

The Spiritual Path From Beginning To End

Atisha's Lamp for the Path to Awakening (bodhipathapradīpaḥ)

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to Awaken arises,
one should make
efforts to strengthen it.”



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namo bodhisattvāya mañjuśriye kumārabhūtāya |

I bow down to Bodhisattva Manjushri, the Youthful.

*kālatrayākhilajināmśca tadīya-dharmān
saṃghān mahādaratayā praṇipatya cāpi |
bodhiprabheṇa kathito viśadīkaromi
śiṣyottamena khalu bodhipathapradīpam | | 1 | |*

And I also prostrate myself with great reverence before the Conquerors of the three times, and to their Teaching and the Community of their followers. I will, at the request of my excellent student, Bodhiprabha ("Light of Awakening"), indeed light the lamp for the Path to Awakening.

*puruṣāstrivīdhā jñeyā uttamādhamamadhyamāḥ |
likhyate lakṣaṇaṃ teṣāṃ sphuṭaṃ pratyekabhedaṭṭhaḥ | | 2 | |*

Know that there are three sorts of people: those of highest, lowest, and middling capacity. I will write separately about each of their distinctive features.

*upāyena tu kenāpi kevalaṃ saṃsṛteḥ sukham |
svasyaivārthe yaiḥeta jñeyaḥ so puruṣo'dhamāḥ | | 3 | |*

A person who seeks, by any means at all, happiness in this world for him- or herself alone is classified of lowest capacity.

*pāpakarmanivṛttātmā bhavasukhāt parāṇmukhaḥ |
ātmanirvāṇamātrārthī yo naro madhyamastu saḥ || 4 | |*

A person who has turned away from worldly happiness and who has rid themselves of all negative karma solely for the purpose of achieving nirvana for him- or herself – that would be someone of the middling capacity.

*svasantānagatairduḥkhairduḥkhasyānyasya sarvathā |
sarvasya yaḥ kṣayam kāṅkṣeduttamaḥ puruṣastu saḥ | 5 |*

A person who has completely put an end to suffering in his or her own mind-stream and desires to bring an end to the suffering of all others is someone of highest capacity.

*kāṅkṣanto hi varāṁ bodhiṁ sattvānāmuttamāstathā |
darśitān gurubhistebhyaḥ sadupāyāṁ pracakṣmahe | 6 |*

And it is for those highest of beings, who desire the best kind of Awakening, that I will explain the excellent methods taught to me by my gurus.

*saṁbuddhacitramūrtyādistūpasaddharmasarīmmukhaḥ |
puṣpaidhūpaiḥ padārthaiśca yathāprāptaiḥ supūjayet | 7 |*

One should make suitable offerings, in the correct order, of flowers, incense, and so on, to paintings, statues, and other images of the Fully Awakened Ones, and also at reliquaries and in the presence of sacred texts.

*samantabhadracaryoktā pūjā saptavidhā'pi ca |
bodhisārasya paryantaṁ avāivartikacittataḥ | 8 |
suśraddhayā triratnebhyaḥ bhūmau sarīsthāpya jānuni |
bhūtvā kṛtāñjaliścāpi triścādau śaraṇaṁ vrajet | 9 |*

And with the seven-limbed practice taken from *Samantabhadra's Deeds* (a.k.a. *King of Prayers*), having a mind that refuses to turn back until one reaches the essence of Awakening and with great faith in the three jewels, one should kneel down on the ground with hands folded in prayer position and go for refuge three times.

*tataḥ samastasattveṣu maitrīcitta puraskṛtaḥ |
durgatitrayājanmādisaṁkrāntimaraṇādibhiḥ | 10 |*

Then, with a heart filled with loving-kindness, consider all living beings who are suffering due to things like death, bardo, and rebirth into one or another of the three lower realms.

