

# THE GARLAND OF VIEWS: AN INSTRUCTION

Attributed to Padma Sambhava

Tibetan title: *man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba*

*A note summarizing the different views, vehicles and so on.*  
Homage to the Blessed Manjushrikumara and Vajradharma!

## *The Worldly paths*

The countless erroneous views that exist in the realms of the world may be subsumed into four categories: (i) the unreflective, (ii) the materialists, (iii) the nihilists and (iv) the extremists.

The unreflective do not understand whether or not all things and events have causes and conditions; they are thoroughly ignorant. The materialists do not understand whether or not there exist previous and subsequent lives and, relying upon the words of mundane secrets, they acquire wealth and power [only] for this one life. The nihilists view all phenomena to be devoid of cause and effects and maintain all elements of existence that have come about in this one life as having done so accidentally. Thus they uphold nihilism. The extremists uphold the existence of an eternal self for they reify all phenomena through conceptual imputation. [The extremists comprise of] those who view the presence of effects where there is no cause; those who view cause and effects erroneously; and those who view the absence of effects where there is a cause. All of these are views of ignorance.

## *The Path Transcending the World*

The path that transcends the world too consists of two categories: (i) the dialectical vehicle and (ii) the indestructible vehicle [of Vajrayana]. The dialectical vehicle in turn is threefold: (a) the vehicle of the Disciples, (ii) the vehicle of the Self-Realised Ones, and (iii) the vehicle of the bodhisattvas.

## DIALECTICAL VEHICLE

### *Disciple's Vehicle*

Of these the view of those who have entered the vehicle of the Disciples is as follows. They maintain that the nihilistic view denying everything and the eternalistic view asserting the existence of eternal realities, which are postulated by the extremists by means of reification and denigration, are as untrue as perceiving a [coiled] rope as a snake. [In contrast] they view the aggregates, the elements and the sources, [which are composed of] the four great elements, as well as the consciousness to be ultimately real. [And] it is by means of meditating on the four Noble truths that, in due course, the four kinds of results are realized.

### *Self-Realized One's Vehicle*

The view of those who have entered the vehicle of the Self-Realized Ones is as follows. With respect to viewing the eternal self and so on that are postulated by the extremists by means of reification and denigration to being non-existent, they are similar to the Disciples. The difference is that they understand the aggregate of form and one aspect of the reality-element to be devoid of self-existence.

Also, at the time of attaining the fruit of Self-Realized One's state, unlike Disciples, they do not depend upon a spiritual mentor. [Rather] due to the force of their past habituation, they realize the profound ultimate reality (*dharmata*) by means of the twelve links of dependent origination and attain the fruit of Self-Enlightenment.

#### *Bodhisattva Vehicle*

The view of those who have entered the vehicle of the bodhisattvas is as follows. All phenomena of thoroughly afflicted and enlightened classes are on the ultimate level devoid of intrinsic nature while on the conventional level they possess their individual characteristics in clearly distinctive manner. The bodhisattvas aspire to seek the unexcelled enlightenment, which is the culmination of traversing the ten levels and the fruit of practicing the six perfections one by one.

### INDESTRUCTIBLE VEHICLE OF VAJRAYANA

The indestructible vehicle [of Vajrayana] has three classes: (i) the vehicle of Kriya-tantra, (ii) the vehicle of Ubhaya-tantra and (iii) the vehicle of Yoga-tantra.

#### *Kriya-tantra Vehicle*

The view of those who have entered Kriya-tantra is as follows. Whilst there are no origination and cessation on the ultimate level, on the conventional level one visualizes [oneself] in the form of a deity and cultivates the deity's image, the attributes - the hand implements - and the mantra repetitions on the basis of the power of the coming together of the necessary ritual articles and other conditions, such as observance of purity laws, performance of rituals on specific days and [auspicious] star constellations and so on.

#### *Ubhaya-tantra Vehicle*

The view of those who have entered the vehicle of Ubhaya-tantra is as follows. Whilst there are no origination and cessation on the ultimate level, on the conventional level one visualizes [oneself] in the form a deity. This is cultivated on the basis of both the practice of meditative absorption endowed with four aspects as well as the [necessary] ritual articles and conditions.

