negligible size.

The Bodhisattva Śāntideva said:

If even a sin committed in a moment
Can place one in the Maximum Torture Hell for an
aeon,
Need it be said that the sins one has accumulated
throughout the beginningless *samsāra*
Will prevent one from going to the upper regions?

The Dzang-lün Sūtra states:

**Do not ignore sins merely because they are small.
However small sparks may be,
They can burn haystacks as big as mountains. <189>**

Similarly, you should not ignore a small meritorious act, for it can bring great results. When King Nga-lay-nu⁵⁷ was born as a pauper, he took a handful of soybeans and went to look for a bride. On the way he met a Buddha named Sökyab who was going to the city. Moved by great devotion, he threw the handful of soybeans to the Buddha.

Four [of the beans] fell into His begging bowl, and two touched His heart. The effect of this action was that [Nga-lay-nu] took rebirth in this world as a universal monarch. Because four of the beans fell into the begging bowl, he ruled over the four continents for eighty thousand years. As for the two beans that touched the Buddha's heart, one made [Nga-lay-nu] the overlord of the four great cardinal kings for eighty thousand years, and the other made him the ruler of half the Kingdom of Indra in the Trayāstrīmśa heaven until thirty-seven Indras had [come and] gone. If you toss even a single blossom skyward for the Buddhas, you will acquire enough merit to become [both] Indra and a universal monarch.

The Dzang-lün states:

**Do not ignore small merits,
Thinking that they are not beneficial.
By accumulating tiny drops of water,
Large vessels are filled. <190>**

The Yön-ten Dzö states:

**From a seed as small as a mustard [seed],
Banyan trees in time bear fruit;
A single branch alone covers about a mile.**

⁵⁷ na.las.nu / S. Māndhātā

**But [even] this example is inadequate to show
How the forms of virtue and sin develop.**

Although a banyan tree has seeds that are smaller than mustard seeds, the annual growth of its spreading branches covers a mile. Even this is not a good example of how the effects of virtue and sin grow. The very slightest transgression of the moral precepts initiates an enormous number of negative consequences.

E-lay-dab,⁵⁸ the Serpent-King, once called on Lord Buddha, appearing in the guise of a universal monarch.

"You caused damage to the doctrine of Ö-sung Buddha," Lord Buddha told him. "Are you now trying to damage my doctrine also? Why don't you listen to the Dharma in your own form?"

"There are many who harm me. I dare not come in my own body," he replied.

At this Lord Buddha ordered Vajrapāṇi to protect him. [E-lay-dab] then appeared in the form of a huge snake, his body trailing behind for many leagues. He was suffering greatly from the pressure of a large mimosa tree that was growing on his head, and from the innumerable worms that were eating at its roots. <191>

Asked the cause of all that, the Buddha answered, "In the past he was a monk who followed the teachings of Ö-sung Buddha. While on the road, his clothes were caught by a huge mimosa tree, and he became very angry. Transgressing his vows, he cut down the tree. This is the penalty for that."

It is your motivation⁵⁹ that plays the major role in determining the quality—meritorious or demeritorious, white or black, heavy or light—of all deeds, such as those [mentioned in the above stories]. For example, if the roots of a large tree are medicinal, then its trunk and leaves will also be medicinal. If the roots are poisonous, then the leaves and trunk must [necessarily] be poisonous. It is not possible for [a tree with] poisonous roots to have leaves and other [parts] that

⁵⁸ *e-la'i-dab* / S. Elāpattra

⁵⁹ *kün-long* / kun.sloñ

are medicinal. Similarly, if your mind is defiled by bad motives, attachment, or hatred, the action that follows—however virtuous it may seem—turns, in essence, to vice. If your mind is pure, the action that follows may appear to be vice, but it is still virtue.

The Yön-ten Dzö states:

**If the root is medicinal, the sprout is also medicinal.
If the root is poisonous, nothing need be said of the
sprout.
It is the virtuous or unvirtuous [character of one's]
thought that makes the difference,
Not the extent to which the [thought] manifests
physically as virtue or vice.**

Thus, if they maintain purity of mind by having no personal interest whatsoever, <192> there are instances when the scions of the Buddhas, the Bodhisattvas, are actually allowed [to commit] the three physical and four vocal demeritorious actions. For example, take the compassionate sea captain who killed Mi-nag Dung-t'ung, or take Karma, the son of a Brahmin, who copulated with a Brahmin girl. Their stories are as follows.

At one time, when our Lord Buddha was born as a compassionate sea captain, He happened to take five hundred merchants aboard His ship. During the trip, a notorious pirate named Mi-nag Dung-t'ung came to attack the five hundred merchants. The captain thought, "These five hundred merchants are all Bodhisattvas who have attained the spiritual stage of Never Returning.⁶⁰ If one man kills them all, he will have to remain in hell for a great many aeons. He deserves compassion. If I kill him, I will save him from going to hell. Even if I go to hell myself, it cannot be helped." With this broadmindedness, He killed the pirate.

This [deed] earned the Buddha merits that otherwise would have taken Him seventy thousand aeons to earn. Seemingly, the story indicates that a Bodhisattva actually

⁶⁰ *ch'ir mi-dog-pa / phyir mi.ldog.pa*

killed a man; however, [the act of killing] was a meritorious act because the Buddha had no personal interest, instantly saved the lives of five hundred merchants, and, from the ultimate point of view, saved Mi-nag Dung-t'ung from the tortures of hell. <193> Thus, it proved to be a meritorious deed of great magnitude.

Similarly, for many years the Brahmin boy Karma-la Gawa had observed celibacy in the forest. [One day], when he was going to town for alms, a Brahmin girl fell so deeply in love with him that she was on the verge of death. Out of compassion he slept with her. He earned merits that would have taken him forty thousand aeons to earn.

Thus, the taking of life and sexual misconduct are permitted under valid circumstances such as these, but such license is not given to one who is motivated by lust, hatred, or stupidity, [and who acts] for the sake of satisfying his own desire.

Taking what has not been given is also permitted to Bodhisattvas of great mental power who have no personal, vested interest. They can steal [goods] from a wealthy miser for his own good, to use as offerings to the Three Jewels, or to give as alms to beggars.

Telling lies is also permitted in order to save the life of a being on the verge of death, or to protect the property of the Three Jewels. To deceive another for your own purposes is not permitted.

Slanderous speech may be permissible. For example, if there are two intimate friends, one virtuous and the other a sinner, it is possible that the latter, who is more influential, will cause the former to deviate from his meritorious course. Slanderous speech may be used to separate them, <194> but it is not permitted merely to disrupt the friendship between two people.

When mild words are ineffective, harsh words may be used to force a listener to turn his [attention] to the Dharma. They are permitted so that the instructions can counteract the listener's defects. Lord Atisa said, "The best Gurus attack [their disciples'] faults. The best instructions strike at these faults." It is as he has said. However, harsh words are not permitted for the purpose of scorning others.

Idle talk is permitted as a means of inducing those who are fond of talking to enter the Dharma, but it is not permitted as a pastime to entertain yourself and others.

As regards the three mental transgressions, the motivations, [which are already meritorious], cannot be transgressed to become meritorious. When a bad thought appears, the motivation becomes demeritorious. Therefore, no one is permitted to break these.

Mind⁶¹ is the doer of meritorious and demeritorious deeds. Even before an action is expressed through body and speech, in many instances the thought has already generated great effects—virtuous or unvirtuous—at the mental level]. Therefore, always examine your mind. If your mind is virtuous, <195> feel happy and promote the virtue. If it is unvirtuous, you should immediately ask for pardon. Think thus: “How terrible! What a shame! I still have such thoughts even after hearing so much Dharma. From now on I must strive to have no such concepts.” Also, before you perform a virtuous work, first examine your motivation thoroughly. If your motivation is meritorious, then proceed with the activity. If your motivation is based on competing with others, hypocrisy, desiring fame, and the like, correct your motivation again and again so that it is based on bodhicitta. If, at any cost, you cannot correct your motivation, you had better give up that sort of “virtuous” work.

Once, in the past, Ge-shey Ben was to be called upon by many benefactors. That morning, he arranged exceedingly beautiful votive [offerings] before the symbols of the Three Jewels [on his altar]. On checking his motivation, he found that he had done this to make a good impression in the eyes of his benefactors. Thus, finding his motivation to be impure, he threw a handful of dust on the offerings, and said, “Monk, you had better remain dispassionate.” When P'a-dam-pa later heard this he exclaimed, “Nothing could be better than Ben Gung-gyal's handful of dust for the ritual objects of Tibet!” <196>

⁶¹ sem / sems

Thus, at all times and under all circumstances, thoroughly examine your mind. If it is committing sin, recognize this immediately. Ask for pardon, vow [to avoid such thoughts], and so forth, so that your heart does not befriend demerit. It is impossible, however, for an unrealized person to have no ill thoughts in his mind.

Again, Ge-shey Ben once was staying in the home of one of those [aforementioned] benefactors. When all the benefactors were out, he thought, "I have no tea leaves. I had better steal some tea leaves so that I can make tea when I return to my hermitage." So thinking, no sooner had he put his hand into the bag of tea than he came to his senses and shouted for the members of the benefactor's family, saying, "Look what I'm doing! Cut off my hand at the wrist!"

Similarly, Lord Atiśa said:

I was not contaminated by the slightest moral offense after taking the prātimokṣa vows,⁶² although I trespassed once or twice in relation to the bodhicitta vows. But after taking the tantric vows, I committed sins right and left. However, I have never spent a single night contaminated with the sins of transgression.

It is said that when he was traveling, as soon as a bad thought arose, he would take out his wooden maṇḍala to ask for absolution, and immediately rejuvenate his vows.

Likewise, when many Ge-sheys who had assembled at P'en-yül-gyal were treated to yogurt, <197> Ge-shey Ben found himself sitting in the middle of a row. He observed that others, sitting at the heads of the rows, were being sumptuously fed with good yogurt. Thinking that the yogurt was excellent, he feared that he might not get any of [the good] portion. At once, he detected his motive and said to himself, "What a greedy yogurt-eater you are!" So saying, he placed his cup upside-down. When the serving monk came and

⁶² so.so.thar.pa'i sgor žugs / lit. entering the door of personal liberation; i.e., becoming a monk

asked him to take yogurt, he refused, saying, "My evil mind has already taken the yogurt."

There was no demerit in his expecting an equal share of what was being offered to upright monks. He refused to eat simply because he had a selfish motive, wanting a serving for himself out of the better portion. Thus, if you always observe your mind and continue to acquire merit and renounce demerit, your mind will become congenial and turn completely meritorious.