*dr̥ṣṭvā'śeṣaṃ jagaddukhaṃ duḥkhena dukhitāyāśca |
duḥkhahetostathā duḥkhāt jagatāṃ muktikāṃkṣayā | 11 |
bodhicittaṃ samutpādyamanāpāyipratijñayā |
evaṃ praṇidhicittānāṃ utpādetu guṇāśca ye | 12 |
te gaṇḍavyūhasūtreṣu maitreyaṇa prabhāṣitāḥ |
sūtrasya tasya paṭhanācchravaṇād gurorvā
sambodhicittaguṇakāni nirantakāni | 13 |
vijñāya tasya khalu samsthitirarṇāna |
cittaṃ tathā samudayeta muhurmuhaśca |
vīradattaparīṛcchāsūtre puṇyaṃ pradarśitam | 14 |*

And having seen that all living beings, without exception, are suffering, and with a desire to free those beings from that suffering and its causes, and with a promise never to give up, one should generate the Wish to Awaken. The good qualities of thus generating the Aspiring Wish to Awaken are explained in the sutras called *The Array of Trunks* by Maitreya. Having learned of the infinite benefits of the Wish for Full Awakening by reading this Sutra or listening to one's Teacher one should arouse it incessantly in order to make it stable. The virtue of doing so has been taught in the *Sutra Requested by Viradattta*.

*yattacślokatrayeṇaiva samāsenātralikhyate |
bodhicittāddhi yatpunyaṃ tacca rupi bhavedyadi | 15 |
ākāśadhātuṃ saṃpūrya bhūyaścottari tadbhavet |
gaṅgāvālikasaṅkhyāni buddhakṣetrāṇi yo naraḥ | 16 |
dadyātsadratna pūrṇāni lokanāthebhya eva hi |
yaścaikaḥ prāñjalirbhūtvā cittaṃ bodhāya nāmayet | 17 |
iyaṃ viśeṣyate pūjā yasyānto'pi na vidyate |*

Here I will quote by way of summary just three verses from that text: If it possessed physical form, the virtue that comes from the Wish to Awaken having completely filled all of space would become even more than that. If someone were to fill a Buddha Field with as many gems as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River and offer it to the Protectors of the World, and if another individual who, having reverently folded his hands, were to prostrate to the Wish to Awaken, the latter's act of worship would surpass the former's, for its merit would be endless.

*utpādyabodhipraṇidhānacittaṃ
naikaprayatnaiḥ parivardhitavyam | 18 |
janmāntare'pi smaraṇārthamasya
śikṣā yathoktā paripālanīyā |
prasthānacitte svayamātiriktaṃ
samyagbhavenna praṇidhānavṛddhiḥ | 19 |*

When the Aspiring Wish to Awaken arises, one should make efforts to strengthen it. In order to remember it through all your future lives, protect the teachings which have been given to you. Without the Activated Wish to Awaken, the Aspiring Wish to Awaken connected to it will not increase on its own into its full form.

sambodhisamvara vivṛddhikāmaḥ
tasmād dhruvaṃ cainamavāpnuyāta |
saptadhāprātimokṣaiśca sadā'nyasamvarānvaitaḥ | 20 |
bhāgyaṃ bodhisattvānāṃ samvarasya na cānyathā |
saptadhā prātimokṣeṣu bhāṣiteṣu tathāgataiḥ | 21 |
brahmacaryaḥ śreṣṭhāḥ bhikṣusamvara iṣyate |
śīlādhyāyoktavidhinā bodhisattvasya bhūmiṣu | 22 |
samvaraḥ sadgurorgrāhyaḥ samyaglakṣaṇayuktataḥ |
yaḥ samvaravidhau dakṣaḥ svayaṃ ca samvare sthitaḥ | 23 |
kṛpāluḥ samvare śaktaḥ jñātaḥ sadgurustu saḥ |
tatra yatnena na prāpto guruścaitādrśo yadi | 24 |
samvaragrahaṇasyānyo vidhiḥ tasmāt samucyate |
ambararājabhūtena pūrvaṃ manjuśriyā yathā | | 25 | |
bodhicittaṃ samutpādi suspaṣṭaṃ cātra likhyate |
mañjuśribuddhakṣetrāṅkārasūtroktivat tathā | | 26 | |

