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# The Fine Path to Liberation

An Explanation of the Stages of the Preliminary Practices  
for Manuals Such as Buddhahood Without Meditation

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[2] First, regarding the explanation of the stages to be discussed, the compassionate *jinās*, who are expert in skillful means, have taught an inconceivable number of Dharmas, entrances to the path, and resultant accomplishments in accordance with the temperaments, capacities, and inclinations of disciples. However many teachings they have given, if you synthesize their meaning, they consist of two [*yānas*]: the causal, [Sūtrayāna] with characteristics, and the resultant, secret mantra, Vajrayāna. If you classify them internally, in the causal yāna there are the Śrāvakayāna, the Pratyekabuddhayāna, and the Bodhisattvayāna. In the resultant yāna [3] there are three classes of outer tantras: *kriyā tantra*, *upa tantra*, and *yoga tantra*. The three classes of inner tantras are the father tantras of the [stage of] generation known as *mahāyoga*, the mother tantras of the transmission of *anuyoga*, and the nondual tantras of the Great Perfection known as *atiyoga*. As a tantra states:

In the past, between the causal and resultant [*yānas*], among the causal [*yānas*] there are three [divisions], and among the resultant [*yānas*] there are two. In the second,<sup>1</sup> there are six categories in accordance with the levels of one's faculties.

As for the topic to be discussed here, among the canonical and treasure teachings, this is exceptional due to four qualities: its short lineage, its unerring practical instructions, its great blessings, and its revelation of the descent of the lineage. [4] The meaning of the vast and profound revealed treasures of the Great Perfection, *atiyoga*, is impeccable, and it includes the three divisions of the mind, expanse, and pith instructions. This is a commentary on the principal, very secret, unsurpassed teaching from a direct vision of Samantabhadra called *Buddhahood Without Meditation*, and it begins with the way to listen to the Dharma, followed by the actual explanation of the meaning of that treatise.<sup>2</sup>

### *I. The Way to Listen to the Dharma*

First, regarding the way to listen to the Dharma, there are (A) the general explanation and (B) the specific explanation.

#### *A. The General Explanation*

It is extremely important that you expel the miserable attitude of thinking only about yourself, by considering that “Among all sentient beings dwelling since beginningless time in *saṃsāra*, there is not even one who has not been my father or mother. So in order for them to be freed from the miserable ocean of *saṃsāra* and to achieve the truly perfected state of buddhahood, I shall authentically practice the profound, sublime Dharma.” In this way, bring forth the indefatigable Mahāyāna motivation of *bodhicitta* to achieve the well-being of others. As Maitreyaṅgā declared:

The generation of *bodhicitta* aspires to

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to the resultant vehicle, with its three inner tantras and three outer tantras.

<sup>2</sup> This second section refers to the commentary to *Buddhahood Without Meditation* called *Garland for the Delight of the Fortunate*, which immediately follows this short, preliminary text on the way to listen to the Dharma.

truly perfected buddhahood for the sake of others. [5]

Especially concerning the practice of the profound path of the secret mantra, Vajrayāna, the goal aspired for and the resolution of bodhicitta are crucial. As the *Lamp for the Three Methods* states:

Because of its lack of confusion regarding even a single point,  
its many methods, which are not difficult,  
and its mastery by those with sharp faculties,  
the Mantrayāna is exceptional.

This secret mantra, Vajrayāna, has many methods that can be practiced without needing to undergo great hardships. The root of its many profound methods for actualizing the fruition [of enlightenment] depends on the transformation of your aspirations. As it is written:

The contributing condition for all Dharmas  
dwells on the summit of your aspirations.

You must listen to the sublime Dharma with a pure body, speech, and mind—not grasping at the ordinary, autonomous existence of the teaching, the teacher, and so on—but rather imagining them to be imbued with five perfections: The perfect place is the pristine buddhfield of the absolute space of phenomena, Akaniṣṭha. The perfect teacher is the primordial lord, the *dharmakāya*, Samantabhadra. The perfect retinue is [6] the View Lineage of the Buddhas and the Symbolic Lineage of the Vidyādhara, visualized as male and female bodhisattvas, gods, and goddesses. The perfect Dharma is the Mahāyāna Dharma of the unsurpassed fruition—the Great Perfection. The perfect time is imagined as the fourth time—one of perfect symmetry, an eternal, continuous cycle, free of movement and change. By such means your body, speech, and mind must be purified, enabling blessings to flow into your mindstream.

