



The Precious Garland of the Sublime Path

The Oral Instructions of Lord Gampopa

NAMO RATNA GURU

Adorned with the pure conduct of the precious Kagyu, you help us traverse the ocean of samsara, so terrifying and difficult to cross. Your stream of blessings is as inexhaustibly immense as the expanse of the great ocean, and your aspirations are vast, enduring, and spontaneously accomplished. All noble masters of the flawless Practice lineage, I bow before you: be my refuge and grant your blessings!

Having cherished the spoken advice of these Kagyu masters in my heart for so long, I shall now write down these most treasured oral instructions for those who are directly or indirectly devoted to me, as a precious garland that is the sublime path.

First of all, the person who wishes to attain liberation and the omniscient state of buddhahood should remember the ten kinds of waste:

This perfect human body, so difficult to find, is wasted by engaging in unvirtuous evil deeds.

This perfect human body with the freedoms and riches, so hard to obtain, is wasted by dying an ordinary unspiritual person.

This fleeting human life, already short in this dark age, is wasted when spent on pointless activities.

Your mind, whose unconstructed nature is dharmakaya, is wasted by sinking into the muddy swamp of samsaric delusion.

The sublime master, who leads you onto the path, is wasted when you dissociate from him before attaining enlightenment.

Your vows and samayas, the ship to reach liberation, are wasted when broken through frivolous disturbing emotions.

The experience and realization discovered within yourself through the assistance of a master are wasted when allowed to dissipate in the jungle of materialistic activities.

The profound oral instructions of the siddhas are wasted when bartered like merchandise to ordinary unworthy people.

All sentient beings, your own kind parents, are wasted when, out of hatred, you abandon and forsake them.

Your youth, when your body, speech and mind are fresh and vigorous, is wasted when spent in ordinary indifference.

These were the ten kinds of waste.

Here are the ten necessary things:

You need to stay independent so as not to lose your true priorities.

You need to follow the words of a sublime master with trust and exertion.

You need to decide on your masters unerring oral instructions by understanding your shortcomings and virtues through his advice.

You need to assimilate the sublime masters realization with discriminating knowledge and persistent devotion.

You need to remain untainted by faults in thought, word and deed through being mindful, conscientious and careful.

You need to keep your resolve steady and unwavering with the armour of fortitude.

You need to be unattached and free from clinging so as to avoid letting the rope to your nose slip into the hands of others.

You need to constantly exert yourself in gathering the two accumulations by embracing them with the preliminary, main, and concluding stages.¹

You need to turn your mind towards helping other beings with loving kindness and compassion, both directly and indirectly.

You need to avoid letting phenomena stray into concrete materiality by means of discriminating knowledge and understanding.

These were the ten necessary things.

Here are the ten things to which you should keep:

Keep to a sublime master who is realized and compassionate.

Keep to a hermitage that is remote, pleasant and blessed.

Keep to companions who have a harmonious view and conduct, and who are trustworthy.

Keep moderation, remembering that [too many] articles to sustain life can involve unwholesome deeds.

Keep to the oral instructions of the lineage of accomplished masters, without prejudice.

Keep to what is of benefit for both yourself and others with regard to material things, medicines, mantras, and the profound causation.

Keep to food and the 'path of means' that is in harmony with your physical constitution.

Keep to spiritual practices and behavior that help your experience.

Keep to disciples who are worthy, trusting and respectful.

Always keep mindful and conscientious during the four daily activities.

These were the ten things to which you should keep.

Here are the ten things to be given up:

Give up, no matter what, a teacher who is mixed up in the eight worldly concerns.²

Give up evil companionship and supporters who harm your attitude and experience.

Give up a hermitage or place [of meditation] that is distracting or harmful.

Give up sustenance acquired through stealing, robbery, or deceit.

Give up aims and activities that harm your attitude and experience.

Give up food and behavior that harms your physical constitution.

Give up all attachment that binds you with greed to desirable things.

Give up frivolous behavior which may cause others to lose trust.

Give up meaningless aims and activities while walking and sitting.

Give up hiding your own faults while proclaiming those of others.

These were the ten things to be given up.

Here are the ten things not to be rejected:

Don't reject compassion, since it is the basis for helping others.

Don't reject experiences, since they are the natural radiance of your mind.

Don't reject thoughts, since they are the play of your innate nature.

Don't reject disturbing emotions, since they are the reminders of wisdom.