Once there was a Brahmin named Dra-k'en who always observed his mind. He would put aside a black pebble whenever a bad thought occurred in his mind, and a white pebble whenever a good thought [occurred]. At first he found only a heap of black pebbles. He made an active effort to reject evil thoughts and to accept only good thoughts. Then he found an equal proportion of white and black pebbles. Finally there were only white pebbles. Thus, at all times and under all circumstances, use remembrance and watchfulness. <198> Strive to [perform actions that will] generate meritorious influences, and see that you are not contaminated by even the slightest demeritorious deed.

You may not have committed any sin in your present life, but the bounds of the effects of actions that you have accumulated throughout beginningless time are imperceptible. You have an inconceivable amount of that kind of karma, the reactions of which you have yet to experience. [Even] those who presently are engaged solely in meritorious actions and in meditation on Śūnyatā have karma lying dormant that would [normally] cause them to be born in the lower regions. However, the remedial force [of their good actions and meditation causes the latent karma] to arise and manifest, and to mature in this life and cause misery.

The Do-je Chö⁶³ states:

The Bodhisattva who practices Prajñāpāramitā suffers, and suffers very severely, because the effects of actions

⁶³ rdo.rje gchod.pa / S. Vajracchedikasūtra

that would have produced sufferings in the future are matured in this very life.

Similarly, although some people indulge in nothing but sin, they still enjoy themselves. This is due only to the present maturation of [the effects of their past] good actions, that were hitherto dormant. It is said that in the past, the kingdom of Nyi-ög⁶⁴ first received showers of jewels for a week, and then in succession received showers of clothes and grain. Eventually, however, it received showers of earth which buried everything, and the beings destroyed there took rebirth in hell. Therefore, when virtuous people suffer [pain] and unvirtuous people enjoy pleasure, <199> it is completely attributable to the maturing of the effects of their past karma.

Whatever action you perform, meritorious or demeritorious, its effect will manifest either in your next life or in a life after that. It is important that you always believe in this system of cause and effect, and consider what to do and what to avoid. Dharma discussions about high doctrinal views should not undermine [your observance of the law of] cause and effect.

The great O-gyen Rin-po-ch'e said:

Great King! This secret doctrine of mine regards the doctrinal view⁶⁵ as the chief thing. But do not act⁶⁶ in accord with the doctrinal view. If you do, you will tend to follow what is called "the black, nihilistic theory of Māra," which holds that virtuous deeds are as empty as sinful ones. Again, please do not hold a doctrinal view in accord with your actions. If you do, belief in the idea of the real existence of things will bind you so solidly that you will have no occasion to find liberation.

⁶⁴ ñi.'og / S. Aparāntaka

⁶⁵ ta-wa / Ita.ba

⁶⁶ chö-pa / spyod.pa

He further said:

**Therefore, the doctrinal view is higher than the sky;
The cause and effect of karma is even finer than the
flour [used for baking] bread.**

As he said, the more you realize the real nature of the ultimate truth,⁶⁷ the more cautious you should be in dealing with the law of cause and effect.

P'a-dam-pa Rin-po-ch'e was asked, "Will sinful actions bring any harmful result if they are committed after the realization of śūnyatā?"

"If śūnyatā has been realized, there is no reason to sin. Realization of śūnyatā and the birth of compassion should be simultaneous," he replied.

Therefore, if you want to follow the completely pure Dharma, you should pay attention principally to adopting [good actions] and renouncing [bad] actions, <200> and to observing the doctrinal view and [proper] conduct harmoniously.

You should measure the growth of your understanding of the explanation of the cause and effect of karma by Je-tsün Mi-la's attainment. His followers said to Je-tsün Mi-la, "From what we see of your activities, they seem beyond the understanding of an ordinary person. Je-tsün Rin-po-ch'e, from the very beginning, you must have been a reincarnation of either Vajradhara, or the Buddha, or a Bodhisattva. Please be kind enough to tell us."

"Your remark that I must be a reincarnation of either Vajradhara, the Buddha, or a Bodhisattva is an expression of faith in me," Je-tsün Mi-la replied, "but there can be no greater derogatory remark against the Dharma than this. To begin with, I committed such heavy sins by means of black magic and hailstorms that I thought I would certainly be reborn in hell. Therefore, I practiced the Dharma with one-pointed effort. Because [I employed] the most powerful tantric methods, extraordinary virtue grew in my mind. You fail because you lack diligence and belief in the cause and ef-

⁶⁷ *ta-wa* (i.e.) *nay-lug-kyi dön* / *lta.ba* (i.e.) *gnas.lugs.kyi don*

fect of karma. If heartfelt belief in the cause and effect of karma is developed, any ordinary being can produce the diligence I had. Then virtue will grow in your mind, <201> and you will feel as though you could be the reincarnation of Vajradhara, the Buddha, or a Bodhisattva."

The absolute conviction that the sin he had accumulated in the beginning would cause him to be reborn in hell arose in Je-tsün Mi-la because of his belief in cause and effect. Depending on that, he followed the Dharma diligently. It would be very difficult to find any biographies from either India or Tibet that tell of an asceticism and industry that parallel his.

Therefore, from the core of your heart, cultivate faith in the cause and effect of karma. At all times and under all circumstances, strive to earn the minutest of good merits in complete awareness of the three perfect principles. Vow not to commit even an iota of sinful action, even if you must lose your life.

When you rise from bed in the morning, do not rush out, like cattle from a pen. While still in bed, relax your mind, turn your attention inward, and thoroughly examine your mind. If you have committed any sins in the previous night's dreams, repent and ask pardon. If you have performed meritorious acts, be happy and dedicate them for the sake of all sentient beings. Think, "Today, so that an unlimited number of sentient beings may attain Buddhahood, I will earn as much good merit as I can and I will avoid as many sins as I can." <202> Generate this motivation.

When you are falling asleep, do not sink all at once into unconsciousness. Relax in bed and introspect, as you did before [in the morning]. See what, in essence, you have achieved in the course of the day—what meritorious things you have done. If you have performed some [meritorious acts], be happy. Dedicate the merits earned thereby to all sentient beings, for their realization of Buddhahood. If you have committed demeritorious actions, deplore them. Think that you have already harmed yourself that day, and repent. From the core of your heart, confess [your sins], and vow that you will not repeat them hereafter.

At all times and under all circumstances, live with remembrance and watchfulness. Do not adhere to the belief that the contents (sentient beings) and the container (the phenomenal world) truly exist. Train your mind to consider phenomena as illusory manifestations, devoid of truth. Always keep your mind on the straight, meritorious track that will make it suitable [for pursuing the ultimate realization].

In short, the essential purpose of the four chapters presented hitherto is to instruct you on how to withdraw your mind from samsāra. If you adhere to these instructions, whatever meritorious acts you perform will remain consistent with the three perfect principles.

It is said:

**Virtue is like a medicinal plant;
Whoever touches it will be benefited.
Vice is like a poisonous plant; <203>
Whoever touches it will be destroyed.**

As stated, you can turn anyone with whom you have contact toward the sublime Dharma through the pure power of your virtuous mind. Great merits for yourself and others will increase continuously. During all your future births you will never be born in the lower regions into which heretics fall. You will acquire the unique physical bodies possessed by the gods and men in the upper regions. At the least, wherever a person who has Dharma resides, merit, goodness, and the protection of the gods will always prevail.

**Although I know the varieties of cause and effect, my
faith is weak.**

**Although I have heard the noble Dharma many times, I
leave it unpracticed.**

**May I and sentient beings like me, who behave badly,
Be blessed to merge our minds with the Dharma.**

This is the analytical instruction on the cause and effect of karma.

[Preface to Chapters Five and Six]

Many learned saints accepted him as a follower;
Carrying out the instructions of his Gurus, he put [the
teachings] into practice;
He showed [his followers] the unmistakable, supreme
path of freedom;
At the feet of my unparalleled Guru, I pay homage.

The instructions in [Chapter] Five, *The Benefit of Freedom*, and [Chapter] Six, *Following a Spiritual Teacher*, [consist of] the manner of listening to [the Dharma], which is the same as [before], and the main subjects to be explained.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Benefit of Freedom

“Freedom” means to be liberated from this great ocean of samsaric suffering. To attain any of the [liberated] states achieved by the Śrāvakas, Pratyekabuddhas, or Bodhisattvas is freedom. [The instruction on the benefit of freedom¹] is twofold:

1. The Cause [of Attaining the State of Freedom];
2. The Result: [The State of Freedom].

1 THE CAUSE [OF ATTAINING THE STATE OF FREEDOM]

First, beginning with the difficulty of obtaining leisure and endowment, the four kinds of practices that turn the mind [away from samsāra]² should make your mind suitable for the practice [of Dharma]. As regards the specific instructions of the subsequent chapters, beginning with the taking of refuge that lays the foundation-stone for all the paths, up to the end of all the chapters which cover the accomplishment of the main subject of the path,³ they will be expounded, along with their benefits, as the chapters are dealt with individually.

¹ *t'ar-pay p'en-yön / thar.pa'i phen.yon*

² *lo-dog nam-zhi / blo.ldog rnam.bzí / i.e., the subjects of Part One, Chapters One through Four*

³ i.e., the subjects of Part Two, Chapters One through Six, and Part Three

2 THE RESULT: [THE STATE OF FREEDOM]

To obtain any of the Śrāvakas', Pratyekabuddhas', or Bodhisattvas' three ultimate goals is to attain peace, tranquility, and freedom from the narrow passages of worldly suffering. Hence, how happy you should be! Since you have encountered Mahāyāna [Buddhism] in this life, you should practice everything—the ten meritorious actions, the four immeasurable virtues,⁴ the six pāramitās, the four kinds of dhyāna,⁵ the four kinds of formless dhyāna,⁶ śamatha and vipāśana meditation,⁷ and so on—with the sole intention to achieve the perfect enlightenment.

While thinking thus, perform your practices with remembrance of the three perfect principles: [1] mental preparation by developing bodhicitta; [2] the main practice of non-conceptual meditation; and [3] subsequent dedication of the merits with proper prayers.