Therefore, out of a desire to increase the vow for Full Awakening, one should certainly take this vow. Someone who is keeping well one or another of the seven-fold freedom vows is entitled to take the vow of the Bodhisattvas. Others are not. The Buddhas have spoken of seven kinds of freedom vows. The best of these is said to be the vow of the fully ordained monk, a life of pure conduct. In accordance with the ritual given in the chapter on vowed morality in Master Asanga's *Stages of the Bodhisattva* the vow should be taken from a qualified guru who possesses all the proper attributes. One who is expert in the ceremony for giving the vow, who is himself or herself keeping the vow well, who is compassionate, and who is considered to be able to impart the vow – that is a qualified guru. And if you try but cannot find a guru like this, another ritual for taking the vow will now be given. In a former life, when Manjushri was a being called Ambararaja, he generated the Wish to Awaken. Here I'll set down clearly what is found in the *Sutra of the Adornment of Manjushri's Buddha Field*.

*utpādayāmi sambodhau cittam nāthasya sammukham |
nimantraye jagatsarvam dāridyānmocitāsmi tat | | 27 | |*

“In the presence of the Protector, I generate the Wish for Full Enlightenment. I invite all the living beings whom I will free from their poor state.”

*vyāpādakhilacittam vā irṣyāmātsaryameva va |
adyāgre na kariṣyāmi bodhim prāpsyāmi yāvata | | 28 | |*

“Beginning today, and up until I reach Awakening, I will not act with a mind afflicted by malice, envy, or jealousy.”

*brahmacarya cariṣyāmi kāmāṁstyakṣyāmi pāpakān |
buddhānāmānuśikṣiṣye śīlasaṁvara saṁnyame | | 29 | |*

“I will practice purity in conduct and will abandon ignorant desire and bad deeds. Restrained by the vow of morality, I will imitate the Buddhas.”

*nāham tvaritarupeṇa bodhim prāptumihotsahe |
parāntakoṭim sthāsyāmi sattvasyaikasya kāraṇāt | | 30 | |*

“I will not be eager to obtain Awakening in some quick way; rather, I will stay until the very end, even if it is for the sake of only one single being.”

*kṣetram viśodhiṣyāmi aprameyamacintim |
nāmadheyam kariṣyāmi daśadikṣu ca viśrutam | | 31 | |*

“I will purify an inconceivable number of places. The new name I take will be known far and wide, in all the ten directions.”

*kāyavāk karmanī cāham śodhayiṣyāmi sarvaśaḥ |
śodhayiṣye manaskarma kartāsmi nāśabham | | 32 | |*

“I will completely purify my actions of body and speech. I will cleanse the activity of my mind. I will no longer be the perpetrator of any non-virtuous act.”

*svakāya cittaviśuddhihetu,
prasthānacittātmayamasthitena |
triśīlaśikṣāpariśiyeta cet,
triśīlaśikṣāsu mahādarasyāt | | 33 | |*

If one exerts oneself in the three ethical trainings by adhering to the rules which are the very embodiment of the Activated Wish to Awaken, the great respect one has for these trainings brings about the purification of one’s own mind and body.

*śuddhasambodhisattvānām tasmāt samvarasamvṛtau |
yatnāt sambodhisambhāraḥ paripūrṇo bhaviṣyati | | 34 | |*

Thus, because of one’s efforts in keeping purely and completely the vows of Bodhisattvas, one completes the collection(s) for Full Awakening.

*punḥyajñānasvabhāvasya sambhārasya tu pūrtaye |
sarvabuddhamatoheturabhijñotpāda eva hi | | 35 | |*

All the Buddhas regard the cause for completing the collection(s) of merit and wisdom to be the development of higher knowledge.

*pakṣavṛddhiṃ vinā pakṣī khe noḍaḍetuṃ yathā kṣamaḥ |
tathā’bhijñābalairhīnaḥ sattvārthakaraṇe’kṣamaḥ | | 36 | |*

Just as a bird with undeveloped wings cannot fly, so too without the powers that come with higher knowledge one is unable to fulfill the goals of living beings.