Don't reject sense-pleasures, since they are the water and fertilizer for experience and realization.

Don't reject sickness and suffering, since they are your spiritual friends.

Don't reject enemies and obstructions, since they are inspiration for your innate nature.

Don't reject whatever comes naturally, since it is a sign of success.

Don't reject any type of 'path of means', since it is a stepping-stone for knowledge.

Don't reject the physical activities of a spiritual nature which you are capable of accomplishing.

Don't reject the intention to help others, even if your powers are feeble.

These were the ten things not to be rejected.

Here are the ten things to understand:

Understand that outer appearances are unreal because they are mistaken.

Understand that inner mind is empty because it is devoid of self-entity.

Understand that thoughts are momentary because they occur due to conditions.

Understand that both your physical body and your voice are impermanent because they are conditioned.

Understand that the consequences of your actions are inevitable because all the pleasure and pain of sentient beings results from karma.

Understand that pain is your spiritual friend because it is the cause of renunciation.

Understand that pleasure and happiness is the demon of attachment because it is the root of samsara.

Understand that many engagements are obstacles for merit because they hinder spiritual practice.

Understand that enemies and obstructers are your teachers because obstacles are inspiration for spiritual practice.

Understand that everything is of equal nature, because all phenomena are ultimately devoid of self-nature.

These were the ten things to understand.

Here are the ten things to train in:

Having entered the door to the Dharma, don't get involved with many mundane concerns, but train in accordance with spiritual principles.

Having left your homeland behind, don't establish a new base in a foreign place, but train without attachment.

Having followed a sublime master, give up conceit and train in accordance with his words.

Having prepared your mind through learning and reflection, don't use it to embrace mere platitudes, but train in the meaning of what you understand.

When realization dawns within your stream of being, don't let it dissipate into indifference, but train undistractedly.

When practical experience has taken birth within you, don't get involved in many distractions but keep to the training.

Once you have made promises and taken vows, don't be careless in thought, word and deed, but observe the three trainings.

Having formed the resolve to attain supreme enlightenment, don't pursue selfish aims, but train in doing everything for the welfare of others.

Having entered the gateway to [Secret] Mantra, don't let your thoughts, words and deeds be ordinary, but train in them being the three mandalas.

While young, don't roam pointlessly to man undertaking hardship at the feet of a sublime spiritual teacher³.

These were the ten things to train in.

Here are the ten things to persevere in:

When a beginner, persevere in learning and reflection.

When experience arises, persevere in meditation training and sadhana practice. Until you attain stability, persevere in solitude.

When particularly scattered or agitated, persevere in focusing your awareness.

When drowsiness and sloth predominate, persevere in refreshing your awareness.

Until your mind is stable, persevere in the composure of the meditation state.

Based upon the composure of the meditation state, persevere in the [daily activities of] postmeditation.

When adversity abounds, persevere in the three types of patience.

When you feel strong cravings for desirable things, persevere in decisively turning away from attachment.

When your love and compassion are feeble, persevere in the training of the awakened frame of mind.

These were the ten things to persevere in.

Here are the ten things to inspire yourself:

Reflecting upon the difficulty of obtaining the freedoms and riches, inspire yourself to adopt the sacred Dharma.

Reflecting upon death and impermanence, inspire yourself to spiritual practice.

Reflecting upon the inevitable consequences of karmic actions, inspire yourself to give up misdeeds and nonvirtue.

Reflecting upon the negative characteristics of samsara, inspire yourself to attain liberation.

Reflecting upon the sufferings of samsaric beings, inspire yourself to train in the awakened frame of mind.

Reflecting upon the utterly deluded mental states of sentient beings, inspire yourself to learn and reflect.

Reflecting upon the difficulty of leaving behind the habitual tendencies for delusion, inspire yourself to meditation training and sadhana practice.

Reflecting upon the rampant disturbing emotions in this dark age, inspire yourself to apply the antidotes.

Reflecting upon the abundance of adverse conditions during this dark age, inspire yourself to be patient.

Reflecting upon the ease with which one can squander away this life in distraction, diverted by one thing after the other, inspire yourself to be diligent.

These were the ten things to inspire yourself.

Here are the ten ways to go astray:

When your trust is feeble but your intelligence sharp, you can stray into being a propagator of platitudes.

When your trust is strong but your intelligence weak, you can stray into close-minded stubbornness.

When your perseverance is great but you lack the oral instructions, you can stray into mistakes and pitfalls.

