

History and Oral Transmission of *Lamp on the Path to Enlightenment*

By *Lama Zopa Rinpoche*

I'm going to give the oral transmission of *The Lamp on the Path to Enlightenment* composed by Lama Atisha in Tibet.

History of the Text

At the time when Lama Atisha was requested to give teachings, there was a lot of corruption and confusion in Tibet. People believed that when they practiced sutra, they could not practice tantra; or if they practiced tantra, they could not practice sutra. There was this kind of confusion and misunderstanding. So, the King of Tibet, Lhalama Yeshe Ö made this request to Lama Atisha through his nephew, Lhatsün Jangchup Ö, "We Tibetans are very ignorant, so please give us very simple teachings, very basic teachings on refuge and karma." This made Lama Atisha extremely pleased that he hadn't requested high initiations or high teachings. Lama Atisha was so happy.

Then, Lama Atisha composed this *Lamp on the Path to Enlightenment*, which makes so clear the heart of the 84,000 teachings of Buddha, in which come the teachings of the three baskets. It makes it so clear how to set everything up, how to set up all these teachings - the Lesser Vehicle teachings, the Mahayana Paramita teachings which are sutra, and the Mahayana tantric teachings - for one person's gradual practice to achieve enlightenment. So there is no confusion. Every teaching is for one person's gradual practice to achieve enlightenment.

He made it so clear, like a meal being cooked and set out on the table, and you just have to eat it. Like that, Lama Atisha composed the *Lamp on the Path to Enlightenment* making it so easy and clear how to go to enlightenment, how to achieve it.

We are most unbelievably fortunate to have this opportunity to learn lam-rim. The Lam-rim, the steps of the path to enlightenment, came from *the Lamp on the Path to Enlightenment*. The Lam-rim came after Lama Atisha wrote this text. So, we are unbelievably fortunate. Before this, because the Buddhadharma is so extensive, there were many difficulties in Tibet. People didn't know how to practice, how to put together the three vehicle teachings, and so there was a lot of confusion.

Therefore, we are unbelievably fortunate because this subject of the Lam-rim contains the 84,000 teachings of Buddha, which are very vast. All of them are rooted in this, so we are unbelievably fortunate.

Motivation for receiving the oral transmission

It is not enough for me to not be reborn in the lower realms or receive the higher rebirth of a deva or a human. It is not enough; I must be free from samsara. However, even that is not sufficient. I must achieve enlightenment for sentient beings. That is the purpose of my life, to benefit other sentient beings.

Therefore, I must achieve enlightenment. Therefore, I need to actualize the path. Therefore, I'm going to take teachings on Lama Atisha's *Lamp on the Path to Enlightenment*.

Think in your heart that this is for every sentient being, for me to benefit them, to liberate them, and to enlighten every single sentient being: the hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, human beings, *suras*, *asuras*, intermediate state beings, etc. In each realm there are numberless sentient beings. So, in your heart think, “I am doing this to liberate them from all suffering and bring them to enlightenment.”

Oral transmission given.

Dedication

Due to all the three time merits collected by myself and others, that which exist but which are empty from their own side, may the I who exists but who is totally empty from its own side, achieve Guru Shakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment, which exists but which is totally empty from its own side, and lead all sentient beings, who exist but who are totally empty from their own side, to Guru Shakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment, which exists but which is totally empty from its own side, by myself alone, who exists but who is totally empty from its own side.

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