#### *Yoga-tantra Vehicle*

The view of those who have entered the vehicle of Yoga-tantra is twofold: (i) the view of outer yoga, the tantra of the Sages, and (ii) the view of inner yoga, the method tantra.

#### *Outer Yoga Vehicle*

The view of those who have entered outer yoga, the Sage's tantra, is as follows. Not holding the external [ritual] articles to be of primary importance, they cultivate [their goal] on the basis of emphasising the yoga of visualising male and female deities that are devoid of ultimate origination and cessation and the form body of the Noble One that share resemblance with them, which is the meditative absorption endowed with the four seals of a thoroughly purified mind.

#### *Inner Yoga Vehicle*

The view of those who have entered the vehicle of inner yoga, the method tantra, is threefold: (1) the mode of generation, (2) the mode of completion, and (3) the mode of great completion [or perfection].

### 1. MODE OF GENERATION

The mode of generation is achieved by means of the meditative practice of gradual development of the three meditative absorptions and [gradual] creation of the mandala.

### 2. MODE OF COMPLETION

The mode of completion is achieved by abiding unwaveringly within [the visualization of] male and female deities that are ultimately devoid of origination and cessation as well as the middle way of ultimate expanse, which is the non-conceptual truth, while on the conventional level cultivating in [perfect] equanimity and un-muddled manner the form of the Noble deity with clear visualization.

### 3. THE MODE OF GREAT PERFECTION

#### *Presentation of the meaning of Great Perfection*

The mode of Great Perfection is to meditate on the basis of understanding all mundane and supramundane phenomena as being devoid of any differentiation and to recognize as having always been present as the mandala of body, speech and mind.

It is stated in the tantra:

As for the limbs of the Vajra body,  
They are known as the five Buddhas.  
The sources and the numerous elements,  
They are the mandala of the bodhisattvas.

Earth and water are Locana and Mamaki;  
Fire and wind are Pandaravasin and Tara;  
The space is Dhateshvari.  
[So] the three worlds are primordially pure.

So all phenomena of cyclic existence and nirvana are primordially unborn yet they have the capacity for illusory function as they have always been in the nature of the ten Tathagatas and their consorts. All phenomena are therefore naturally transcendent of sorrow: The great [elements] are in the nature of the five consorts; the five aggregates, the nature of the five Buddha families; the four consciousness, the nature the four great bodhisattvas; the four objects, the four beautiful goddesses; the four senses, the bodhisattvas; the four temporal stages, the four goddesses; the bodily organs, the consciousnesses; the sensory fields and the bodhicitta drops arising from them, the four wrathful deities; the four extremes of eternalism and nihilism, the four wrathful female deities; the mental consciousness, the nature of Samandrabhadra, namely the indestructible bodhicitta; the objects [of both] conditioned and unconditioned phenomena are in the nature Samandrabhadri who is the receptacle [of the creation] of [all] phenomena. All of these in turn have already been in the nature of complete enlightenment; they are not acquired now by means of the path. Thus all phenomena - conditioned and unconditioned - such as the ten directions, the three temporal stages, the three worlds, and so on do not exist apart from one's own mind. It is stated:

The clear understanding of one's own mind -  
This is the buddhas and the bodhisattvas;  
This constitutes the three worlds;

This constitutes the great elements as well.

Thus it has been stated:

All phenomena dwell in the mind; the mind dwell in space, while space dwells nowhere.

Furthermore:

All phenomena are devoid of intrinsic nature; all phenomena are thoroughly pure from the very beginning; all phenomena are thoroughly radiant; all phenomena are naturally transcendent nirvana; all phenomena are manifestly enlightened.

This [then] is the [meaning of] Great Perfection. (The mode of Great Perfection means the perfection of the accumulations of merit and wisdom and the spontaneous realization of the resultant goal.)

#### PRESENTATION OF THE MODE OF GREAT PERFECTION

##### *The four understandings*

Conviction in this mode of Great Perfection [arises] by means of four understandings: (i) understanding the oneness of cause, (ii) understanding through the mode of syllables, (iii) understanding through the blessings, and (iv) direct understanding.

Understanding the oneness of cause refers to this: Since all phenomena are on the ultimate level unborn, they are not different [from each other]; they are not different in sharing the characteristics of illusions on the conventional level; what is unborn itself appears as diverse illusory forms just like reflections of moon in water; since illusion is devoid of intrinsic nature and is unborn and since the ultimate and the conventional are indistinguishable one understands the oneness of cause.