When you don't first dispel misconceptions through learning and reflection, your meditation training can stray into the perception-spheres of ignorant darkness⁴.

When you don't bring an authentic understanding into the realm of experience, you can stray into being an insensitive "spiritual expert".

When you don't train your mind in great compassion, the method aspect, your path can stray into that of the lesser vehicles.

When you don't train your mind in emptiness, the knowledge aspect, whatever you do can stray into the ways of samsara.

When you don't equalize the eight worldly concerns, whatever you do can stray into embellishing worldly life.

When you receive a great deal of respect from others, you can stray into ingratiating yourself with the public.

When your virtues and powers are significant but your mind is unstable, you can stray into becoming a performer of rituals for common people.

These were the ten ways to go astray.

Here are the ten things which are easily mistaken:

It is possible to mistake desire for devotion.

It is possible to mistake passion for loving kindness and compassion.

It is possible to mistake mind-made emptiness for the intrinsic emptiness of all things.

It is possible to mistake the nihilistic view for Dharmadhatu⁵.

It is possible to mistake an experience for realization.

It is possible to mistake a hypocrite for an honest person.

It is possible to mistake a maniac for someone whose delusion has collapsed.

It is possible to mistake a charlatan for a siddha.

It is possible to mistake self-serving activity for altruism.

It is possible to mistake deceit for skillful means.

These were the ten things which are easily mistaken.

Here are the ten things which are unmistakable:

It is unmistakable to leave behind the life of a householder to become a homeless renunciant without any attachment whatsoever.

It is unmistakable to respect a sublime master and spiritual teacher [as if they were] as high as the top of your own head.

It is unmistakable to train yourself in the threefold combination of learning, reflection and meditation.

It is unmistakable to keep a high view while maintaining a low profile of conduct.

It is unmistakable to be carefree while at the same time keeping a strict resolve.

It is unmistakable to be sharp-minded while remaining humble.

It is unmistakable to be rich in oral instructions while exerting yourself in practice.

It is unmistakable to have excellent experience and realization while being free from conceit and pretense.

It is unmistakable to be able to live in solitude while also being able to be with others.

It is unmistakable to be unbound by selfishness while being skillful in helping others.

These were the ten things which are unmistakable.

Here are the fourteen things which are meaningless:

Like returning empty-handed from an island of precious gems, it is meaningless to ignore the sacred Dharma after having obtained a human body.

Like a moth diving into a flame, it is meaningless to return to family life after having entered the gateway to the Dharma.

Like dying of thirst at the shore of the ocean, it is meaningless to live near a noble Dharma master while having no trust.

Like leaning an axe against a tree-trunk, it is meaningless to have a spiritual practice that is not used to remedy the four roots⁶ and ego clinging.

Like a sick person holding a bag of medicines, it is meaningless to have heard oral instructions that don't remedy disturbing emotions.

Like a parrot reciting verses, it is meaningless to have a tongue expert in Dharma terms that are not taken to heart.

Like trying to wash a sheepskin coat in plain water, it is meaningless to be generous with wealth acquired through thievery, robbery, or deception.

Like handing a mother her child's flesh, it is meaningless to make offerings to the Three Jewels by hurting other sentient beings.

Like a cat lying in wait for a mouse, it is meaningless to be stubbornly involved in selfish aims for this life.

Like trading a wish-fulfilling jewel for a pile of ordinary gems, a load of leftover chang-mash, or a single bag of tsampa, it is meaningless to perform ostentatious virtuous actions out of a desire for mundane praise and fame, honor and gain.

Like a doctor struck by an incurable disease, it is meaningless to have studied a lot and yet remain a shallow person.

Like a rich man without the key to his treasury, it is meaningless to be learned in the oral instructions but not apply them in practice.

Like the blind leading the blind, it is meaningless to teach others the significance of a spiritual practice you haven't realized yourself.

Like believing brass to be gold, it is meaningless to regard an experience produced through a technique to be the supreme, while neglecting the natural state.

These were the fourteen things which are meaningless.

Here are the eighteen errors of a spiritual practitioner:

A spiritual practitioner is in error when he lives in seclusion and still strives for greatness in worldly life.

A spiritual practitioner is in error when he leads others and still strives for selfish aims.

A spiritual practitioner is in error when he is learned in the teachings and still doesn't shy away from committing evil deeds.