⁴ see Part Two, Chapter Two

⁵ *sam-ten zhi* / *bsam.gtan bži* / see Part Two, Chapter Two

⁶ *zug-me zhi* / *gzugs.med bži*

⁷ *zhi-l'ag nyi* / *ži.lhag gñis* / concentration and insight

CHAPTER SIX

Following a Spiritual Teacher

With regard to the instruction on following a spiritual teacher,¹ <205> in all the Sūtras, Tantras, and Śāstras, there is no account that tells of anyone who attained Buddhahood without a Guru. Also, it is obvious that no one has achieved the virtues of the spiritual stages and paths through guess-work and self-concoctions: [lacking a Guru], all sentient beings, yourself included, will simply follow a wrong path. As regards the path of freedom and omniscience, you are like a blindman bewildered on a desolate plain. [Similarly], there is no example of anyone who obtained gems from a jewel-island without relying on a sea captain. Spiritual teachers and spiritual friends are the real guides to the freedom and omniscience [of Buddhahood]. Therefore, you must rely on them with respect. To do so, [you must know] three things:

1. How to Examine the Guru;
2. How to Follow the Guru;
3. How to Learn [the Manner in Which the Guru] Thinks and Acts.

1 HOW TO EXAMINE THE GURU

In general, because ordinary people are easily changed by immediate conditions, such as [the influence of] friends, at all times and under all circumstances, they should rely on spiritual teachers and spiritual friends. For example, if a log of

¹ *shey-nyen ten-pay t'ri / b'ses.gñen bsten.pa'i khrid*

ordinary wood remains in a sandalwood forest for many years, <206> it too will acquire a sweet aroma. Similarly, if you rely on, and abide by, a virtuous, noble person, the sweet aroma of his virtue will suffuse you, and the whole of your behavior will become like his.

As it is said:²

**Just as in a dense forest of sandalwood trees,
Where even the stray log of ordinary wood
Acquires the fragrance of sandalwood from the constant
touch of the moist branches and leaves,
Things acquire the qualities of that with which they
associate.**

During the present deteriorated period, finding a Guru who is perfectly endowed with all the characteristics described in the precious Tantras is difficult. Nevertheless, whoever he may be, the Guru on whom you rely must definitely have all these qualities: a pure lineage, due to the fact that his [behavior] is not contrary to the allowances and prohibitions of the three vows, which are the outer vow of individual liberation, the inner vow of bodhicitta, and the secret tantric vow; clear and wide understanding of the subjects of the Sūtras, Tantras, and Śāstras; a mind saturated with affection and kindness for the boundless sentient beings, [each of] whom he regards as his only child; expertise in the exoteric methods of the Tripitaka and the esoteric rituals of the four classes of Tantra; clear evidence that, as a result of having put the meaning [of the Dharma] into practice, he has fully attained the extraordinary virtues of the insight [that stems from] abandoning [the obscurations];³ and [the ability] to draw fortunate followers by the power of the four attractions: charity, soothing speech, serving the causes of others, and acting in accord with the Dharma. <207> These he must have.

² This verse is from Jig-me Ling-pa's Yön-ten Rin-po-ch'ey Dzö, as are the majority of uncited verses that follow throughout the chapter.

³ *pang-tog / spangs.rtogs*

One who has perfected all the methods of the noble Dharma is,
Due to the power of this deteriorated time, difficult to find.
Yet, since he has purified his [mental] ground by [observing] the allowances and prohibitions of the three vows,
Has moistened [it] with learning and great compassion,
Is expert in dealing with the ocean-like Pitakas and Tantras,
Is enriched by the undefiled fruit of the wisdom of insight [attained after] abandoning [obscuration],⁴
And with the four essences of attraction, a multi-colored blossom,
Gathers fortunate followers like bees—he should be followed.

In particular, a Guru who imparts the profound instructions of the esoteric Vajrayāna should, as described in the precious Tantras, have been matured through receiving an unbroken chain of initiations; have fully observed the obligations and vows he undertook when receiving those initiations; be tranquil and disciplined, because he suffers from fewer miseries and superstitions [than ordinary people]; have comprehensive knowledge of the meaning of the basis, path, and goal of all the secret Vajrayāna Tantras; have had visions of the tutelary deities and so on, which are the indications of having completed the cycle of mantra recitation and of having obtained perfection in meditation; have attained self-liberation, because he fully understands the real meaning of the ultimate truth; strive only to benefit others, because his mind is filled with compassion; have little to do, because he has abandoned attachment to this worldly life; be earnestly interested in the Dharma, because he is concerned with the life hereafter; <208> have remorse and encourage others as well to have remorse, because he sees samsāra as misery; be ex-

⁴ *pang-tog ye-shey / sparis.rtogs ye.ses*

pert in attracting disciples with means suited [to their individual natures]; and should possess the blessings pertaining to his spiritual lineage, because he has obeyed his Guru. It is on such a [Guru] you should rely.

It is said:

In particular, the Guru who imparts the secret techniques [of the Vajrayāna]
Should have received initiations, have maintained the [tantric] bond, and should be extremely peaceful.
He should be well-versed in the basis, path, and goal [of the Tantras],
Should have the signs of having completed the mantras and perfected the practices of meditation,
And should have liberated himself through insight.
He should have limitless compassion and care only for others,
Have little to do and intensely think of the Dharma,
Have great remorse and encourage it in others also,
Be resourceful in means, and have the blessings of his spiritual lineage.
If you follow someone like that, you can quickly [attain] accomplishment.⁵

On the contrary, you should abandon a so-called “guru” who has the following characteristics: one who has not the slightest knowledge of hearing, contemplating, and meditating on [the Dharma], yet thinks, “Being the royal son or cousin of such and such a Guru, I am superior to others; furthermore, my family lineages are also superior”—like a Brahmin preserving his caste; or, one who has some slight knowledge of hearing, contemplating, and meditating on [the Dharma], but has acquired it not with a pure motivation, [that is], for the purpose of life hereafter, <209> but rather for the sake of this life, fearing that his [own] Guru’s center, at which place he resides, will decline in importance. One who does such things is said to be like a wooden grinder, [which is inca-

⁵ *ngö-drub* / dños.grub / S. siddhiphala

pable of grinding a hard substance]: he cannot transform the wild mind of a student.

Although [such a “guru”] has no knowledge that distinguishes him from an ordinary person, because some fools show faith in him without scrutinizing him, he acquires a high place. Honor and gifts make his ego swell to such an extent that his mind becomes filled with arrogance, and hence he cannot appreciate the noble qualities [of others]. Such a person is called “a frog in a well.”

There once was an old frog who had lived all his life in a well. A sea frog once paid him a visit.

“Where do you come from?” asked the frog in the well.

“I come from the great ocean,” replied the other.

“How big is your ocean?”

“It’s very large,” came the reply.

“Could it be one-fourth the size of my well?”

“Bigger than that.”

“Half of it?”

“No, bigger than that.”

“Well then, is it as large as this well?”

“There is no comparison.”

“Such a thing could not possibly exist. I must see it.”

They went off together, and when the frog from the well saw the ocean, it is said that he fainted, cracked his head, and died.

Because [a false “guru”] has not studied with a learned Guru and has not practiced the Sūtras and Tantras, he has little learning. Because he has coarse mental delusions and is lacking in remembrance and watchfulness, <210> he breaks his vows and betrays the [tantric] bond. Although his [level of] spiritual development is lower than that of a common person, he acts as if he were a realized yogi. Hence, he behaves in a lofty manner. Because of his hatred and his malicious criticism [of others], his towrope of loving-kindness and compassion is broken. Such a “spiritual teacher” is called “a mad guide”: he will lead you on a wrong path.

In particular, a “guru” whose knowledge does not exceed your own and who lacks loving-kindness and compassion—*bodhicitta*—is called “a blind guide.” [Such a “guru”] cannot

open your eyes to what you should adopt and what you should renounce.

It is said:

**One who, like a Brahmin, preserves his caste,
Or, one who fears for his center's decline,
Learns and thinks with an improper aim, which is like
bathing in a [contaminated] tank [in the hope of
being purified].**

**A guide who is like a wooden grinder,
Although his nature does not transcend that of a
common person,
Secures [an honored] place because of the unfounded
faith of fools.**

**Becoming arrogant due to the wealth and respect he
receives,
Such a "spiritual teacher" is like a frog in a well;
His learning being little, he betrays the vows and
[tantric] bond.**

**One whose understanding is inferior, yet whose
behavior floats beyond the earthly level,
One whose towrope of loving-kindness and compassion
is broken—
Such a mad guide propagates sin.**

**In particular, as he has no more virtue than do you,
If the fame of he who has no bodhicitta leads you to
follow him, <211>
You will make the great mistake of having a blindman
for a guide;
Associating with an impostor, you will go astray in the
dense darkness [of ignorance].**

Therefore, the great O-gyen Rin-po-ch'e said:

**Having an unexamined Guru is like drinking poison;
Having an unexamined disciple is like jumping off a
cliff.**

Because the Guru is the one on whom you must depend throughout many rebirths [in the future] and the one who shows you the things you should avoid and those you should adopt, if you find a false "guru" through lack of proper examination, you will ruin the meritorious virtues you may have earned during a whole lifetime as a faithful follower. The favorable state you have obtained in this life will be rendered useless. For example, this is like mistaking the coil of a venomous snake at the foot of a tree for shade, so that you are killed when you approach the tree.

It is said:

**Therefore, if the noble teacher is not carefully
examined,**

The devotee's virtuous merits will be wasted.

**You who have found [this] one opportunity of leisure
Will be deceived by mistaking**

A poisonous snake for the shade of a tree.

Hence, you must thoroughly examine the Guru so that you make no mistake in finding one with the aforementioned qualities. And, having found him, you should not fail to treat him as a real Buddha. Such a fully qualified Guru is [in fact] the compassionate wisdom of all the Buddhas of the ten directions, <212> manifesting in human form solely for the sake of those sentient beings who are ready to be delivered.

It is said:

**A Guru endowed with all these qualities
Embodies the compassionate wisdom of all the
Buddhas.**

**Appearing in human form in the world of disciples,
He is the paramount root of all accomplishments.**

For the sake of promoting his followers through skillful means, such a Guru may, at present, be behaving like a common man. But in the real sense, his mind equals that of the Buddha, and therefore he is altogether different from an ordinary person. All his actions are done solely in order to

adjust to the nature of his followers, and you should definitely regard them as thoughtful conduct which is superior to that of others. Expert in eliminating doubt, and patient with the misconduct, dejection, and fatigue of his followers, he acts like the mother of an only child.

It is said:

**In the sense of the gradual method, he accords with all;
In the sense of the abrupt method, he is altogether
contrary to all;
Because of his profound insight, he surpasses all.
Expert in eliminating doubts, he is patient with
misconduct, dejection, and fatigue.**

Such a Guru, one well endowed with all virtues, is like a great ship that crosses the ocean of samsāra; like a navigator who makes no mistakes in charting the way to freedom and omniscience; <213> like a rain of nectar that extinguishes the massive, blazing fire of karma and delusion; like the sun and moon that clear the dense darkness of ignorance and bring the light of Dharma; like the earth that can accommodate different views and actions, and endure ingratitudo and despondency; like a [wish-fulfilling] tree, the source of all virtues, that provides benefit for the present life and comfort for the next; like an excellent vase that stores an inconceivable number of doctrinal schools and views, and answers all needs; like a wish-fulfilling gem, forming the ocean-like source that provides accomplishment in the four different types of action;⁶ like a loving parent, treating the boundless number of sentient beings impartially—making no distinctions, whether they are close relations or strangers, [deserving of] love or hatred; like a river, for his compassion is great, being mindful of sentient beings equal to the limits of the sky, and especially swift to flow to suffering beings who have no protector; like Mount Sumeru, for his sympathetic joy remains unchanged by jealousy and unshaken by the wind that mistakes falsehood for

⁶ pacifying, increasing, wielding authority, and applying force

truth; like a rain-bearing cloud, for his impartiality is unper-
turbed by attachment and hatred.