On all occasions—whether you are teaching or listening to the Dharma or practicing meditation—you must carefully examine your own mindstream and listen in a way that is free of the following three faults: Like an upside-down container, however the words of Dharma are expressed, you do not hear them or retain the slightest bit of their meaning. Like a leaky container, even though you hear the mere sounds of the Dharma, your conceptual mind is unstable regarding their meaning from start to finish. Like a toxic container, even though you retain the words of the Dharma, they do not act as remedies for your mental afflictions, because your mindstream is not sustained by the pure spirit of emergence and bodhicitta. These faults must be avoided, as is said in the sūtras: “O monks, listen well and attentively and bear in mind what you hear, and I shall teach you.” By listening well to the Dharma, [7] the fault of a toxic container is dispelled. By listening attentively, the fault of an upside-down container is dispelled. And by bearing the teachings in mind, the fault of a leaky container is remedied.

When you listen to the Dharma, you should avoid everything that is incompatible with the Dharma, such as the egoistic pride of thinking you are highly knowledgeable, lack of faith in your Dharma friends and the guru, lack of interest in the Dharma, and

allowing your eyes and other senses to be distracted elsewhere. Instead, when you listen to the Dharma, you should take delight in receiving the sublime Dharma, and with firm reverence and faith purify the faults of the six contaminants<sup>3</sup> and focus solely on the welfare of sentient beings, as is written in the *Condensed Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra*:

By abiding in delight, reverence, and supreme faith,  
obscurations and mental afflictions are dispelled and defilements are left  
behind.  
By applying yourself to the welfare of sentient beings, heroic wisdom is  
perfected.  
O valiant disciples, follow such conduct.

Here is how to practice the six perfections: Setting out the Dharma seat and offerings is generosity. Listening to the Dharma while restraining your body, speech, and mind is ethical discipline. Enduring harm by others at that time is patience. Requesting the guru to teach the Dharma is enthusiasm. [8] Listening without distraction to the meaning of the Dharma is meditation. Inquiring by means of investigation and analysis into the points of uncertainty is wisdom. These are the six aspects of a listener. The *Tantra of Manifest Realization* states:

Beautifully offering flowers, a seat, and so forth;  
restraining your conduct in the room;  
refraining from harming all living creatures;  
offering prayers of supplication to the guru;  
retaining the guru's teachings without distraction; and  
making critical inquiries in order to dispel your uncertainties:  
these are the six aspects of the lamp.

Accordingly, listening to the Dharma while properly bringing to mind everything regarding your motivation and conduct is very important, so this is a sublimely important point.

### *B. The Specific Explanation*

Regarding the specific explanation, there are five topics: (1) the cultivation of admiration and reverence for the guru, (2) the cultivation of love and affection for your *vajra* siblings and friends, (3) the cultivation of compassion for sentient beings, (4) the cultivation of the spirit of emergence regarding saṃsāra, and (5) meditation on the impermanence of composite phenomena.

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<sup>3</sup> The six contaminants are (1) pride, (2) lack of faith, (3) lack of dedication to practice, (4) distraction, (5) dullness, and (6) depression.

### 1. The Cultivation of Admiration and Reverence for the Guru

In general there are said to be six kinds of teachers from whom you receive teachings,<sup>4</sup> but the one who grants empowerments, explains the tantras, and provides pith instructions is the root guru who is imbued with the three kindnesses. Nowhere in the sūtras or tantras are there accounts of anyone achieving enlightenment without devotion to a guru. It is empirically evident that all the *siddhas* of the past without exception [9] developed the sublime qualities of the grounds and paths and achieved *siddhis* by first devoting themselves to their gurus who were physically present and those who were not. Therefore, even though the guru is truly a buddha, free of all faults and replete with all sublime qualities, the mindstreams of ordinary individuals like us are easily swayed by the influences of our social environments, historical eras, friends, and so on. For this reason, it is important that you first thoroughly examine the guru, both closely and from a distance. Then, eliminate the faults of your own speculations and negative attitudes and devote yourself to the guru. Finally, offer your services by pleasing the guru in three ways,<sup>5</sup> and without letting your *samayās* deteriorate or be broken, emulate the thoughts and behavior of your guru, as if you were shaping yourself in his mold. Because of the degenerate nature of the current era, it is difficult to find a guru who has all the attributes described in the collections of tantras. Nevertheless, the guru to whom you devote yourself must have all these positive qualities:

- purity of the three kinds of vows,
- great erudition,
- compassion for sentient beings,
- knowledge of the collections of the three outer divisions of the teachings and of the meaning of the inner secret mantra, Vajrayāna Dharma,
- for the guru's own sake, the actualization of realization and the perfect achievement of positive qualities and the abandonment of negative ones,
- for the sake of others, [10] the ability to provide training in the sublime Dharma by way of body, speech, and mind in inconceivable ways, in accordance with the temperaments and capabilities of individual students, and
- the ability to assemble fortunate students by the four means of gathering others.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to devote yourself to such a spiritual mentor, and specifically to a guru who reveals the profound points of pith instructions in the secret mantra, Vajrayāna. Due to the unbroken lineage of ripening empowerments and liberating teachings, his mindstream is ripened and liberated. The guru's [conduct] does not conflict with the root

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<sup>4</sup> The six kinds of teachers are (1) teachers who grant *samayās* and vows, (2) teachers who grant oral transmissions, (3) teachers who explain the tantras, (4) teachers who provide pith instructions, (5) teachers who bestow empowerments, and (6) teachers who perform work.