A spiritual practitioner is in error when he has received abundant oral instructions and his mind still remains that of an ordinary person.

A spiritual practitioner is in error when he keeps pure discipline and still remains full of craving.

A spiritual practitioner is in error when he has good experience and realization and still hasn't tamed his own mind.

A spiritual practitioner is in error when, having entered the gateway of the teachings, he still hasn't given up worldly prejudices.

A spiritual practitioner is in error when, after setting aside worldly affairs and practicing the sacred Dharma, he is still involved in ordinary business.

A spiritual practitioner is in error when he comprehends the meaning and still doesn't put it into practice.

A spiritual practitioner is in error when he forms the resolve to practice and still doesn't keep to his seat.

A spiritual practitioner is in error when he does nothing other than spiritual work and still doesn't behave properly.

A spiritual practitioner is in error when sufficient food and clothing is naturally obtained and he still continues to pursue them.

A spiritual practitioner is in error when he utilizes his powers of spiritual practice only to assist the sick and possessed.

A spiritual practitioner is in error when he teaches the profound instructions in order to receive food and wealth.

A spiritual practitioner is in error when he shrewdly applauds himself and cleverly denounces others.

A spiritual practitioner is in error when he teaches the oral instructions to others while his own mind is not in harmony with the teachings.

A spiritual practitioner is in error when he can neither live in solitude nor get along with other people.

A spiritual practitioner is in error when he is carried away by pleasure and also cannot endure pain.

These were the eighteen errors of a spiritual practitioner.

Here are the twelve indispensable things:

First of all, it is indispensable to possess stable trust born from sincere dread of [the cycle of] birth and death.

It is indispensable to have a master who guides you onto the path of liberation.

It is indispensable to be intelligent enough to understand the meaning.

It is indispensable to be diligent while wearing an armor of fortitude.

It is indispensable to be insatiate in gathering the provisions of the three trainings and the two accumulations.⁸

It is indispensable to possess the view that realizes the basic state of things.

It is indispensable to possess the meditation that leaves your attention wherever you place it.

It is indispensable to possess the conduct that utilizes all activities as part of the path.

It is indispensable to possess the practice that vanquishes adversity and hindrances, demonic influences and pitfalls, without letting the oral instructions remain mere words.

It is indispensable to possess the deep confidence of inner peace when the time comes for body and mind to part.

It is indispensable to possess the fruition of the three kayas that are spontaneously present within yourself.

These were the twelve indispensable things.

Here are the eleven signs of a sublime Personage:

It is a sign of a sublime personage to be less envious and conceited.

It is a sign of a sublime personage to have less craving and be content with just the basics of living.

It is a sign of a sublime personage not to be pompous, haughty or arrogant.

It is a sign of a sublime personage to be without hypocrisy and double-dealing.

It is a sign of a sublime personage to examine, precisely and conscientiously, any course of action, and then carry it out with mindfulness.

It is a sign of a sublime personage to be on guard concerning the karmic consequences of actions, as carefully as he would protect his own eyes.

It is a sign of a sublime personage to be free from duplicity in keeping vows and samaya commitments.

It is a sign of a sublime personage not to be prejudiced or false-hearted towards sentient beings.

It is a sign of a sublime personage to be forgiving and unaggressive towards those who do evil.

It is a sign of a sublime personage to offer all victories to others and accept all defeats for himself.

It is a sign of a sublime personage to differ from worldly-minded people in all thoughts and deeds.

These were the eleven signs of a sublime personage.

Their opposites are the signs of not being a sublime personage.

Here are the ten useless things:

It is useless to cater to and perform protective rituals for this illusory body since it will most certainly perish - no matter how much trouble you take.

It is useless to crave material things and be stingy with them since the day you die you leave poor and empty-handed - no matter how much trouble you take.

It is useless to build castles and mansions since the day you die you leave alone and even your corpse will be thrown out - no matter how much trouble you take.

It is useless to thoughtfully bequeath things to your children and descendants since they have no power to help you at the moment of death, not even for one instant - no matter how much trouble you take.

It is useless to affectionately care for friends and relatives since the day you die you leave alone and friendless - no matter how much trouble you take.

It is useless to have possessions that will surely be squandered when given to children and descendants since they are all impermanent - no matter how much wealth you may have.

It is useless to have property, dominion, and enterprises since the day you die you proceed aimlessly without fixed abode or dwelling – no matter how much trouble you take.