It is said:

Like a great ship that crosses over the ocean of
samsāra;
Like a true sea captain who is undeluded as to the best
course;
Like a rain of nectar that extinguishes the fire of bad
karma and delusion; <214>
Like the sun and moon that dispel the darkness of
ignorance;
Like the earth that has enormous forbearance;
Like the wish-[fulfilling] tree that is the source of
benefit and pleasure;
Like a noble vase that holds a treasure of Dharma;
Like something that surpasses even the all-producing,
wish-fulfilling gem;
Like a loving parent who has equal affection for all;
Like a river of compassion, swift and mighty;
Like Mount Sumeru, [whose] happiness is unchanging;
Like a rain-bearing cloud whose impartiality is
unperturbed. . . .

From the standpoint of grace and blessings, such a Guru is equal to all the Buddhas. A good relationship [with him] will provide Buddhahood in one lifetime, and a bad one will provide liberation toward the end of the world.

It is said:

Such a Guru equals all the Buddhas.
If even one who harms him makes contact with the path
of bliss,
Upon a person who follows him with genuine faith,
The virtues of his exalted state and highest good
will shower like rain.

2 HOW TO FOLLOW THE GURU

From the Dön-po Kö-pa:

Nobly born child, assume yourself to be a patient....

There are many such analogies. For example, an ailing patient seeks expert doctors; a traveler journeying on a dangerous road engages heroic escorts for protection; <215> those who are facing thieves, robbers, ferocious animals, and other [dangers] seek [body]guards for protection; seafarers need the help of the navigator; those who intend to cross a river in a boat depend on the boatman. Similarly, to protect yourself from the dangers of birth, death, and delusion, you must depend on a Guru and on spiritual teachers.

It is said:

**Just as patients [depend] on a doctor,
 Travelers on an escort,
 Those facing danger on a protector,
 Merchants on a sea captain,
 And passengers on a boatman,
 One who fears the enemies—birth, death, and delusion—
 should depend [on a Guru].**

You should have a great armor of courage, so that you do nothing contrary to the wishes of your Guru and spiritual teachers, even at the cost of your life. You must possess extremely well-founded wisdom, so that no incidental causes can change your views. [You should] sacrifice your life and body for the sake of caring for your Guru and obeying his words, without considering yourself at all. Such a devotee attains liberation solely through devotion to the Guru.

**Having a great armor [of courage] and firm wisdom,
 Offering service heedless of body and life,
 Obeying [the Guru's] instructions without thinking of
 himself—
 Such a person is liberated by devotion alone.**

Your faith should be great, <216> so that you can see the Guru as a real Buddha. Your intelligence and [ability to] learn should be great, so that you can understand how the mental behavior of [such a] resourceful expert functions and can grasp whatever sublime Dharma he teaches. You should have great, affectionate compassion for those who suffer from miseries and have no protector. You should respect the vows and [tantric] bond with which the Guru has entrusted you. Your body, speech, and mind should be peaceful and subdued. You should be able to accommodate any behavior that the Guru and your spiritual teachers [may manifest]. You should be a great offerer, for you should spend whatever you have for the sake of the Guru. Since your mind should not have the defect of bad thoughts, you should always have a transcendent outlook.⁷ You should know that if you do anything demeritorious, you will incur the displeasure of the noble Guru, and hence you should behave discreetly. In these aforesaid ways, you should follow the Guru.

It is said:

**One who has devotion, transcendent wisdom, [the ability to] learn, and great compassion,
Respects the vows and [tantric] bond, is disciplined in body, speech and mind,
Is broadminded, generous, of transcendent outlook,
modest....**

Thus, in this way, at all times and under all circumstances, your behavior and manner of doing things should conform to his views.

You should be expert in restraining yourself from doing whatever will not be to his liking. Like an excellent horse, even if he reprimands you fiercely, do not become angry and quarrelsome. Like a ferry, have no complaints while doing errands for your Guru. <217> Like a bridge, be tolerant of whatever kind of work the Guru may assign you, whether

⁷ *dag-nang* / *dag.snañ* / to view all conceptual things as pure, as they are seen by an undeluded mind

good or bad. Like a blacksmith's anvil, forbear while dealing with all kinds of difficulties, [such as] cold and heat. Like a serf or servant, be obedient. Like one who sweeps the floor, have no arrogance, but be humble. Like a bull that has lost its horns, abandon vanity [and be respectful to all]. It is stated in the Dön-po Kö-pa and other Sūtras that you should follow the Guru with all these kinds of humility.

**Like a hero, he protects the Guru extremely well;
 Like an excellent horse, he does not react to the Guru's
 reproach;
 Like a boat, he expresses no sorrow in going back and
 forth [on errands];
 Like a bridge, he forbears everything, whether good or
 bad;
 Like an anvil, he can tolerate heat and cold;
 Like a serf or servant, he obeys whatever the [Guru]
 commands;
 Like one who sweeps and cleans, he is free of arrogance;
 Like a hornless bull, he has no vanity;
 "Follow the Guru in this way," the Piṭakas state.**

You should please the Guru by making three kinds of offerings. The best [offering] is called "the offering of practice," which refers to practicing all of whatever Dharma you have been taught by your Guru, while enduring hardship with perseverance. The intermediate [offering] is that of body and speech, <218> which refers to rendering physical, vocal, and mental services to the Guru. The inferior way to please the Guru is through making liberal offerings of material things such as food and wealth.

It is said:

**If you have wealth, offer it to the Fourth Jewel.
 Homage, reverence, the use of vocal and physical
 services, and the like,
 Will never go to waste.
 Of the three [ways to] please him, practicing [the
 Dharma] is the best.**

In whatsoever incomprehensible manner the Guru may behave, you should know that it [represents] skillful behavior [which is being manifested for the sake of meeting some need], and you should regard it as perfect.

Long ago, when the *Pandit Nāropa* was functioning as a learned and well-attained scholar, his tutelary deity said to him, “The superb being Tilopa is the Guru of your chain of previous lives. Go to eastern India [and find him].”

He immediately left for the east, but he did not know where to find Tilopa. When he inquired of the local people, they said, “We do not know who Tilopa is.”

“Was there ever one named Tilopa in this area?” he insisted.

“There is a beggar called Tilopa, Tilopa the Destitute,” came the reply.

At this, *Nāropa* told himself, “That might be he, since there is no certainty about the way in which a realized person may behave.” So he inquired further, asking, “Where does that beggar, Tilopa, live?”

“Over there,” they responded, “in that ruined foundation of a building where you can see smoke.”

When *Nāropa* went there, he saw Tilopa sitting with a dish full of dead and live fish before him. <219> He observed Tilopa picking up a fish, roasting it in the fire, and simultaneously snapping his fingers as he put it into his mouth. He prostrated to Tilopa and requested to be taken as a disciple.

“What do you mean? I am only a beggar,” said the Guru. But, after he persisted in his request, Tilopa accepted him.

Tilopa’s behavior did not mean that he was hungry, had nothing to eat, and was killing the fish. Rather, the fish were beings of bad karma who had failed, due to their stupidity, to choose right over wrong. Tilopa had the spiritual power to liberate them [from the lower realms]. Therefore, he used their material bodies [to make] a karmic connection [with them], and then transported their consciousnesses to the Pure Lands. Similarly, Sarahapa pretended to be an arrow-maker, Šavaripa to be a hunter, and so forth. Thus, almost all the highly realized sages of India were found in the form of fishermen or people in extreme destitution. In whatever way

Gurus behave, do not view them with any antipathy; you must practice [maintaining] a solely transcendent outlook.

It is said:

Whatever be their behavior, do not view them with antipathy.

Most of the great sages of India appeared as fishermen, outcasts, sinners, and ordinary beings.

Not only did they appear dissipated, they even appeared to be extremely degenerate.

If, on the contrary, you observe [a Guru's seeming] mistakes with an antagonistic view, "through long association you will see faults even in a Buddha." <220>

As in that saying, even He who was a Buddha was viewed as having faults. In the past, Lord Buddha's half brother, the monk Leg-pay Kar-ma,⁸ served the Buddha for twenty-four years. Although he could recite the twelve Piṭakas by heart, he found all Lord Buddha's activities to be deceitful. Developing unmanageable antipathy, he thought himself the equal of Lord Buddha in everything, except for the light rays an arm-span in length [that emanated from the Buddha's body].

For twenty-four years have I served You.

Except for Your body that [emanates] an arm-span's length of light,

I do not see any knowledge even the size of a sesame seed in You.

I am more learned in Dharma.

I see no reason to serve my equal.

So saying, he left.

Kün-ga-wo, a disciple of Lord Buddha, asked where Leg-pay Kar-ma would be reborn. [The Buddha] said that Leg-pay Kar-ma would die in a week's time and be reborn as a preta in a flower garden. Kün-ga-wo paid a visit to Leg-pay Kar-ma and told him what the Buddha had said. Leg-pay

⁸ legs.pa'i skar.ma / S. Sunaksatra

Kar-ma reflected that, at times, the “lies” told by the Buddha had turned out to be true. He decided to be very careful for a week, so that once the week had passed [and he was still alive], he could criticize Him. Thinking thus, he did not eat for a week. On the night of the seventh day he felt thirsty, <221> drank water which he could not digest, and died. He was reborn as a preta with nine ugly marks on his body.

Thus, if you see defects in the behavior of the noble Guru, you should reproach yourself. You should think as follows, “[This illusory defect] is due to my own eyes and mind, which are not clear. There cannot be an iota of defect or fault in his behavior.” Thinking thus, you should develop greater faith and a faultless view [towards the Guru].

It is said:

**Lacking in the power of self-control, the fault-finder
suffered immeasurable retribution.**

**The way in which the monk Kar-zang,⁹ who knew the
twelve Piṭakas by heart,
Was struck by the power of sin and viewed the Buddha's
activities as deceitful should be well-considered.
Think carefully and reform yourself.**

Similarly, you may feel that the noble Guru is particularly hostile towards you. Instead of becoming angry, think that he finds it necessary to assume that rough attitude in order to deal with the defects he sees in you. When he calms down, go to him, confess your mistakes, and rejuvenate your vows.