*abhijñasya divārātrau yāni puṇyāni santi vai |
abhijñāyāśca rāhitye naiva janmaśateṣu ca | | 37 | |*

The merit accumulated in one day by someone with higher knowledge is not gained by someone without higher knowledge even in a hundred lifetimes.

*śighraṁ sambodhi-sambhāraṁ saṁpūrayitumicchati |
nirālasyaena yatnenābhijñāṁ saṁsādhayettu saḥ | | 38 | |*

One who wants to quickly complete the collection necessary for Full Awakening will succeed at gaining higher knowledge only by making efforts, not through laziness.

*śamathasiddhyabhāve'bhijñānaṁ na jāyate |
ataḥ śamathasiddhayarthāṁ yatitavyaṁ punaḥ punaḥ | | 39 | |*

Without the attainment of meditative concentration, higher knowledge cannot arise. Therefore, one should repeatedly make efforts to attain meditative concentration.

*śamathāṅgaprahīṇatve tadyatnairbhāvite'pi ca |
saṁvatsarasahasraīśca samādhirnaiva setsyati | | 40 | |*

One whose meditative concentration is incomplete will not achieve complete meditation, even if he tries to meditate for a thousand years.

*ataḥ samādhisaṁbhārādhyāyoktāṅgasamāśritaḥ |
kasmimścit alambane'pi puṇye saṁsthāpayenmanaḥ | | 41 | |*

Therefore, following the nine stages discussed in the relevant chapter of Bodhibhadra's *Collection for Complete Meditation*, one should place the mind on some virtuous object or another.

*yoginahśamathe siddhe'bhijñānaṃ cāpi setsyati |
prajñāpāramitāyogaṃ vinā nā''varaṇakṣayaḥ | | 42 | |*

When the practitioner has achieved meditative concentration, he or she will gain higher knowledge as well. But the obscurations will not be destroyed without the yoga of the Perfection of Wisdom.

*kleśajñeyāvṛtestasmāt prahāṇārthamaśeṣataḥ |
prajñāpāramitāṃ yogī sopāyaṃ bhāvayet sadā | | 43 | |*

And so, in order to remove the mental affliction obstacles and the obstacles to wisdom, the practitioner should always meditate on the Perfection of Wisdom and practice skillful means.

*upāyarahitā prajñā'pyupāyaḥ prajñayā vinā |
yato bandha iti proktau praheyaṃ nobhayaṃ tataḥ | | 44 | |*

Bondage is said to come from wisdom without skillful means, or skillful means without wisdom, and so one cannot do without both.

*kā prajñā ka upāyaśca śaṅkāmiti nirāsitum |
upāyasya ca prajñāyāḥ bhedaḥ samyak prakāśyate | | 45 | |*

In order to remove doubts about what wisdom and skillful means are, I will clarify the real differences between the two.

*prajñāpāramitāṃ tyaktvā dānapāramitādayaḥ |
sarve hi kuśalāḥ dharmāḥ upāyāḥ jinabhāṣitāḥ | | 46 | |*

According to the words of the Conquerors, skillful means include all meritorious spiritual practices beginning with the Perfection of Giving up to but excluding the Perfection of Wisdom.

*upāyābhyāsaśyātmā yo hi prajñāṃ vibhāvayet |
śīghraṃ sa labhate bodhiṃ na nairātmyaikabhāvanāt | | 47 | |*

One who meditates on wisdom while keeping himself under control through the practice of skillful means quickly attains Awakening, not someone who only meditates on the absence of a truly existing self.

*skandhāyatanadhātūnāmanutpādāvabodhinām |
svabhāvaśūnyatājñānaṃ prajñeti parikīrtitā | | 48 | |*

Realizing that things are empty of having any inherent nature – that the five heaps that make up a person, the six senses and objects of sense, and the five elements do not really arise on their own – this is said to be wisdom.

*sadutpattirayuktāsti asaccāpi khapuṣpavat |
dvayordoṣaprasaṅgatvāt udbhāvo na dvayorapi | | 49 | |*

There is no existing thing that could be produced, and there is no non-existing thing, like a sky-flower, that could be produced. To say something could be both existing and non-existing involves faulty reasoning, and so both of them together cannot be produced.