It is useless to act in discord with the teachings since such "spiritual practice" will cause a rebirth in the lower realms- even if you have entered the gateway to the Dharma.

It is useless not to practice after training your mind in learning and reflection since there is then nothing to apply at the moment of death - no matter how much Dharma you understand.

It is useless to lack trust and respect since a sublime spiritual teacher's superior qualities and blessings are not transmittable - even if you have stayed a long time near him.

These were the ten useless things.

Here are the ten ways to destroy yourself:

Like an imbecile eating a strong poison, you destroy yourself by living a family life without love.

Like a madman jumping over the brink of an abyss, you destroy yourself by engaging in unspiritual, evil deeds.

Like enjoying a poisoned meal, you destroy yourself by being a charlatan and deceiving other people.

Like an infirm old lady trying to herd cattle, you destroy yourself by foolishly acting as a leader for others.

Like a blind man roaming the northern plains, you destroy yourself by being self-serving and motivated by the eight worldly concerns, without acting for the welfare of others with pure motivation.

Like a weakling trying to carry a big load, you destroy yourself by grabbing for grandeur and unreachable feats.

Like losing the company of a powerful escort, you destroy yourself by arrogantly belittling the words of a sublime master or the Buddha.

Like a mountain deer descending into the valley, you destroy yourself by postponing your practice to rove through the towns of common people.

Like a garuda bird breaking its wings, you destroy yourself by getting carried away by distractions instead of sustaining innate wakefulness.

Like a small child trying to eat embers, you destroy yourself by heedlessly enjoying the funds of your master and the Three Jewels.

These were the ten ways to destroy yourself.

Here are the ten ways to do yourself a kindness:

You do yourself a kindness by giving up the attachments and aversions of worldly life, and practicing the pure Dharma.

You do yourself a kindness by leaving behind married life, family and friends, and following a sublime personage.

You do yourself a kindness by giving up distractions, and engaging in learning, reflection and meditation.

You do yourself a kindness by abandoning village people and neighbors, and living alone in secluded places.

You do yourself a kindness by cutting the ties of sense pleasures, and remaining stable in nonattachment.

You do yourself a kindness by being content with the bare necessities and not craving better things.

You do yourself a kindness by keeping a steadfast resolve without letting yourself fall under the influence of others.

You do yourself a kindness by pursuing the lasting happiness of enlightenment without regard for the temporary pleasures of this life.

You do yourself a kindness by giving up the clinging to things as being real, and bringing emptiness into your experience.

You do yourself a kindness by exerting yourself in the two accumulations as a unity, without giving in to ordinary thoughts, words and deeds.

These were the ten ways to do yourself a kindness.

Here are the ten correct qualities:

To trust in the consequences of karmic deeds is the correct view for the person of lesser capacity.

To realize all outer and inner phenomena to be the fourfold unity¹ of appearance and emptiness and awareness and emptiness is the correct view for the person of medium capacity.

To realize that the viewer, the viewed, and the realization are indivisible is the correct view for the person of highest capacity.

To remain one-pointedly concentrated on the object of focus is the meditation of the person of lesser capacity.

To remain in the samadhi of the fourfold unity is the meditation of the person of medium capacity.

To remain in the state of nonfocus in which the meditator, the object meditated upon and the meditation itself are indivisible is the meditation of the person of highest capacity.

To be on guard against the consequences of karmic actions as carefully as you would protect your own eyes is the conduct of the person of lesser capacity.

To act as though all phenomena are like dreams and magical illusions is the conduct of the person of medium capacity.

To not do anything at all is the conduct of the person of the highest capacity.

The signs of progress for people of all three capacities is that ego-clinging and all disturbing emotions consistently decrease and subside.

These were the ten correct qualities.

Here are the delusions of a spiritual practitioner:

It is extremely deluded to follow a cliché spouting impostor rather than attending a master who correctly practices the sacred Dharma.

It is extremely deluded to pursue meaningless knowledge instead of seeking the pith instructions that are the oral transmission of accomplished masters.

It is extremely deluded to struggle with endless worldly affairs as though you were going to live forever, instead of being carefree concerning the temporary events of this life.

It is extremely deluded to spout the Dharma aloud in gatherings rather than pondering its meaning in solitude.

It is extremely deluded to hoard resources and possessions with avarice and deceit rather than giving away your excess wealth and supplies as offerings and alms.

It is extremely deluded to be careless and frivolous in thought, word and deed rather than observing your samayas and vows correctly.