It is said:

**If you see hostility in the Guru,
He has perceived your defects and is subduing them
harshly, <222>
Knowing the time to be appropriate;
[Therefore], confess and [renew] the vow.
An intelligent person does not fall under Māra's
influence.**

⁹ i.e., Leg-pay Kar-ma

Usually, when you are in the presence of the Guru, you should not remain seated when he rises; you should get up at once. You should inquire about his health and provide him with whatever things he may need.

If you are accompanying him when he goes out, do not walk before him, because you will be showing him your back. If you walk behind him, you will be treading on his footprints, which you should not do. If you walk to his right, you will be occupying the head of the row, which you should not do. Therefore, as a follower, walk respectfully on the Guru's left side, a little to the rear. If there is danger [on the road, in order to protect him], with his permission, there is no mistake in walking ahead of him.

Regarding the Guru's carpets and horses, neither tread on the former nor ride on the latter. Even the doors [of his house] should be closed and opened gently, not forcefully. You should neither overly display physical beauty nor manifest a grumpy face. Avoid telling him what is not true, <223> talking at random without careful observation, joking, playing, laughing, and [engaging in] meaningless and irrelevant gossip. Have a sense of respect and [an attitude of] reverential fear, and do not be disdainful; rather, cultivate a peaceful manner.

It is said:

When the Lama gets up, do not remain seated.

**When he is sitting, inquire of his health and provide
what he wants.**

**When he moves about, as a follower, go neither before
him, behind him, nor to his right.**

**The use of his seat and horse, and [indulging in] con-
temptuous talk, diminishes your merit.**

**Banging doors, displaying vanity, showing a grumpy
face,**

**Telling lies, gossiping, joking, and laughing should be
abandoned.**

Follow him with a calm body, speech, and mind.

If there is someone who speaks ill of the Guru and is hostile towards him, you should not befriend him. If you have the power to make him alter his view of disregard for the Guru and his speaking ill of him, you should do so. If you cannot, then you should avoid the pleasure of talking with him.

It is said:

If someone speaks ill of the Guru and bears a hostile attitude towards him, avoid befriending him; However, if you can, change his attitude. If you talk with [such a person] pleasantly, the influence of sin will generate a tremendous force, And will render the [tantric] bond defective.

In the same way, however long you have associated with the followers of the Guru and your Vajra brothers and sisters, <224> do not grow vexed and become contemptuous of them. Rather, be as easily adaptable as a belt. In responding to any [of their] immediate needs, give up your feeling of superiority and be as responsive as salt [is to water]. Even if those who oppose you speak ill of you, quarrel with you, or place an unbearable load on you, be as enduring as a pillar and continue your friendship with them.

It is said:

**Be as adaptable as a belt,
As responsive as salt,
And as enduring as a pillar.
Be friendly with the Guru's followers and your Vajra friends.**

3 HOW TO LEARN [THE MANNER IN WHICH] THE GURU THINKS AND ACTS

Thus, by remembering all the ways of following the Guru, you should behave like swans that live in an excellent pond, and without muddying the water, enjoy playing in it; and like bees that visit a flower garden, and without damaging the

color or fragrance of the flowers, collect the nectar and fly away. In the same way, without being oppressed or discouraged by a sense of dejection or tiredness, you should fulfill the orders of the Guru and uphold his appreciation [of you]. Depending on the effect of faith and perseverance, your receiving and absorbing the entire wisdom of learning, thinking, and meditating that the noble Guru has within him should be like the pouring of the contents of one perfect flask into another. <225>

**Like swans that dwell in a superior pond,
And like bees that taste the nectar of flowers,
With behavior [that shows] amazing and eternal
friendship,
Without sadness or fatigue,
Hold the Guru's appreciation,
And taste the virtues your faith attracts [in turn].**

Similarly, when the noble Guru is putting bodhicitta into practice in order to accrue a tremendous amount of relative and absolute merit, you yourself should make some small material contribution, offer vocal and physical service, or, in the least, offer appreciation by agreeing with whatever he has undertaken. By so doing, you will obtain the same amount of merit that the noble Guru has acquired through his unique motivation.

For example, once there were two travelers who happened to visit central and western Tibet. For rations, one of them had a small quantity of black pea flour, which he mixed with a quantity of good barley flour belonging to the other man. A few days later, the man with the greater amount of barley flour said to him, "By now your pea flour should be finished."

"I wonder. Let's have a look in the bag," he replied. They found that the pea flour was still there. In the same way, although they inspected it many times, <226> they could [still] see the pea flour. Thus, they had to eat the whole of the flour together.

As in this example, whatever merits others may be earning, if you join them by making a small material contribution or

by [performing] a physical or vocal service, you too will enjoy that merit equally. In particular, immediate services to the Guru, such as running errands, carrying messages, and in the least, sweeping the floor of his residence, are an unmistakable way to earn merit. Therefore, put forth your best effort in performing them.

It is said:

**When the Noble One is earnestly practicing to earn the
relative and absolute merits,
Behave in an agreeable manner;
Serve, run errands, sweep, and clean:
These are the best methods by which to earn merit that
will bring rewarding fruits of labor.**

As an object for taking refuge, and [as a means] for earning merits as well, there is nothing that surpasses the Guru. In particular, when he is bestowing initiations, preaching, and so forth, the supreme merits and blessings of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the three times and ten directions enter him. [At that time,] he is no different from all the Buddhas. By offering him even a morsel of food at that time, you will earn more merits than you would by making <227> hundreds of thousands of offerings at other times.

When visualizing [the forms of] deities during Mahāyoga meditation, if you regard them as the forms of deities, while recognizing them to be intrinsically no other than your own Root-Guru, the blessings will enter you speedily. Every [aspect of] the growth of primordial wisdom¹⁰ in your mind through Anuyoga meditation is wholly due to the power of your devotion to the Guru, [which] draws the blessings of the insight of his primordial consciousness into you. Since all the meditative methods, such as the two classes of Mahāyoga and Anuyoga, aim at the attainment of the essence that is embodied in the Guru, all the Sūtras and Tantras state that the Guru is actually a Buddha.

¹⁰ *ye-shey* / *ye.śes* / the wisdom of the Buddha, as opposed to *nam-shey* / *rnam.śes*, the knowledge of sentient beings

It is said:

**Why do taking refuge and the field of [earning] merit
[Depend on] the two processes of Outer and Inner
Guru Yoga?**

**It is because the essence of the attainment of Mahāyoga
and Anuyoga is embodied in him,
For all the Sūtras and Tantras have shown him to be a
Buddha.**

Thus, although the noble Guru is the spiritual equal of all the Buddhas, for the sake of liberating unrealized beings like ourselves, he has incarnated in human form and is actually living [among us]. This is the time [when] you should follow exactly whatever he instructs. By offering him the three kinds of service, do your best to transform your mind so that it becomes identical with his mind.

On the contrary, some do not serve him, respect him, obey him, <228> and so forth while he is alive. Rather, they claim to meditate on a picture of him drawn after his death. Others claim to be meditating on the ultimate nature, but they are seeking something profound from somewhere other than [where it can be found]. They do not offer faith, devotion, or prayers to transfer from their [Guru's] mind to their own the virtue he has acquired by abandoning [what should be abandoned] and realizing [what should be realized]. They are called “those who confuse the means with the end.” Those who meet the Guru and obtain his guidance in the *bar-do* do so because of their immeasurable faith, which meets with the force of the Guru’s mercy and goodwill. As the Guru does not physically manifest in the *bar-do*, if you have no faith, however powerful the Guru may be, there is no way for him to lead you through the *bar-do*.

It is said:

**Most fools paint images [of the Guru] and meditate on
them;
They offer him no service when he is actually alive.**

**Without knowing the Guru's mind, they claim to
meditate on the ultimate nature.**

**How deluded they are to confuse the means with the
end!**

**Lacking faith and devotion, how amazing it is to expect
[to meet] him in the bar-do!**

At the beginning, be expert in examining the Guru. "Examining the Guru at the beginning" means to examine him thoroughly before you receive initiations and teachings from him. If he has the complete characteristics of a Guru, you should follow him; if they are incomplete, <229> do not. But once you have accepted him as your Guru, view whatever he does as pure, regard it as entirely virtuous, and develop faith and a transcendent outlook. If you find fault with him, you will accrue unimaginable sufferings.

In general, when testing a Guru, you should see that he has all the qualities of a Guru mentioned in the Sūtras and Tantras. But in particular, he certainly should have bodhicitta in his mind. In short, if you are testing the Guru, your sole criterion should be whether or not he possesses bodhicitta. If he has bodhicitta, he will show his disciples whatever is best for them in their present and future lives. Hence, it is impossible that he will not meaningfully serve their purpose. Since the Dharma shown by that Guru is connected with the Mahāyāna path, in every respect it follows the perfect path. The "guru" who has no bodhicitta is contaminated with selfishness; he will not be able to subdue thoroughly the minds of the disciples. However secret and wonderful the Dharma he teaches may appear to be, ultimately you will find that [his teaching] has been given only for the sake of this life. Thus, here lies the entire secret criterion for testing a Guru. If his mind is filled with bodhicitta, <230> however poor his external appearance may be, you should follow him. One whose mind is severed from bodhicitta is not to be followed, no matter how much he may demonstrate a temporary feeling of withdrawal from samsāra, remorse, the signs of tenacity in practice, and the appearance of excellent behavior.

However, the extraordinary qualifications hidden in the minds of the great beings who remain incognito cannot be understood by ordinary beings like us, even with our best efforts in examining them. On the other hand, even ordinary impostors are expert in deceiving others by behaving exactly like noble people. The Guru with whom you are connected from your previous life is important. Meeting with, listening to, or, at the least, hearing the name of such a Guru will generate such faith in you that the hair on your body will stand on end and your mental attitude will be transformed. That sort of Guru is one with whom you have been connected throughout your previous lives, and you need not test him.

In the past, Rong-tön L'a-ga told Je-tsün Mi-la, "The Guru connected with your past lives is in the Dro-wo-lung Monastery in the south. He is known as the superior man, the king of translators, Mar-pa Lo-tsa-wa. You should go there."

At that instant, when the Je-tsün heard the name of Mar-pa, a unique faith grew in the depths of his heart. Even if it were to cost him his life, he thought, he would go to meet that Guru and obtain his merciful blessings. <231> When he went to see the Guru, Mar-pa came to receive the Je-tsün under the pretense of ploughing his field. As they met on the road, although the Je-tsün did not recognize him as the Guru, the Je-tsün said that his mind, which was actively engaged in thoughts of this world, stopped for a while, and he found himself in an immobile state.