<sup>5</sup> The three ways to please the guru are by means of (1) offering material goods, (2) offering service, and (3) devoting yourself to practice.

<sup>6</sup> The four means of gathering others are (1) pleasing others by giving them material things or whatever they need, (2) teaching the Dharma to lead others to liberation, (3) helping others in their Dharma practice by giving them encouragement, and (4) showing others a good example by always practicing what you teach.

of commitments taken at the time of an empowerment, namely the samayas and vows of enlightened body, speech, and mind, and so on. He has few mental afflictions and obsessive thoughts, his mindstream is calm and subdued, and he has internalized the meaning of all the tantras and the pith instructions pertaining to the ground, path, and fruition. Having seen the signs of the stages of generation and completion, he has correctly actualized the nature of existence. Having renounced [the concerns of] this life, he constantly dwells in solitary retreat. Imbued with great altruism, he brings living beings onto the path of Dharma by every suitable means. By practicing in accordance with such a guru's instructions, you receive swift blessings of the lineage, and excellent qualities manifest.

A guru who has all these sublime qualities is the regent of all buddhas of the past, [11] the source of all buddhas of the future, and an emanation of all buddhas of the present. His body is the Saṅgha, his speech is the sublime Dharma, and his mind is the Buddha. His enlightened body is the guru, his enlightened speech is the personal deity, and his enlightened mind is the *ḍākinī*. His enlightened body is the *nirmāṇakāya*, his enlightened speech is the *sambhogakāya*, and his enlightened mind is the dharmakāya. The synthesized essential nature of the objects of refuge is the compassionate root guru. Regarding him as an actual buddha, reverently offer prostrations with your body, reverently offer prayers of supplication with your speech, and with your mind reverently visualize the guru in the center of your crown, your throat, and your heart. While merging your mind and so on with that of the guru, by unpretentiously pleasing him in the three ways with your body, speech, and mind, it is of vital importance that you maintain continuous faith, pure perception, admiration, and reverence. Even if you know the three collections of teachings as if by heart, if you lack admiration and reverence for your guru, there will not be even the slightest benefit for your mindstream. As it is written:

The guru is the Buddha, the guru is the Dharma,  
and the guru is also the Saṅgha.  
The master of everything is the guru.  
The guru is the glorious Vajradhara.

Drikung Kyobpa Rinpoché [1143–1217] declared:

If the sun of admiration and reverence does not rise  
on the snow mountain of the four *kāyas* of the guru,  
the stream of blessings will not flow. [12]  
So earnestly devote your mind to admiration and reverence for him.

Accordingly, if you single-pointedly pray to the guru, without a vacillating mind or uncertainty, his realizations will be transferred to you, and you will achieve all the supreme and common siddhis.

## *2. The Cultivation of Love and Affection for Your Vajra Siblings and Friends*

The guru, your spiritual mentor, and your vajra siblings and friends are like guides on the path to the land of omniscience and liberation, so you should devote yourself to them

with love and affection. Although there are four internal divisions of vajra siblings,<sup>7</sup> here the coupling of siblings and friends is like that of twins—so on all occasions and in all ways restrain your conduct by way of body, speech, and mind with affection and loving-kindness, without any duplicity regarding the samayas. Viewing everything they say as credible, as if they were your gurus, cultivate pure perception with the admiration and reverence of seeing their conduct as symbolic of the Dharma, whatever they do. You should never be separated from them, as if they were your own heart, and you should hold them dear with love and affection. The *Awesome Lightning of Primordial Consciousness* states:

With affection for your vajra siblings,  
for all your siblings, for those with whom you are and are not close, and  
for those who have entered the authentic path, [13]  
always avoid even the mere thought of contempt.  
Bring forth the power of love and affection,  
and look after each other as you would your own eyes.

Until you actualize liberation and the omniscient state of perfect buddhahood, you must accompany your vajra siblings and friends. So it is important that you love them and do not let your samayas degenerate. If they degenerate, you and everyone else will wander about in miserable states of existence, so you must properly guard your samayas and ardently love your vajra siblings.