It is extremely deluded to let your life run out in petty pursuits, chasing this and that, rather than familiarizing yourself with realization of the natural state.

It is extremely deluded to try to tame the minds of other incorrigible and childish people rather than taming your own entrenched habit of delusion.

It is extremely deluded to pursue ambitions of grandeur in this life, rather than cultivating the experience and realization you have already glimpsed.

It is extremely deluded to remain fond of laziness and indolence, rather than being diligent now while all the right conditions are present.

These were the delusions of a spiritual practitioner.

Here are the ten necessities:

At first, you need a sincere trust that dreads birth and death, like a deer escaping captivity.

Next, you need a diligence that holds no regrets even in the face of death, like a farmer who perseveres in tilling the soil.

Finally, you need the carefree frame of mind that understands there is no 'thing' which dies, like a person who has completed a major task.

At first, you need to acknowledge that you have no time to waste, like someone who has been hit in the chest by an arrow.

Next, you need to meditate unwaveringly, like a mother whose only child is dying.

Finally, you need to recognize that there is no 'thing' to do, like a milkmaid after the enemy has carried off all the cattle.

At first, you need to gain certainty in the Dharma, like a starving man finding a delicious meal.

Next, you need to gain certainty in your mind, like a wrestler discovering his jewel.⁹

Finally, you need to gain certainty in nonduality, like a charlatan whose falsehood is exposed.

[Above all,] you need to resolve what alone is real—like a crow flying up from a ship.
These were the ten necessities.

Here are the ten unnecessary things:

Once you realize that your mind is empty, you don't need to study and reflect.

Once you recognize that awareness is undefiled, you don't need to purify misdeeds.

Once you abide on the true path, you don't need to gather the accumulations.

Once you can sustain the innate state, you don't need to train in the 'path of means'.

Once you recognize that thoughts are the innate nature, you don't need to train in nonthought.

Once you recognize that disturbing emotions are rootless, you don't need to apply their antidotes.

Once you recognize that sights and sounds are magical illusions, you don't need to accept or reject.

Once you recognize that suffering is a boon, you don't need to strive for happiness.

Once you realize that your mind is nonarising, you don't need to train in the ejection of consciousness (phowa).¹¹

When everything you do is for the welfare of others, you don't need to accomplish your own aims.

These were the ten unnecessary things.

Here are the ten types of superiority:

One human body endowed with the freedoms and riches is far superior to any number of the six classes of sentient beings.

One spiritual person is far superior to any number of irreligious lay people.

This vehicle of essential meaning is far superior to any number of path-oriented vehicles.¹²

One instant of knowledge resulting from meditation training is far superior to any amount of knowledge resulting from learning and reflection.

A single moment of nonmaterialistic virtue is far superior to any amount of materialistic virtue.

One second of samadhi free from focus is far superior to any amount of training in samadhi with focus.

One moment of unconditioned virtue is far superior to any amount of conditioned virtue.

A single instant of realization within your stream-of-being is far superior to any number of [temporary meditation] experiences.

One moment of spontaneous action is far superior to any amount of deliberately intended positive deeds.

Not to hold on to anything is far superior to any amount of material giving.

These were the ten types of superiority.

Here are the ten qualities that makes whatever you do excellent:

For someone who has cut through misconceptions in his mind, it is excellent if he meditates but also if he doesn't.

For someone who has cut through attachment to sense pleasures, it is excellent if he acts detached but also if he doesn't.

For someone who has realized the innate nature in actuality, it is excellent if he lives in an empty cave but also if he acts as a leader for many people.

For someone who has recognized that appearances are a magical illusion, it is excellent if he lives alone in retreat, but also if he aimlessly roams the land.

For someone who has gained mastery over his mind, it is excellent if he gives up sense pleasures but also if he puts them to use.

For someone who possesses the awakened mind of bodhichitta, it is excellent if he practices in seclusion but also if he acts for the welfare of others in society.

For someone whose devotion is constant, it is excellent if he remains at the feet of his master but also if he doesn't.

For someone who is learned and understands the meaning, it is excellent if he has success but also if he has obstacles.

For the yogi who has attained supreme realization, it is excellent if he possesses the common signs of accomplishment but also if he doesn't.

These were the ten qualities that makes whatever you do excellent.