*anutpannaḥ svato bhāvo parato nobhayorapi |
ahetuteśca no tasmāt niḥsvabhāvaḥ svarupataḥ | | 50 | |*

An existing thing cannot come from itself, or from something other than itself, or from both itself and something other, and it is not without cause. Therefore, the true nature of existing things is that there is an absence of inherent nature in them.

*athavā sarvadharmāṇāṃ caikānekavicāraṇe |
svarupā'prāpyamānatvāt niḥsvabhāvato aniścayaḥ | | 51 | |*

Moreover, when we examine all existing things to see if they are singular or plural, we can find no true nature as either. And so for

this reason they are certainly without any inherent nature.

*śūnyatāsaptau yuktau mūlamadhyamakādiṣu |
siddho bhāvasvabhāvastu śūnyatāyām bhāṣitaḥ | | 52 | |*

It is explained in texts like Nagarjuna's *Seventy Verses on Emptiness* and the *Root Verses on the Middle Way* that the only inherent nature existing things have is found in their emptiness.

*granthasya gauravo yasmāt atra tasmānna vistaraḥ |
siddhasiddhāntamātraikam bhāvanārtham prabhāṣitam | | 53 | |*

In order not to make this tome too weighty we will not go into the particulars here, but have referred only to the final conclusions for the purpose of meditation.

*tasmādaśeṣadharmāṇām svabhāvanāmalābhataḥ |
nairātmyabhāvanā yā hi sā prajñāyāstu bhāvanā | | 54 | |*

So a meditation on the lack of essence to things, where one cannot find an inherent nature in anything, is a wisdom meditation.

*prajñayā sarvadharmāṇām yatsvabhāvo na dr̥ṣṭavat |
yuktayā parikṣya tām prajñām so'vikalpena bhāvayet | | 55 | |*

Having used wisdom to intellectually examine all things and finding no inherent nature in them, one should then meditate on wisdom in a non-conceptual way.

*bhavo vikalpobhūto'yaṁ tadvikalpātmakastataḥ |
sarvakalpaparityāgaḥ nivārṇaḥ paramo'sti hi | | 56 | |*

This world has come into being through concepts and thus exists purely conceptually. The abandonment of all such conceptual thinking is the highest nirvana.

*evamapyuktam bhagavatā--
mahā'vidyā vikalpo hi saṃsārārṇavapātakaḥ |
nirvikalpasamādhisthe'vikalpo bhāsate khavat | | 57 | |*

And so the Lord said, “Conceptual thinking entails great ignorance and casts us into the ocean of samsara. When one stays in perfect, non-conceptual meditation, the space-like non-conceptual state appears clearly.”

*avikalpapraveśadhāraṇyāmapi uttam—
cintitenirvikalpe'smin saddharme jinaputrakaiḥ |
vikalpaṃ durgamaṃ tīrtvā'vikalpo prāpsyate kramāt | | 58 | |*

It is also said in the *Mystical Verses on Entering the Non-Conceptual State*: “When Bodhisattvas think non-conceptually about this Highest Teaching, they will transcend the conceptuality which is so hard to get beyond. Gradually they will arrive at the state of non-conceptuality.”

*nīścayīyāgamayuktibhyāṃ svabhāva rahitān tathā |
sarvān dharmānutpannānavikalpaṃ bhāvayet | | 59 | |*

And so, having ascertained through reasoning and scriptural authority that all things are unproduced and without an inherent nature, one should meditate in a non-conceptual manner.

*bhāvayannidamevetthaṃ prāpyoṣṇatvādikaṃ kramāt |
labhate pramuditvādiṃ buddhabodhirna lambitā | | 60 | |*

Meditating in this way, one gradually obtains the stages of the path of preparation known as “Heat” and the rest. One then attains the ten stages of a Bodhisattva beginning with “Joy,” and soon thereafter the Awakening of a Buddha.