In general, you will find a Guru depending on whether your conceptual mind is pure or not, and also through the influence of karma. In whatever poor state he may be, you must not fail to regard the Guru to whom you owe gratitude for teaching you the Dharma and secret instructions as the real Buddha. If you have no karmic link, you will not have the fortune to meet with a noble Guru. If your vision is not pure, even if you meet with a real Buddha, you will not have the power to recognize him as one who is endowed with virtues. The Guru you meet because of your previous karma and from whom you receive kindness is the most important.

Secondly, when you are following the Guru, overcome any difficulties such as heat, cold, or thirst; fulfill any orders that

the Guru may pass on to you; and offer him devotional and respectful prayers. While following your present schedule, consult with the Guru and follow his suggestions. Follow the Guru by having full faith in him.

Thirdly, “learning [the Guru’s] thoughts and actions” <232> means that you should observe all the acts of the noble Guru closely, and learn how you can act in exactly the same way yourself.

As the worldly saying goes:

**All things are done by mimicry;
That which is done best [reflects] the most skillful
mimicry.**

As in that saying, the practice of the Dharma generally refers to mimicking the doings of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the past. When a disciple follows a Guru, he is learning to be like the Guru. Hence, he should learn how to think and act exactly like the Guru. For example, a disciple following a Guru should be like taking a *sa-tsa* from its mold. Just as a clay cast takes on all the patterns of its mold, the full quantity of the virtue in the Guru’s mind should be present [in that of the disciple]. If that is impossible, at least a somewhat similar [amount of] virtue certainly must be present.

Thus, it is said that one who is initially expert in testing the Guru, secondly expert in following the Guru, and thirdly expert in learning how the Guru thinks and acts, will certainly traverse the sublime path.

**First, be expert in examining the Guru,
Second, be expert in following the Guru,
Third, be expert in learning how the Guru thinks and
acts—
Such a person will traverse the noble path.**

Therefore, having found a noble spiritual teacher endowed with all the [requisite] virtues, <233> in the course of following him do not consider your body and life; rather, follow him

as the Bodhisattva Tag-tu-nğu¹¹ followed the Bodhisattva Chö-p'ag,¹² as Pan-ch'en Nāropa followed the superior being Tilopa; and as Je-tsün Mi-la followed L'o-drag Mar-pa.

How did the Bodhisattva Tag-tu-nğu follow Chö-p'ag? Long ago, the Bodhisattva Tag-tu-nğu went to a desolate place in search of the Prājñapāramitā. He heard a voice from the sky saying, "Son of good family, go to the east and you will find the Prājñapāramitā. Pay no attention to physical fatigue, drowsiness, heat and cold, day and night, and the like. Keep going, without looking to the right or left. Before you have gone far, either you will find the Prājñapāramitā written in a book or you will hear it from a preaching monk who embodies it. If the latter happens, nobly born son, you must conceive of the one from whom you are hearing the Prājñapāramitā as the Buddha, and, venerating the Dharma, you must follow him. Even if you see him indulging in the five sensual pleasures, you should know it to be a Bodhisattva's skillful means, and therefore you should not lose faith in him." <234>

On hearing those [words], Tag-tu-nğu set off towards the east, but he had not gone very far when he thought, "I did not ask the voice how far I would have to go, so I will not know how to get to where the Prājñapāramitā is being propounded." Then and there he began to weep and wail, saying, "Until I obtain the Prājñapāramitā, I will remain without thought as to physical fatigue, hunger and thirst, torpid sleep, day and night, and the like." He remained contemplating, like a mother pining over the death of her only son, [thinking] of nothing other than when he would hear the exposition of the Prājñapāramitā.

A figure of a Buddha then appeared before him, praising the manner in which he was searching for the Dharma. That Buddha instructed him as follows, "At a distance of five hundred leagues from here, there is a city fully developed in all its amenities, called the City of Incense, which is built out of

¹¹ rtag.tu.nğu / S. Sadāprarudita

¹² chos.'phags / S. Dharmodgata

seven kinds of precious jewels and surrounded by five hundred parks. At its central crossing place lies the mansion of the Bodhisattva Chö-p'ag. Made of seven precious jewels, [the mansion] covers an area about one league [square]. Amid parks and other fully developed comforts, the Bodhisattva Mahāsattva Chö-p'ag lives with his followers, along with sixty-eight thousand women. <235> They have [an abundance of] the five sensual stimulants and the power to enjoy them to the fullest extent. The Prājñapāramitā is revealed throughout all the past, present, and future times to the people who live there. Go to him. From him you will hear the Prājñapāramitā."

On hearing this, Tag-tu-ngu transported himself [into a trance]. By remaining with no thoughts in his mind, he had a vision of that place and heard Chö-p'ag revealing the Prājñapāramitā. He also understood various entrances to meditation, saw innumerable Buddhas preaching the Prājñapāramitā in the worlds of the ten directions, and saw them preaching the Dharma and praising the Bodhisattva Chö-p'ag. The vision then disappeared. The Bodhisattva Tag-tu-ngu developed happiness, faith, and respect for the Bodhisattva Chö-p'ag, and tried to think of how he could call on the Bodhisattva Chö-p'ag.

[Tag-tu-ngu] was so poor that he had neither the clothes, jewels, incense, beads, nor other articles used for honoring a religious teacher with which he could pay homage to the Bodhisattva Chö-p'ag. <236> Then he thought of paying homage to the Bodhisattva Chö-p'ag with money realized by selling [parts of his own] body. He said to himself, "Throughout the beginningless samsāra, an immeasurable [number] of my bodies have been sold, and as a result of my desire, innumerably [many] of my bodies have been destroyed in hell, by being split and chopped. But none at all [have been lost] for the sake of this type of Dharma or for paying homage to such a noble personage."

Thinking thus, he went to the marketplace and shouted, "Who needs a man? Who wants to buy a man?"

In spite of his call, no one responded. Māra the Sinner had become jealous of the Bodhisattva Tag-tu-ngu's under-

going of penance for the sake of the Dharma, and so had made his appeal inaudible to all. Finding no one to buy him, Tag-tu-ngu retreated into a corner and wept continuously.

At this, Indra, Lord of the Gods, decided to test Tag-tu-ngu's mind. Transforming himself into a Brahmin boy, he came forward, saying, "I do not need a man; but, for the purpose of performing a ritual, I need human flesh, fat, and marrow. If you want to sell them, I will pay you."

Tag-tu-ngu was only too glad to take a sharp weapon and pierce his right hand, making it bleed. He cut off all the flesh from his right thigh, <237> and as he walked towards a wall to break his bones, a merchant's daughter noticed him from the top floor of a building. She ran to him and asked, "O nobly born son, why do you inflict such pain on your body?"

He related the purpose of selling his body in order to pay homage to the Bodhisattva Chö-p'ag.

"What kind of virtue do you derive from paying him that much homage?" she inquired.

"He is proficient in the Bodhisattva's methods, and he also reveals the Prājñapāramitā. If I learn that, I will obtain the omniscient power of the Buddha and gain many other of the Buddha's virtues. I could then distribute the precious Dharma to all sentient beings," he replied.

"It is worth sacrificing bodies equivalent [in number] to the sand grains of the Ganges Valley to gain even a single one of those virtues. However, do not inflict this sort of pain upon yourself. I will provide you with whatever you need for making offerings to the Bodhisattva Chö-p'ag. I would also like to accompany you, [so that] I will meet the Bodhisattva Chö-p'ag and gather the merits needed to acquire those virtues," said the merchant's daughter. <238>

Indra, Lord of the Gods, then appeared in his own form and said to Tag-tu-ngu, "I am Indra, Lord of the Gods. I came to test your mind. I can grant whatever you wish. Do ask."

"Give me the supreme virtues of the Buddhas," Tag-tu-ngu requested.

"Oh! That does not fall within my jurisdiction. I cannot offer them."

"Well, you will not have to take any trouble for the mere sake of fully restoring my health," replied Tag-tu-ngu. "I will exercise the blessings of the truth."

So saying, he pronounced, "May the truth by which the Buddhas predict the power of avoiding re-entry [into samsara], the truth of my having an extraordinary, unwavering intention, and the truth of my words restore me to my original state of health."

He instantly regained his previous health, and Indra disappeared as well. The merchant's daughter then took Tag-tu-ngu to her parents' home and related the story to them. Taking many articles for worship, she and her five hundred maidservants mounted their chariots. Having proceeded to the east in the company of her parents and many other followers, they saw the Bodhisattva Chö-p'ag revealing the Dharma to thousands of his followers in the City of Incense. <239> When the Bodhisattva Tag-tu-ngu saw this, he gained the blissful experience of a monk absorbed in contemplation. The entire entourage, including the five hundred girls, dismounted from their chariots and went towards the Bodhisattva Chö-p'ag.

At that time, the Bodhisattva Chö-p'ag had on that spot a palace, built of seven kinds of jewels, which was used to [house] the Prājñapāramitā. [The palace] was ornamented with red sandalwood, covered with a lattice of pearls, illuminated by four wish-fulfilling gems that were set at its four corners as lamps, and infused throughout with the aroma of black aloewood,¹³ which wafted from silver censors. In the center, in quadruple boxes made of precious jewels, was the Prājñapāramitā, written in liquid lapis lazuli on leaves of gold, before which the gods and men made offerings.

After inquiring about the reasons [for all that they were seeing], Tag-tu-ngu, the girl, and her five hundred maidservants worshiped everything fully. They then went to the Bodhisattva Chö-p'ag, who was expounding the Dharma to his followers. Having arrived, Tag-tu-ngu and the retinue of five hundred followers worshiped Chö-p'ag by presenting the

¹³ *a-ga-ru* / *a.ga.ru*

offerings [they had brought], and the merchant's daughter and her entire entourage developed the supreme thought of bodhicitta. <240>

Tag-tu-ngu inquired, "The Buddhas I previously met—from where do they come and to where do they depart?" Therefore, the Bodhisattva Chö-p'ag expounded the chapter on "The Buddhas Neither Come Nor Go," and afterwards rose from his seat, went home, and remained seven years in one samādhi.

During that period, the Bodhisattva Tag-tu-ngu and the retinue of five hundred women gave up the habit of sleeping and sitting. They remained on their feet and spent their time walking. They continuously contemplated, wondering when the Bodhisattva Chö-p'ag would rise from his samādhi and reveal the Dharma.