Understanding through the mode of syllables is as follows. The unborn nature of all phenomena is AH, which is the nature of enlightened speech; that the unborn nature itself appearing as causally efficacious illusion is O, which is the nature of enlightened body; and that the awareness that cognises this, the illusory wisdom devoid of centre and peripheries, is OM, which is the nature of enlightened mind.

Understanding through blessing refers to the understanding that just as, for example, the power to change a white sheet of cloth into a red sheet lies in the dye, the power to transform all phenomena into enlightened Buddhas is obtained through understanding the oneness of cause and [understanding the mode of] the syllables.

Direct understanding is, [understanding] that the abiding of all phenomena primordially as fully enlightened is not contrary to [the intention of] the scriptures and the quintessential instructions and that it does not depend upon the words of the scriptures and quintessential instructions alone. This is understood directly as one has gained conviction from the depth of one's mind by means of one's own intellect. "Gaining conviction through the path" refers to the comprehension of the meaning of the four understandings, which is the path of a yogi. However this is not like the practice in which the cause depends upon temporal process for its effect to arise; rather, one comprehends it directly by oneself through faith.

### *The Three Characteristic Marks*

It is by means of [understanding] the three characteristic marks successful realization of the goal will take place. The comprehension of the four modes of understandings is the characteristic mark of knowledge; constant cultivation of familiarity is the characteristic mark of engagement; and its actualisation due to the force of habituation is the defining characteristic of the result.

[These three characteristic marks also] present the correlations, the purpose, and the ultimate purpose. As for “correlations,” it refers to relating the characteristic marks of the knowledge of the cause - the understanding of all phenomena labelled as afflicted or enlightened as being, right from the beginning, embodiments of enlightened body, speech and mind and as the expanse of natural Buddhahood, which is the meaning of blessing - to being the cause for achieving the unexcelled enlightenment.

As for the purpose, it is the comprehension of all phenomena - those that are imputed as afflicted factors or factors belonging to the enlightened class - as the five medicines as well the five nectars and so on, within the great equanimity of primordial Buddhahood, with no [evaluative judgement of] affirmation and negation. This is the characteristic mark of engagement and, since it is the cause of achieving the unexcelled Buddhahood, it is the purpose.

The ultimate purpose is as follows. Given that all phenomena that are imputed as distinct realities, such as, as afflicted factors, as factors of enlightened class, as five medicines, as five nectars and so on, have spontaneously come into being within the great equanimity of unexcelled Buddhahood with no [evaluative judgement of] affirmation and negation, the wheel of existence itself has existed right from the beginning as the nature of unexcelled Buddhahood, sharing the characteristics of nirvana. It is therefore the characteristic mark of the result and the manifest actualisation of this wheel of adornment of inexhaustible body, speech and mind is the ultimate purpose.

### *The Four Branches of the Yogic Practice*

To achieve this one must strive in the yoga that brings about spontaneous realization of approximation, near approximation, attainment and great attainment. “Approximation” refers to the knowledge of the awakening mind, which is the understanding that it is by means of the path that all phenomena are realized as primordially in the nature of Buddhahood and that they cannot be altered by means of their counter-forces. “Near approximation” refers to the knowledge of oneself as a deity, which in turn is the understanding that since all phenomena are primordially the nature of Buddhahood oneself too is primordially in the nature of a deity and that this is not something that has been cultivated at present. “Attainment” refers to the generation of the mother. As for the great mother, it is within the expanse of space the space itself appears as the great mother, namely as [the four great elements of] earth, water, fire and wind. One recognizes these as the mother who is the receptacle [of the creation of all phenomena]. The “great attainment” refers to the relating of method and wisdom, which is the primordial uniting of the wisdom of the five great consorts - the space of the consorts and emptiness - with the father of all the Buddhas of the five aggregates, free of aspiration. From this [union] the bodhicitta drops appear as emanations whose nature is such that within the truth of primordial Buddhahood, illusions play on illusions. And at this blissful moment of illusory supreme bliss continuum one achieves spontaneously the truth of signlessness with the non-objectified space into a single stream. The four classes of mara are [thus] subdued and one achieves the final objective.