*sādhitairmantraśaktayā hi śāntivistarakarmabhiḥ |
bhadrakumbhādisiddhāṣṭamahāsiddhibalena ca | | 61 | |
abhīṣṭā bodhisarṁbhāraparipūrṭiḥ sukhena cet |
kriyācaryādi tantrokam guhyācaranabhiṣyate | | 62 | |
tadā''cāryabhiṣekārtha mahāratnādidānataḥ |
sadgurum prīṇayed bhaktayā sarvājñātipālanaiḥ | | 63 | |*

If you want to easily complete the collections needed for Awakening through activities of pacification, increase, etc. -- which are accomplished through the power of mantras and the great attainments like the eight siddhis beginning with the “Auspicious Vase” – and if you want to engage in the secret practices spoken of in the Action, Activity, and other classes of tantra, then, for the purpose of receiving an initiation from a Master, one should please a qualified guru with gifts of great value, with one’s devotion, and by doing everything he or she commands.

*prasanne ca gurau bhūte pūrṇācāryābhiṣekataḥ |
sarvopāpaviśuddhātmā siddhibhāgī bhaviṣyati | | 64 | |*

When the guru has become pleased and you receive full initiation from a Master, you will become purified of all your negative karma and will be blessed with great attainments.

*ādibuddhamahātantre prayatnena niṣedhataḥ |
guhyaprajñābhiṣekastu na grahyā brahmacāriṇā | | 65 | |*

Because of the emphatic prohibition found in the *Great Tantra of the Primordial Buddha* (a.k.a. the *Kalacakra Tantra*), someone with vows of celibacy should not take the secret and wisdom initiations (in their literal form).

*so'bhīṣeko gṛhītaścet brahyacaryatapaḥ sthitaiḥ |
niṣiddhācaraṇatvāt tattapaḥ samvarakṣayaḥ | | 66 | |*

If someone who was keeping the austerity of celibacy were to take those initiations, that vow of austerity would be destroyed because of doing what was proscribed.

*jāyante vratinastasya pārājikavipattayaḥ |
saḥ pateddurgatau nūnaṁ siddhirnaiva kadācana | | 67 | |*

Transgressions in the nature of downfalls would arise for that vow-holder. He would surely fall into a lower rebirth having gained no attainments at all.

*sarvatantraśrutau bhāṣye homayajñādikarmāsu |
labdhācāryābhīṣekaśca tattvaṁ naiva duṣyati | | 68 | |*

But there is no fault for one who knows how things really are. Having received initiation from a Master, he may learn all the Tantras, teach them, and perform rituals like fire offerings and sacrifices.

*dīpaṅkaraśriyā bodhipathaḥ proktaḥ samāsataḥ |
dṛaṣṭvā sūtrādidharmoktīm bodhiprabhanivedanāt | | 69 | |*

The Path to Awakening, as it is found in dharma teachings of the Sutras and other texts, has thus been concisely explained by the glorious Dipamkara at the request of Bodhiprabha.

ADDENDUM

BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE *LAM RIM* (“STEPS ON THE PATH TO AWAKENING”)

- I. Relying on the Teacher
- II. Recognizing the Importance of this Life of Leisure and Fortune
- III. Steps Shared with Those of Lesser Capacity
 - A. Impermanence in the Form of Death
 - B. The Sufferings of the Lower Realms
 - C. Going for Refuge
 - D. Generating Belief in the Laws of Karma
- IV. Steps Shared with Those of Medium Capacity
 - A. Developing the Wish for Freedom
 - B. The Path that Leads to Freedom (Training in Morality, Meditative Concentration, and Wisdom)
- V. Steps Shared with Those of Greater Capacity
 - A. Developing the Wish for Enlightenment
 - B. Taking the Vows of a Bodhisattva
 - C. Living the Life of a Bodhisattva (the Six Perfections)
 - 1. Perfection of Generosity
 - 2. Perfection of Vowed Morality
 - 3. Perfection of Tolerance
 - 4. Perfection of Joyful Effort
 - 5. Perfection of Meditation
 - 6. Perfection of Wisdom
 - D. Entering the “Diamond Way”