Here are the ten qualities that summarize the virtues of the sacred Dharma:

The ten virtuous deeds, the six paramitas, all aspects of emptiness, the virtues of the factors of enlightenment, the four truths of noble beings, the four meditation states, the four formless states of serenity, the ripening and liberation of Mantrayana, and so forth - all these appear in this world by virtue of the sacred Dharma.

Among human beings, the important and lofty royal caste, the important and lofty priestly caste, the important and lofty caste of householders, the six classes of gods in the Desire Realms including [the domains of] the Four Great Kings, the seventeen classes of gods in the Form Realms, and the four classes of gods in the Formless Realms -all these appear in this world by virtue of the sacred Dharma.

The stream-enterers, once-returners, nonreturners, arhats, pratyekabuddhas, and the omniscient buddhas — all these appear in this world by virtue of the sacred Dharma.

The two form-kayas, naturally manifesting out of compassion by the power of bodhichitta resolve and aspirations, that spontaneously accomplish the welfare of beings for as long as samsara has not been emptied -all these appear by virtue of the sacred Dharma.

When an abundance of necessities for sentient beings, each according to their need, appears through the power of the aspirations of the bodhisattvas - this is by virtue of the sacred Dharma.

When even in the lower realms and in the unfree states there is some slight temporary happiness, created through the merit of wholesome virtuous deeds - this is by virtue of the sacred Dharma.

When even evil beings turn their minds towards the sublime teachings, remain in the family of noble beings, and become objects of respect for others - this is by virtue of the sacred Dharma.

When someone who formerly has carelessly engaged in evil misdeeds, adding firewood to the flames of hell, turns his mind towards the sublime teachings and connects with the happiness of the higher realms and liberation - this is by virtue of the sacred Dharma.

When someone merely gains trust in, interest in, or delights in the sublime teachings, or simply wears the robes, becomes liked by everyone and is respected - this is by virtue of the sacred Dharma.

When someone gives up all possessions, attains excellence by leaving the life of a householder to be a homeless monastic, goes in hiding in remote mountain retreats, and still receives abundant means of sustenance - this is by virtue of the sacred Dharma.

These were the ten qualities that summarize the virtues of the sacred Dharma.

Here are the ten things that are merely words:

Since the basic state of the ground cannot be demonstrated, 'ground' is merely a word.

Since the path is beyond journey and traveler, 'path' is merely a word.

Since the basic state is beyond viewer and something viewed, 'realization' is merely a word.

Since the innate is beyond meditator and something meditated, 'experience' is merely a word.

Since the intrinsic nature is beyond doer and deed, 'conduct' is merely a word.

Since in actuality there is no observer nor anything observed, 'samaya' is merely a word.

Since in actuality there is no gathering nor anyone to gather, the 'twofold accumulation' is merely a word.

Since in actuality there is no purifier or object purified, the 'twofold obscuration' is merely a word.¹³

Since in actuality there is no thing to be abandoned nor anyone to abandon it, 'samsara' is merely a word.

Since in actuality there is no attainer nor attainment, 'fruition' is merely a word.

These were the ten things that are merely words.

Here are the ten qualities of being spontaneously present as great bliss:

Since the nature of mind of all beings is dharmakaya, it is spontaneously present as great bliss.

Since the basic space of dharmata is free from the constructs of conceptual attributes, it is spontaneously present as great bliss.

Since the realization of unconfined transcendence of conceptual mind is free from biased thought constructs, it is spontaneously present as great bliss.

Since the experience of cognitive non doing is free from the constructs of reference point, it is spontaneously present as great bliss.

Since the conduct of effortless nonaction is free from the constructs of accepting and rejecting, it is spontaneously present as great bliss.

Since the dharmakaya of indivisible space and wakefulness is free from the constructs of perceiver and perceived, it is spontaneously present as great bliss.

Since the sambhogakaya of self-existing compassion is free from the constructs of birth and death, change and transmigration, it is spontaneously present as great bliss.

Since the nirmanakaya of self-manifesting compassion is free from the constructs that form dualistic experience, it is spontaneously present as great bliss.

Since the Dharma Wheel of the teachings is free from the constructs of conceptual belief in a self, it is spontaneously present as great bliss.

Since the boundless compassionate activity is free from time-bound limitations and interruptions, it is spontaneously present as great bliss.

These were the ten qualities of being spontaneously present as great bliss.