### *The procedure for entering the mandala of Great Perfection*

[This is achieved in the following manner:] With respect to entering the primordially unexcelled mandala, which is the undifferentiated celestial wish-granting mansion wherein all phenomena are primordially pure, hearing the scriptures of method vehicle is the opening of one's eyes. Understanding the meaning [of these teachings] is seeing the mandala; cultivating its familiarity following its understanding is entering the mandala, while actualising it after entering it is the obtainment of the great *siddhi* attainment. This procedure signifies the final stage of Great Perfection - that is one arrives spontaneously on the level of great accumulation, which is the wheel of syllables.

*Demonstrating that this mode of Great Perfection is not suitable for everyone*

The persons of excellent mental faculty understand what are primordially enlightened as primordially enlightened and the familiarity of this [knowledge] enhances with firm steps. This is not a pursuit of the ordinary person. As for the ordinary person, even though he contemplates, he will have no conviction in its truth and profundity. Relating to this fact of the mind of the ordinary person not gaining conviction, having difficulty in comprehending it and accepting its truth and profundity, there is the danger of thinking that this must be the same for everyone. [One might then] denigrate the excellent persons as all liars and thereby engender thoughts of refuting them. Because of this it is being kept hidden as such it is taught as the "secret vehicle." Therefore until the mind understanding the truth of all phenomena as being primordially enlightened has arisen, if one engages in other's welfare on the basis of the lower vehicles, one will not undermine the spiritual trainees. So extensive statements are found [in the scriptures] that the master must be versed in [the knowledge of] the defects of cyclic existence, the excellent qualities of nirvana, as well as in all the vehicles, and that a master who is ignorant of some aspects [of the teachings] must not hold [the position of a teacher].

#### DIFFERENCES OF ASCETIC PRACTICES AND THE CONDUCTS

Due to the difference of views differences exist too in the ascetic practices and conducts. Those devoid of ascetic practice are the unreflective worldly and the nihilists. There are four kinds that have ascetic practices: (i) the mundane ascetic practice which the materialists and the extremists have, (ii) the ascetic practice of the disciples, (iv) the ascetic practice of the bodhisattvas, and (iv) the unexcelled asceticism.

Of these the unreflective is ignorant of cause and effects and is therefore devoid of ascetic practice. The nihilists uphold nihilistic view and are devoid of ascetic practice. The materialists seek qualities characteristic of this life so they possess ascetic practices, such as observance of purity laws and so on. The extremists, with the goal of purifying the eternal self, engage in such asceticism as abusing the body, keeping themselves in the five types of fire and so on; they engage in the conducts in a distorted manner.

As for the ascetic practice of the Disciple, the Discipline scripture states:

Do not commit any evil;  
Engage in virtues as best as you can;  
Thoroughly tame your own mind -  
This is the doctrine of the Buddha.

Thus they view all factors of existence, virtuous or non-virtuous, as existing separately and respectively belonging to [the categories of] ultimate and conventional truths. They engage in the conduct of practising the virtues and relinquishing non-virtues.

As to the ascetic practice of the bodhisattvas, the *Bodhisattva Vows* states:

Not effecting the means when circumstances call for;  
Not employing supernatural powers, threats and so on;  
He who has compassion and out of loving kindness,  
And those of virtuous mind, there is no fault [in these acts].

So if it is sustained by great compassion, regardless of whatever acts one might engage in, be it virtuous or non-virtuous, one's vows will not degenerate. For the bodhisattva vow is, in brief, to act with taking great compassion as its ground.

As for the unexcelled asceticism, the *Great Pledge Sutra* states:

If one is thoroughly affirmed in the Buddha's vehicle,  
Even if one indulges in all the afflictions and the five senses,  
Just like a lotus [growing] in muddy water,  
In him morality remains pure and perfect.

Since all phenomena are in perfect equanimity from the very beginning, no compassion is to be cultivated and no hatred to be eliminated. It does not mean, however, that enlightened compassion does not arise for those who failed to understand this way. Just as they comprehend by means of the view that [all phenomena are] primordially pure, they engage also in the ascetic practices and the conducts with thorough purity.

This secret [instruction], a garland of views,  
If there are persons who possess skills of wisdom and method,  
May such excellent beings encounter this [instruction],  
Just as the blind who opens his own eyes and recovers his sight.

The instruction entitled *A Garland of Views* is complete. It was composed by the great master Padmasambhava.

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