



The Foundation of All Good Qualities

By Lama Tsongkhapa

In the 11th century, Tibet was blessed by the arrival of the Indian Buddhist master Lama Atisha. Motivated to present an organized summary of the sutra teachings, Atisha composed a short text entitled, *The Lamp of the Path*. Three hundred years later, Lama Tsongkhapa expanded upon this text with his opus *The Great Exposition on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment (Lamrim Chenmo)*. The often referred to “Lam-Rim teachings” are taken from this seminal text. The teachings are presented in three scopes according to the

The foundation of all good qualities is the kind and venerable guru;
Correct devotion to him is the root of the path.
By clearly seeing this and applying great effort,
Please bless me to rely upon him with great respect.

Understanding that the precious freedom of this rebirth is found
only once,
Is greatly meaningful, and is difficult to find again,
Please bless me to generate the mind that unceasingly,
Day and night, takes its essence.

This life is as impermanent as a water bubble;
Remember how quickly it decays and death comes.
After death, just like a shadow follows the body,
The results of black and white karma follow.

Finding firm and definite conviction in this,
Please bless me to always be careful
To abandon even the slightest negativities
And accomplish all virtuous deeds.

Seeking samsaric pleasures is the door to all suffering;
They are uncertain and cannot be relied upon.
Recognizing these shortcomings,
Please bless me to generate the strong wish for the bliss of
liberation.

Led by this pure thought,
Mindfulness, alertness, and great caution arise.
The root of the teachings is keeping the pratimoksha vows:
Please bless me to accomplish this essential practice.

Just as I have fallen into the sea of samsara,
So have all mother migratory beings.
Please bless me to see this, train in supreme bodhichitta,
And bear the responsibility of freeing migratory beings.

Even if I develop only bodhichitta, but I don't practice the three
types of morality,

capacities of varying practitioners – small, medium, and great – which organize practices and meditations on the path into gradual stages.

Lama Tsongkhapa's famous prayer, *The Foundation of All Good Qualities*, is the most concise and stirring outline available of the Lam-Rim teachings. In only fourteen stanzas, Tsongkhapa offers us a prayer that covers the entire graduated path to enlightenment, short enough to recite every day, profound enough to study for a lifetime.

I will not achieve enlightenment.
With my clear recognition of this,
Please bless me to practice the bodhisattva vows with great energy.

Once I have pacified distractions to wrong objects
And correctly analyzed the meaning of reality,
Please bless me to generate quickly within my mindstream
The unified path of calm abiding and special insight.

Having become a pure vessel by training in the general path,
Please bless me to enter
The holy gateway of the fortunate ones:
The supreme vajra vehicle.

At that time, the basis of accomplishing the two attainments
Is keeping pure vows and samaya.
As I have become firmly convinced of this,
Please bless me to protect these vows and pledges like my life.

Then, having realized the importance of the two stages,
The essence of the Vajrayana,
By practicing with great energy, never giving up the four sessions,
Please bless me to realize the teachings of the holy guru.

Like that, may the gurus who show the noble path
And the spiritual friends who practice it have
long lives.
Please bless me to pacify completely
All outer and inner hindrances.

In all my lives, never separated from perfect gurus,
May I enjoy the magnificent Dharma.
By completing the qualities of the stages and path,
May I quickly attain the state of Vajradhara. ❀

From the Jor Chö booklet, trans. Jampal Lhundrup, ed. Ven. Ailsa Cameron, Wisdom Publications: 1988. Lightly edited by Ven. Constance Miller and Nick Ribush, April 1999.