When the period of seven years was nearing its end, Tag-tu-ngu heard from the gods that in a week from that day the Bodhisattva Chö-p'ag was to rise from his samādhi and preach the Dharma. Together with the retinue of five hundred women, he swept the place where the Bodhisattva Chö-p'ag would preach. Within an area of a league, to keep down the dust, they began to sprinkle water. At this, Māra the Sinner made the water disappear. <241> The Bodhisattva Tag-tu-ngu punctured all the veins of his body in order to use his blood for sprinkling. When the merchant's daughter and her retinue of five hundred women punctured the veins of their individual bodies and started to sprinkle their blood, Indra, Lord of the Gods, blessed all the blood [and transformed it] into the red sandalwood of the divine realms.

The Bodhisattva Chö-p'ag arrived at that place and sat upon the lion throne that Tag-tu-ngu and his followers had perfectly erected. When the Prājñapāramitā was expounded, the Bodhisattva Tag-tu-ngu realized one hundred and sixty thousand doors of samādhi. He saw the faces of countless Buddhas. From that time onward, he had no dream in which he did not see the Buddhas. At present, it is said that he lives with the perfect Buddha Dra-yang Mi-zay-pa Drog-pa.

In the same way, when the Mahāpāṇḍita Nāropa was following Tilopa, he underwent a tremendous amount of hardship. As related earlier, Nāropa met Tilopa when [the latter was living] incognito as a beggar. Nāropa requested Tilopa to accept him as his follower, to which Tilopa agreed. Tilopa took Nāropa wherever he went, <242> but taught him no Dharma.

One day Tilopa took him to the top of a nine-story building and said, "To fulfill the Guru's command, is there anyone who can jump from the top of this building?"

Since no one else was present, Nāropa thought that Tilopa meant him. He jumped from the top of the building, and his body smashed against the ground, causing him enormous pain and suffering.

The Guru came and inquired, "Do you suffer from pain?"

"It's not only painful, but I am becoming like a corpse," was Nāropa's respectful reply. The Guru, blessing him to regain his former health, again took Nāropa with him.

[Another time Tilopa] said, "Nāropa, make a fire."

When the fire was made, Tilopa applied oil to many long splinters of bamboo and tempered them by heating them in the fire. Tilopa, saying that such a penance would also need to be undertaken in order to fulfill the commands of the Guru, drove the splinters underneath Nāropa's fingernails and toenails. [Nāropa felt as though] all the joints of his body were splitting open. After creating unbearable pain and suffering, the Guru went away. Suddenly, after a few days, the Guru returned, removed the bamboo, and drew a great deal of blood and serum from the wounds. Again, after blessing him, he took him along.

One day Tilopa said, "Nāropa, I am hungry. Beg for some food and come back."

Nāropa went to beg at a place where many farmers were having their meal. <243> They gave him a skull-cup full of broth. Returning, he offered it to the Guru, who took it as if he relished it. When the Guru expressed extreme gladness, it made Nāropa think, "I have served my Guru so many times in the past, yet never has he been so happy as he is now."

Thinking that if he went begging he might be able to obtain some small [quantity of broth], he went again with his skull-cup. The farmers had gone to work, leaving behind the remaining portion of broth. Nāropa thought that he had better steal the whole of it. As he ran off, the farmers noticed him, chased him, and beat him until he was almost dead. He suffered enormous pain and could not rise for many days. Again the Guru appeared, blessed him, and took him along.

One day Tilopa said, "Nāropa, I need much wealth. Go and steal some."

When he went to steal from a wealthy man, he was discovered, caught, and so soundly beaten that he was on the verge of death. A few days later, the Guru came and asked him if he was in pain. Nāropa replied as before. The Guru blessed him and took him along again.

Thus, Nāropa suffered such kinds of penance, twelve major and twelve minor, twenty-four in all, on his one body.

In this way, after Nāropa had accomplished all these hard tasks, <244> Tilopa one day said, "Nāropa, go and get some water. I shall stay and make a fire."

When Nāropa returned with the water, he found Tilopa kindling the fire. Tilopa got up, approached Nāropa, caught him by the base of the skull with his left hand, and said, "Nāropa, show me your forehead." With his right hand, Tilopa picked up his sandal, which he had just taken off, and struck Nāropa's brow. Nāropa fell into a dark, unconscious state. On regaining consciousness, he found that the entire knowledge of his Guru had grown in him, rendering the insight of the Guru and that of the disciple identical.

Although the twenty-four hardships that Nāropa bore were, intrinsically, predictions of his Guru that turned out to be the methods by which his obscurations were dissolved, they appeared to be useless, tiresome toils that had not a single aspect that could be [called] religious. The Guru spoke not a word of the Dharma, nor did the disciple perform a single prostration in the name of practicing the Dharma. But, after finding a developed Guru, Nāropa obediently carried out his [Guru's] demands and underwent all sorts of hard-

ships. Therefore, he dissolved his own sins and generated the strong power to grow insight in his mind.

Thus, there is no greater practice of Dharma than fulfilling the commands of the Guru. Fulfilling the Guru's command has that much beneficial power. <245> Similarly, if even a minor aspect of his command is disobeyed, the weight of the offense is especially heavy.

Again, Tilopa once told Nāropa not to take on the responsibility of the panditas who guarded [the four] gates of Vikramaśilā [University]. Later, while Nāropa was visiting Magadha, a pandita guarding one of the gates of Vikramaśilā died. Everyone said that no one could debate with the heretics better [than Nāropa]. They insisted that he accept the post of pandita to guard the northern gate. So he did. A heretic came to debate. [Nāropa] debated with him for many days, but was losing. When he began to offer prayers to his Guru one day, Tilopa came to him with beaming eyes.

"You have little kindness," said Nāropa. "Why didn't you come earlier?"

"Didn't I tell you not to serve as pandita guarding the gate? Now you had better visualize me on top of your head, make a *karana mudra*¹⁴ towards the heretic, and debate," Tilopa replied. On doing so, Nāropa was victorious, completely routing the entire challenge.

Similarly, the manner in which Je-tsün Mi-la Re-pa sought after L'o-drag Mar-pa was as follows. In the country of Ngarri Gung-t'ang there lived a wealthy man named Mi-la Shey-rab Gyal-ts'en. He had a son and a daughter. The son was named T'ö-pa-ga, <246> [later known as] Je-tsün Mi-la.

Their father died while they were still at a tender age. Yung-dung Gyal-ts'en, their paternal uncle, robbed them of all their wealth, causing the mother and her two children to experience [great] hardship.

After learning black magic and the art of bringing down hailstones, from Yung-tön T'ro-gyal of Tsang and L'a-je Nub-ch'ung, respectively, [T'ö-pa-ga] killed thirty-five people, in-

¹⁴ a gesture of threatening command

cluding his uncle's son and daughter-in-law, crushing them under their house, which [he caused to] collapse. And, [in addition], he brought down hailstones as high as three mud-walls on those villagers who were hostile to [his family].

Repenting these sinful deeds, an interest in practicing the Dharma was born in T'ö-pa-ga. As instructed by Lama Yung-tön, he went to seek the Dharma from Rong-tön L'a-ga, a Dzog-ch'en teacher. The Guru said, "My noble Dzog-ch'en Dharma is the excellent root to be found, the excellent tip to be obtained, and is the universal fruit of excellence. If one meditates on it during the day, one attains Buddhahood during the day. If one meditates on it during the night, one attains Buddhahood during the night. He who has a past karmic connection¹⁵ will not have to meditate on it. He can attain liberation simply by hearing it. It is a Dharma for one of the highest intelligence. I will impart it to you."

When he was given ordination and instruction, Mi-la thought, "Initially, I gained great perfection in sorcery in fourteen days, and a week was enough for [me to learn how to] launch hailstones. Now, this Dharma, which is easier [to learn] than sorcery or bringing down hailstones, <247> can help one to realize Buddhahood during the day if meditated on during the day, during the night if meditated on during the night, and if one is fortunate, one need not meditate on it at all. The way I met with a teaching such as this indicates that I must surely be one who is fortunate."

Thinking thus, he did not meditate, but went to sleep. This caused the high teaching to separate from the person who was following it.

A few days later, the Guru said, "You are right in saying that you are a great sinner. Then too, I bragged of my Dharma a bit too much. I shall not be able to liberate you. You had better go to L'o-drag Dro-wo-lung Monastery, where the personal disciple of the Indian sage Nāropa lives, the great personage and king of translators called Mar-pa Lo-tsa-wa. He is an accomplished sage of the New Tantric School, un-

¹⁵ *lay-t'ro-chen* / las.'phro.can / one who bears the evidence of having done the same work in one's previous life

paralleled in the three realms. You have a karmic connection with him from your previous life. Go to him."

On hearing the name of Mar-pa Lo-tsa-wa, Mi-la developed inexpressible mental delight, physical joy that stood all the hairs of his body on end, and immeasurable devotion that made his eyes shed tears. He set out, thinking of when he might meet his Guru and behold his face.

Both the Guru and his wife had had several extraordinary dreams. Knowing that Je-tsün Mi-la was coming, Mar-pa went down the valley to receive him and awaited him by the side of the road, <248> pretending that he was ploughing.

Je-tsün Mi-la first encountered Mar-pa's son, Dharma-dode, tending cattle. As he proceeded further on his way, he met Guru Mar-pa, who was ploughing. On seeing his face, Mi-la felt enormous, inexpressible delight and happiness, which immediately stopped his worldly thoughts for a little while. He did not recognize the Guru, so he told him that he had come to see Mar-pa.

"I will introduce you to Mar-pa," said [the Guru]. "You take over my ploughing."

So saying, he offered him a pot of barley beer and left. By the time Je-tsün Mi-la had drunk the last drop of beer and finished all the ploughing, the Guru's son came to call him. Mi-la accompanied him, met the Guru, touched the [Guru's] feet with his head, and said, "O Guru! I am a great sinner from Nyi-ma La-tö. I offer you my body, speech, and mind. I expect food, clothes, and the Dharma from the Guru. Please give me the teaching that will make me realize in this life."

"Your pride in being a great sinner has nothing to do with me," replied the Guru, "for I did not send you to commit those sins. Anyway, what sins have you committed?"

Mi-la gave him a detailed account.

"Whatever may be the case," said Mar-pa, "offering your body, speech, and mind is good. Food, clothes, and the teaching—everything may not be possible. Either I give you food and clothing, <249> and you seek the teaching from someone else, or I teach you, and you must procure food and clothing elsewhere. Choose one of the two. If you prefer me

to teach you, whether you can realize in one lifetime or not depends upon your own endeavor."

"Well then," said Mi-la, "since I have come to the Guru for the teaching, I will look elsewhere for food and clothing."

He stayed there for a few days and then left [to tour] the entire upper and lower areas of L'o-drag for alms, collecting barley weighing twenty-one *k'el*.¹⁶ For fourteen *k'el* he purchased a copper pot with four handles. Taking six *k'el* of barley packed in a bag along with the copper pot, he went to offer them to the Guru.

