
Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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We will begin with the usual meditation.

[Tonglen meditation]

It is always very important to check our motivation before beginning an action, particularly before beginning a spiritual practice. Not only that, but even in everyday life, the type of activity we do and the effectiveness or outcome depends on the state of mind that motivates us to do that action. Therefore, it is beneficial to give a bit of thought to what sort of mind or motivation we have at the beginning any activity. In particular, when we engage in spiritual practice it is not enough to think that what we are doing appears to be a spiritual practice – whether it is actually going to be a spiritual or Dharma practice depends on the motivation which led us to that action. We should therefore ensure that we have the right motivation to begin this teaching.

If, when we check our motivation, we notice some mistake or fault with that motivation, then before we carry on with that activity, we should utilise our own intelligence to correct that faulty mind and get rid of it.

Continuing with the commentary on Atisha's *Lamp for the Path*, we are up to the third heading.

3. CAUSE FOR THE COMPOSITION

In relation to this, Verse 68 of the root text reads:

Verse 68

*I, the Elder Dipamkarashri, having seen it
Explained in sutra and in other teachings,
At the request of Jangchup Wö,
Have made this concise explanation.*

The presentation of the lines in the commentary has been changed to accord with the order in the translation of the root text. The commentary says:

The first line of the root text *I, the Elder Dipamkarashri, having seen it*

This indicates the author, ...

... the fourth line indicates the activity undertaken.

The fourth line refers to having completed *this concise explanation*.

The second indicates the internal condition of excellent wisdom knowledge.

This is, as the root text says, *explained in sutra and in other teachings*.

The third line indicates another condition of great compassion as a cause for composing the text.

This refers to the line *At the request of Jangchup Wö*

So this verse shows the causes for the author to compose this text.

In this verse we can notice the two important elements necessary for the composition of any Mahayana text, which are wisdom and method.

First of all, as this verse says, the author of a Mahayana text needs to be endowed with the qualities of excellent wisdom, the intelligent knowledge of the entire teachings and scriptures (including the sutras and the various commentaries to those), and a correct and complete understanding of the content of all the scriptures. These are the necessary qualities of any author of a Mahayana text.

The second element is that the author should also use an excellent skilful method in the composition. Here 'method' primarily refers to great compassion, as Mahayana texts are composed in order to benefit other beings.

It is also implied here that those who are studying this text should also try to develop both method and wisdom.

Then the commentary continues, referring to the author Atisha:

He was called the Great Elder Dipamkara Shrijnana because he was the head and the crown ornament of all the eighteen schools (of early Buddhism), and who, after taking the full ordination vows, had maintained for over thirty years the pure and unbroken lineage of ordination vows.

Further:

He wrote an exposition for the sake of guiding the fortunate people of the land of snow ...

This refers to the people of Tibet.

... on how to follow the Mahayana path of liberation from the beginning level to supreme enlightenment.

We have already heard these words so many times: the teachings of the stages of the path indicate the spiritual practices that are suitable for all levels of practitioners from the very low scope through the medium and then to the great scope. Not only that, but the structure of the entire path is explained in such a systematic way that it makes it easy for followers to follow it step by step without any mistakes. So this part of the commentary is basically referring to the three stages of the path.

The next part of the commentary is quite self-explanatory.

There is also a cause for composing his work. The cause is that he had gained knowledge and seen what is explained in sutra and in other, which includes tantras, and the commentary scriptures and pith instructions.¹ Beside this, Bhikkhu Jangjub Wö from the royal family, who shouldered the responsibility for Buddhism in Tibet, fervently requested him to write an exposition which could serve as the pioneer doctrine of the Mahayana for the sake of the flourishing of general Buddhism.

In requesting the teaching from Atisha there is reference to the *flourishing of general Buddhism* in Tibet. These words, as we have mentioned in the past, were very pleasing to Atisha.

It then continues:

As to the manner of the composition Atisha's *Entering into the Two Truths* states:

Life is short and many the kinds of knowledge;
Let him who knows not even his own life's span,
Choose only from his purest desires,
As the goose strains from water.

These words advise us to consider what is really essential for our spiritual practice. First of all, *the kinds of knowledge*

¹ Here we can see how the commentary actually relates to that line in the root text.

refers to an object of knowledge, something to learn and to know, and of course there are endless things to know. However our life span is just not long enough to gain all that knowledge. And, as it says here, when we think about it, we have no idea how long we will live.