This completes the Precious Garland of the Sublime Path, a compilation of the flawless oral teachings of Glorious Atisha, and his heart disciples which I received from my kind Kadampa masters. Atisha was empowered to illuminate the Buddhadharma in this northern Land of Snows by his guru endowed with unconditioned wisdom, by Jetsun Tara and other sublime deities. This also includes a compilation of the flawless teachings with which I was accepted by Milarepa, the lord of yogis. Milarepa upheld the heart essence of learned and accomplished masters, of both sublime beings, Naropa and Maitripa, renowned like the sun and the moon in the noble land of India, and of Marpa of Lhodrak. It was written down by Sonam Rinchen, the meditator of the Nyi clan from southern Dakpo, who holds the treasury of the oral instructions of both Kadam and Mahamudra.

Lord Gampopa once said, 'People in the future who trust in me and who feel [sad] they didn't meet me, please read The Precious Garland of the Sublime Path, The Jewel Ornament of Liberation and my other writings. Then it will be just like meeting me in person.' Therefore, everyone who trusts in Lord Gampopa should exert themselves in propagating these teachings.

By the command of Ven. Chogyi Nyima Rinpoche, this precious collection of advice was rendered into English, according to his oral teachings and with the help of Khenpo Tashi Palden, by Erik Perna Kunsang, Nigi Gompa, 1994. Edited by Kerry Moran, Marcia Binder Schmidt and Michael Tweed. May it bring benefit to countless beings!

Rather than weighing down this precious little book with a lengthy glossary, we ask the reader to look up specific Buddhist terms, if necessary, in our other books, especially Advice from the Lotus Born.

Notes:

- 1 The preliminary, main, and concluding stages refer to the three excellences: the excellent preparation of beginning with the altruistic attitude of awakened mind, the excellent main part free from conceptualization, and the excellent conclusion of dedicating the merit to the welfare of all sentient beings.
- 2 The eight worldly concerns are attachment to gain, pleasure, praise and fame, and aversion to loss, pain, blame and bad reputation.
- 3 Instead of going on pilgrimage and carrying loads of provisions, stay with a spiritual teacher.
- 4 The perception-spheres of ignorant darkness (mun pa'j skye mched) refer to meditation states, the cultivation of which lead to a 'dead end,' a temporary rebirth in a god realm.
- 5 Dharmadhatu here is used as a synonym for emptiness which is not a nihilistic void but should be understood as 'empty cognizance'.
- 6 I have not yet been able to identify the four roots.
- 7 When soaking sheepskin in water it only get more rigid and inflexible.
- 8 When embarking on a long journey, we need sufficient provisions. Likewise, we shouldn't ever feel we have too much merit when trying to accomplish the welfare of all beings. The three trainings are in superior discipline, concentration, and discriminating knowledge. The two accumulations are of merit with concepts and wisdom beyond concepts.
- 9 This is a metaphor from ancient India in which a wrestler needs to retain a jewel of good luck in his head band to be able to win.
- 10 The crow leaving a ship flies towards land without the slightest hesitation.
- 11 The ejection of consciousness (phowa) is a certain tantric practice performed at the moment of death to ensure rebirth in a pure land of the buddhas, especially in Buddha Amitabha's realm known as Sukhavati.
- 12 Vajrayana, being the vehicle of fruition, teaches the approach of realizing that the result of the path, the awakened state, is already now spontaneously present.
- 13 The twofold obscuration refers to the obscuration of disturbing emotions, involvement in the five poisons, and the cognitive obscuration of dualistic concepts.

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End Notes:

¹ Four Modes of Sameness (nyam.pa bzhi): sameness of emptiness (stong.pa), the sameness of the coalescence of appearance emptiness (snang.stong zung.'jug), the sameness of freedom from conceptual elaboration (spros.bral) and sameness itself (mnyam.nyid) (p. 135, Dudjom Rinpoche, The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism); Four Unions or Four Branches of Ritual Service and Attainment: ritual service (bsnyen, seva), further ritual service (nye.bar, upaseva), attainment (sgrub.pa, sadhana) and great attainment (sgrub.chen, mahasadhana) (p. 125, Dudjom Rinpoche, The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism); Body, speech, mind, and pristine awareness (p. 476. Kongtrul, Vol 6. part 4. Treasury of Knowledge); or nonexistence, all-pervasiveness, oneness and spontaneous perfection (p. 68 Rainbow Painting, Tulku Urygen Rinpoche), stong nyid bzhi sbyor - fourfold emptiness [Rangjung Yeshe] — [fn. inserted by LY]