The house shook a bit when he put the load of barley down upon the floor. At this, the Guru rose up and said, "You seem to be a strong young monk! Do you intend to kill us by pulling the house down on us with the might of your hand! Take out the load of barley." [Mar-pa pushed it] with his foot, and [Mi-la] had to take it out. Later, he offered the copper pot, empty.

One day, the Guru told him, "I have many devout disciples coming from Ü and Tsang provinces, but the people of Yar-drog Tag-lung and Ling-pa rob them and prevent them from [traveling here] with their rations and presents. Go and launch a shower of hailstones on each of those [places]. That too is a Dharma. [Thereafter] I will give you the teaching."

After launching hailstones on those two places, [Mi-la] asked for the teaching. Mar-pa said, <250> "Do you expect the teaching that I received from India with hardship just for the three lumps of hail you have launched? If you need it at any cost, first use sorcery against [the people of] L'o-drag La-k'a. Not only have they been robbing my disciples from Nyallo-rön, but they have always taken advantage of me as well. If the result of the sorcery is proven, I will give you the secret teachings of Mahāpāṇḍita Nāropa, which enable one to realize Buddhahood in a single life and body."

Subsequently, when [Mi-la] asked for the teaching after proving the result of his magic, the Guru laughed at him and said, "Ha! Ha! As a reward for the sin you have committed, are you demanding the sacred teachings, which are like the

¹⁶ One *k'el* is approximately thirty pounds.

steaming breath of the dākinīs, teachings which I obtained by exposing my life and body to danger? This could be tolerable as a joke. Otherwise, it is ridiculous indeed! If it were someone else instead of me, he would have killed you. Now you had better compensate the people of Yar-drog for destroying their crops and restore the people of La-k'a to life. If you accomplish this, I will give you the teaching. If not, don't come near me again."

Thus Mar-pa scolded him. Finding himself in great despair, Mi-la wept bitterly.

On the following morning, the Guru went to him personally and said, "I quarreled with you too much yesterday. Don't be sorry. Take it easy. The teaching will be imparted to you. Don't be impatient. Since you seem to have an aptitude for working, construct a house for Dharma-do-de. On completing it, <251> the teaching will be given. I will take care of your food and clothing."

Mi-la inquired, "What happens if I die during that period, without any teaching?"

"I assure you that you will not die during that period. I have no Dharma of which I need to brag. You seem to have the highest perseverance. So, if you are able to meditate on my teaching, you will see whether or not you can realize in this life."

Thus [Mar-pa] spoke in an optimistic manner, and set Mi-la to building, systematically: a circular house on the ridge of an eastern hill, a crescent-shaped house to the west, and a triangular house to the north. Every time he half finished constructing one of those houses, the Guru scolded him, told him to pull it down, and made him return the earth and stones [to the places] from which they had originally been brought.

Because of this, the [skin on] the small of his back cracked and a sore developed. He thought, "Even if I show it to the Guru, I will simply be inviting further scolding. If I show it to the Guru's consort, it will amount to boasting of the service I have offered." Thinking thus, instead of showing it to her, he cried and asked for her help in approaching the Guru for the teaching. When she requested the Guru to teach him, the Guru said, "Feed him well and bring him to me."

The oral transmission¹⁷ of the vows for taking refuge were imparted to him. The Guru said, "All of these are called exoteric teachings. If you want esoteric, tantric teachings, you must do as follows." He then narrated Nāropa's biography in brief, showing how he underwent difficult penance. <252> He concluded, "Of course, you won't be able to do that." This generated such strong devotion in Mi-la that he shed tears and took a firm mental vow to do whatever the Guru asked.

A few days later, Mar-pa went out for a walk and took [Mi-la] as his attendant. Walking towards the southeast, as they arrived at a cul-de-sac, Mar-pa said, "Build a nine-story, square building with turrets, which will make ten stories. That will not be demolished. On completing it, the teaching will be given to you, you will be set to practice it, and your food will be provided."

Accordingly, when he was laying the foundation of the building, three of the Guru's great disciples, while frolicking, rolled down a huge boulder which Mi-la used in the foundation. As the building rose to about two stories, the Guru came and examined it. He inquired about the above-mentioned stone, asking where it had been found. Mi-la told him its history.

"My disciple-sons who practice meditation at two levels¹⁸ cannot be your servants," said the Guru. "Pull out that stone and return it to its original place." Again, the building was pulled down from the top. The stone was taken back to its original place.

The Guru said, "Bring the stone again, by yourself." Mi-la brought the stone back and placed it as before. He then continued constructing the building. As he completed the seventh story, a large sore appeared on his waist.

Then the Guru said, "Stop further construction of the building. Build an annex, <253> including a chapel with twelve pillars, so that it forms a courtyard at the base [of the main building]."

¹⁷ *lung / luñ*

¹⁸ Mahāyoga and Anuyoga

On completing the courtyard also, a sore appeared on his lower back.

On [two] occasions, when Mey-tön Ts'ön-po of Tsang-rong received the initiation of Samvara and when Ts'ur-tön Wang-de of Döl received the Guhyasamāja initiation, Mi-la hoped that, since he had completed the house, he too would be given the initiations. As he took a seat in the row for [those who were to receive] the initiation, the Guru scolded him, beat him, and expelled him from the row of initiates.

Although his entire back was covered with sores, and pus and blood were oozing from three open sores, causing him pain, he continued with the construction by carrying the basket [of materials] in front of him. When Ngog-tön Ch'ö-dor of Zhung came for the Hevajra initiation, Mi-la [again] sat in the row for the initiation. For an initiation fee, Mar-pa's wife had given him a large [piece of] turquoise which she had inherited from her parents. But, as before, Mi-la only received scoldings, beatings, and no initiations.

Thinking that he was certainly not going to receive the Dharma, he wandered off until a certain householder of L'odrag K'og-pa asked him to read the Prājñapāramitā in eight thousand verses. Within it, he came across Tag-tu-ngu's biography, which encouraged him to suffer for the Dharma and to win the favor of the Guru by complying with his orders, whatever they might be. So thinking, he returned. Again, the Guru gave him only scoldings and beatings.

While thus bewildered, <254> he was sent by Mar-pa's wife to Lama Ngog-pa. Although he received the doctrine [from that Lama] and meditated upon it, not the slightest virtue grew in him, for he had not obtained his Guru's permission.

As instructed by the Guru, Mi-la again went—as an attendant of Ngog-pa—to stay with Mar-pa. One day, during a ts'og ceremony, Mar-pa gave a terrible scolding to everyone, including Lama Ngog-pa, and was on the verge of giving them a good beating. Mi-la thought that due to his heavy sin of bad karma, not only was he suffering, but he was also causing Lama Ngog-pa and Mar-pa's wife to suffer greatly. Since, rather than finding the teaching, he was only earning sin, he decided to commit suicide.

As he was about to do so, Lama Ngog-pa intervened. By then, Guru Mar-pa had also calmed down and had asked them to come to him. At that moment, Mar-pa took Mi-la [as his disciple] and told him many auspicious things. He was given the name Mi-la Do-je Gyal-ts'en. When he was initiated into the De-chog teaching, the sixty-two deities were shown in their true forms. Zhay-pa Do-je, a secret name, was conferred upon him. The entire body of initiations and teachings was given to him, as if being poured from a pitcher. He subjected himself to great mortification while putting the teaching into practice, and he obtained both the ordinary and extraordinary achievements. <255>

Thus, in the past, all the scholar-saints and wisdom-holders¹⁹ of India and Tibet adopted perfect Gurus and spiritual teachers. Carrying out whatever commands they received, they eventually achieved perfect mental communion with their [teachers]. Unless you view the whole of the [Guru's] behavior without any antagonism and with a straightforward mind, the smallest lie you tell will accrue very heavy sin.

Once, when a disciple of a great yogi was giving sermons to a large crowd which he had gathered, the yogi Guru appeared in the guise of a beggar. [The disciple] was ashamed to prostrate to his Guru in the marketplace and pretended not to see him. Towards evening, as soon as the congregation had dispersed, he went [to the yogi Guru] and prostrated to him.

"Why didn't you prostrate to me a while ago?" asked the Guru.

"Oh! I didn't see you then."

No sooner had he spoken this reply than both his eyeballs dropped to the ground. He asked for pardon and related the truth. The Guru blessed him, and his eyes were restored to him.

Similarly, the great Indian yogi Nag-po Chö-pa once boarded a ship with many followers. He was sailing on the ocean when he thought, "Although my Guru is really well-

¹⁹ *rig-pa dzin-pa* / *rig.pa 'dzin.pa* / a realized yogi

attained, in mundane respects like wealth and followers, I am greater than he is." <256>

No sooner had this thought dawned than he found himself in trouble, for the ship began to sink. Because he prayed to the Guru, the latter came in person, rescued him from the waters, and said, "This [misfortune] is due to the great arrogance you have developed. I did not try to accumulate wealth or followers. If I had, I could have become like you."

Although innumerable, indescribably many Buddhas have come in the past, their mercy could not save you. Hence, until now, you have remained in the great ocean of samsaric suffering. Indeed, you could not have been rescued by the grace of those inconceivably great personages of perfect attainment who came in the past, for you did not even have the fortune to behold their countenances.

At present, a time when the Buddhist doctrine is nearing its end and the five symptoms of deterioration are manifesting, you are entirely deluded by non-virtuous illusion, even though you have obtained a nominal human status. When you are confused by the choice between virtue and vice and are groping about like an ignorant blindman on a desolate plain, the noble Guru and spiritual teachers, being strongly moved by boundless compassion, appear in the form of human beings in accord with the fortune of their followers. Although their minds abide in the state of Buddhahood, <257> they act and behave in a manner suited to ordinary beings.

Skillfully drawn by their compassion, you are admitted into the sublime entrance of the Dharma, your eye for discerning virtue from vice is opened, and you are shown the best path to freedom and the state of omniscience, without mistake or illusion. Hence, [Gurus] are no different from actual Buddhas; furthermore, they treat you personally with more kindness than the Buddhas. Therefore, at all times and under all circumstances, you must endeavor to follow them properly by means of the three kinds of faith.

**Although I have met a Noble One, I am deceived by my
low conduct.**

**Although I have found the excellent path, I fall over the
precipice of a wrong path.**

**May I and beings like me, who are base-natured,
Be blessed to subdue our minds with the Dharma.**

This is the instruction on following a spiritual teacher,
which completes the ordinary preliminary practices.





Plate 5. The Great Pandit Atīśa



Plate 6. Guru Mar-pa



Plate 7. Je-tsün Mi-la Re-pa



Plate 8. Je-tsün Mi-la Re-pa