Therefore, it says we have to be like a *goose* or a duck. The idea here is if you give it milk mixed into water the goose will strain the milk from the water as it drinks, although I'm not too sure whether a goose actually has that ability! But the turtle does have that ability so we can consider a turtle as an example here.

The implied advice to us is that it is more important to put what we learn into practise, to the point that we can really taste it, just like drinking milk is more satisfying than water. The commentary is saying to us that we should not spend a lot of time just trying to learn and understand the meaning of the text. Rather we should be focusing more on the application of whatever knowledge we have acquired. That is what we need to practise.

Then the commentary continues:

Having eliminated all the lengthy elaboration of what to accept and reject, ...

This indicates the special qualities of Atisha's texts. The author of the commentary is saying: *I'm not focusing on the elaborations of various ideas, various things which we should accept and other things we should reject and so many things like various theories.* Rather:

... the work just focuses in a concise manner on the complete favourable conditions for the practice of those seeking the state of omniscience.

Here, *those seeking the state of omniscience* could be referring to all of those who follow Dharma practice. The author is indicating that his intention is to give a teaching that is concise, and which can be directly applicable to those who are seeking the state of omniscience.

Concluding remarks

We will just read through the remaining part of the commentary which is:

The fourth is Concluding Remarks which has two:

1. Who wrote it
2. Who translated it

Who wrote it

The first is that this completes the work kindly composed by the great scholar and preceptor, the crown jewel of the five hundred sages, Dipamkara Shrijnana, for the sake of countless fortunate beings.

Who translated it

The second, is that this work that was translated from Indian into the Tibetan language, edited and approved by the eminent Indian Abbot Dipamkara Shrijnana and the Tibetan translator, the eyes of the world, fully ordained monk Geway Lodro and it was then taught and studied. The *Self-commentary* to this was translated by Geshe Gungtang pa with permission (from the author). As it is said, 'No other disciples of Jowo have it but Nagtso alone', the translator Nagtso preserved it as hidden Dharma. However, this enlightening work was propagated widely by Geshe Tonpa² and other masters. Geshe Tonpa passed it to the three Kadampa brothers (Geshe Potowa, Chengawa and Phuchungwa) and to

a large gathering of his disciples and so forth. Geshe Potowa held the teachings of the translator and the pandita to such a high regard that each time he would teach them eight times to the gathering. (?) Later on, Sharawa disseminated this teaching, and that's how it serves as the lamp of the Buddhadharma and the eyes for migrating beings to this day.

It is very fortunate and auspicious that we have been able to complete this teaching of Atisha's *Lamp for the Path* from beginning to end. Receiving this teaching is also very special for a number of reasons. First of all, the transmission that you have received is an unbroken transmission of the teachings. I, along with many of you, received this teaching on the *Lamp of the Path* from His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Sydney during one of his visits. His Holiness received the transmission from one of his teachers Gen Rinzin Tenpa, who was the brother to the great bodhisattva commonly known as Khunu Rinpoche or Khunu Lama Tenzin Gyaltzen. His Holiness also received the transmission and commentary to this teaching from the late Serkong Tsenshab Rinpoche. I have always had a great personal interest in this text and received a teaching on it from the late Gen Rinpoche (Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey). The preciousness of this teaching is always in my mind, and I've always wanted to extensively study it in conjunction with Lama Tsong Khapa's *Lam Rim*. But my time is passing, and I don't think that I will be able to do that now. As you can see, this teaching has the blessing of being a lineage of unbroken transmission, and therefore we are very fortunate to be able to study it.

As we have completed a commentary for this whole text it would be good to make a booklet as soon as we can, as I see it as being very beneficial for others. I acknowledge the great job of the preparation of the teaching transcriptions and translation by the Tara publication team over many years. For the publication of the teachings on the *Lamp for the Path*, we need a few volunteers. Ross volunteered. Would Jeremy and Kathy like to be involved? If the publication needs more help they will check with you. Consult with Adair, who's in charge of this and then go from there.

I admire Ross for his years of experience and knowledge in the Buddhadharma and contribution to the centre. I am very happy that he is involving himself in the publication of this book.

As we discussed last week, I am going to teach from a section from Lama Tsongkhapa's *Great Stages of the Path*, beginning with Chapter 8 Training in the Mahayana: Precepts and Perfections. So if you have time before next week it would be good to go over some part of it.

The translation of the commentary on *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* called *Joy of the Blossomed Excellent* by Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltzen is used with the kind permission of Sandup Tsering.

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Edited Version*

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² Referring to Drom Tonpa.