### 3. *The Cultivation of Compassion for Sentient Beings*

Among all sentient beings throughout space, there is not one who has not been your father or mother, but under the influence of the delusive appearances of their own karma, those sentient beings, who have been your parents, experience only suffering, without even the briefest occasion of happiness. Resolve that “In order to purify and cleanse the appearances of their karma, habitual propensities, and suffering, and to achieve the precious state of authentic, omniscient buddhahood, I shall generate bodhicitta to achieve perfect enlightenment and shall dredge the depths of the ocean of the three realms of saṃsāra.” [14] With this heartfelt motivation, you should cast off the attitude of self-centeredness and cultivate compassion for the sake of sentient beings, like Prince Courage.<sup>8</sup> The *dohās* of the glorious Saraha state:

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<sup>7</sup> The four internal divisions of vajra siblings are (1) *general* brothers and sisters, who are all the sentient beings possessing buddha nature, (2) *distant* brothers and sisters, who are all the practitioners belonging to the retinue of the Buddha, (3) *close* brothers and sisters, who are Vajrayāna practitioners, and (4) *inseparable* brothers and sisters, who belong to the retinue of the same guru. Those who receive empowerment together from the same maṇḍala are like siblings with the same father.

<sup>8</sup> Tib. *Snying stobs can*. This is a reference to Prince Great Courage (*Rgyal bu snying stobs chen po*), one of three sons of the king at Namu Buddha in Nepal, the other two being Great God (*Lha chen po*) and Great Mighty One (*Mthu thob chen po*). When Prince Great Courage saw a tigress in the forest that was dying of starvation, he offered his body

One whose view of emptiness is devoid of compassion  
does not reach the supreme path.  
Even if you cultivate compassion alone,  
you will remain here in saṃsāra, but where is liberation?  
One who has both  
does not remain either in mundane existence or in *nirvāṇa*.

Accordingly, loving-kindness, compassion, and bodhicitta are indispensable for Dharma practitioners. At all times, whatever path you follow, they are like your pillar of life, so you should practice them correctly.

#### *4. The Cultivation of the Spirit of Emergence Regarding Saṃsāra*

Wherever we are born in saṃsāra, whether in its heights, its depths, or in between, it never transcends the nature of suffering—an ever-shifting display of misery and a delusive cycle of pain, nothing more. Therefore, by reflecting on the ways in which the activities of saṃsāra are devoid of essence, resolve that “I shall renounce all activities of this life, such as subduing my enemies and protecting my friends, and devote myself solely to practicing the sublime Dharma.” With this firm intention, [15] you should go by yourself to an unpopulated, solitary place and let your practice pervade your whole life. Otherwise, if you have attachment to those who are close to you and aversion to those who are distant, while craving and clinging to such things as food, clothing, and enjoyments as if this were a city of *gandharvas*, your practice will act as a cause for higher and lower rebirths, with no occasion for happiness, and you must experience only misery. The great Orgyen declared:

Here in saṃsāra there is never  
as much happiness as would fit on the tip of a needle.  
Even slight happiness is the suffering of change.

Accordingly, it is very important that you come to a complete and decisive certainty that the activities of saṃsāra have no essence, and then strive solely for the essence—the sublime Dharma.

#### *5. Meditation on the Impermanence of Composite Phenomena*

All outer appearances of the firm and solid physical world, the numerous inner sentient beings who move about and inhabit the physical world, and all the beautiful intervening appearances of the five sensory fields are finally impermanent and subject to destruction. Apart from that, however composite phenomena may appear, they are not self-sustaining, like clouds in the sky, and all activities are like last night’s dream or like rainbows in the sky, [16] never remaining. So continually meditate on death and impermanence, and with the thought that “death is coming,” until you cast off that sense of dread, without laziness

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to her so that she could save her starving cubs. The prince was a previous incarnation of Buddha Śākyamuni when he was a bodhisattva.



or procrastination, you must bring your life and spiritual practice to culmination. The noble Mogchokpa commented:

The experiences of those in whom [the awareness of] death has not arisen are like autumnal mist.  
The nobility of those in whom [the awareness of] death has not arisen is like that of a king's consort.  
The courage of those in whom [the awareness of] death has not arisen is like ice in the summertime.

Accordingly, impermanence is a motivating force for Dharma, so you should by all means bring forth this certainty in your mindstream at all times and on all occasions. Leave your homeland behind, adopt another region, disregard hardships, let your body and life force be an object [of abuse], live happily in a cave as your home, let wild animals be your companions, entrust your heart to the guru and the Dharma, and bring your life and spiritual practice to culmination. This is the most cherished, sublime point.

Whatever kind of practice you adopt, with meditative objects belonging to the stages of generation and completion, the above five topics are indispensable. They are the most important things to practice, like a heart treasure for all Dharma practitioners, [17] so each of you should definitely take them to heart. This concludes the explanation of the stages to be discussed. This is just a synopsis of auxiliary elements of the Dharma from the root text, adapted by Dewé Dorjé as requisites for practice.<sup>9</sup>

May there be virtue!  
*Sarva maṅgalam!*

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<sup>9</sup> Tib. *Bde ba'i rdo rje*. This is Sera Khandro's personal name.