

*Tantric Grounds
and Paths*

Also by Geshe Kelsang Gyatso

Meaningful to Behold
Clear Light of Bliss
Heart of Wisdom
Universal Compassion
Joyful Path of Good Fortune
Guide to Dakini Land
The Bodhisattva Vow
Heart Jewel
Great Treasury of Merit
Introduction to Buddhism
Understanding the Mind
Ocean of Nectar
Essence of Vajrayana
Living Meaningfully, Dying Joyfully
Eight Steps to Happiness
Transform Your Life
The New Meditation Handbook
How to Solve Our Human Problems
Mahamudra Tantra
Modern Buddhism

Profits from the sale of this book are designated to the
NKT-IKBU International Temples Project Fund
according to the guidelines in *A Money Handbook*
[Reg. Charity number 1015054 (England)]
A Buddhist Charity, Building for World Peace
www.kadampa.org/temples

GESHE KELSANG GYATSO

*Tantric Grounds
and Paths*

HOW TO ENTER, PROGRESS
ON, AND COMPLETE THE
VAJRAYANA PATH



THARPA PUBLICATIONS
UK • US • CANADA
AUSTRALIA • ASIA

First published in 1994
Second impression 1995
Reprinted 2003, 2012

The right of Geshe Kelsang Gyatso
to be identified as author of this work
has been asserted by him in accordance with
the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced
in any form or by any means except for the quotation
of brief passages for the purpose of private
study, research, or review.

Tharpa Publications UK Office
Conishead Priors
Ulverston, Cumbria
LA12 9QQ, UK

Tharpa Publications US Office
47 Sweeney Road
Glen Spey,
NY 12737, USA

Tharpa Publications has offices around the world,
and Tharpa books are published in most major languages.
See page 282 for contact details.

© New Kadampa Tradition – International Kadampa Buddhist Union
1994

Library of Congress Control Number: 2003100131

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is
available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-0948006-34-0 – hardback
ISBN 978-0-948006-33-3 – paperback

Set in Palatino by Tharpa Publications
Printed on Munken Pure by
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham, Wiltshire, SN14 6LH, England.

Paper supplied from well-managed forests and
other controlled sources, and certified in accordance with the
rules of the Forest Stewardship Council.

Contents

Illustrations	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
Introduction	1
The Lower Tantras	23
Highest Yoga Tantra	49
Generation Stage	75
Isolated Body	105
Isolated Speech and Isolated Mind	145
Illusory Body, Clear Light and Union	175
The Final Results	195
Dedication	207
Appendix I – The Condensed Meaning of the Text	209
Appendix II – The Preliminary Practices	223
<i>Liberating Prayer</i>	224
A Handbook for the Daily Practice of Bodhisattva	
Vows and Tantric Vows	225
<i>Great Liberation of the Mother</i>	239
<i>Great Liberation of the Father</i>	247
An Explanation of the Practice	255
Glossary	262
Bibliography	274
Study Programmes of Kadampa Buddhism	278
Tharpa Offices Worldwide	282
Index	284

Illustrations

The line illustrations depict the Mahamudra Lineage Gurus

Vajradhara	viii
Manjushri	8
Je Tsongkhapa	16
Togden Jampel Gyatso	24
Baso Chokyi Gyaltsen	32
Drubchen Dharmavajra	40
Gyalwa Ensapa	48
Khedrub Sangye Yeshe	56
Panchen Losang Chokyi Gyaltsen	62
Drubchen Gendun Gyaltsen	68
Drungpa Tsondru Gyaltsen	76
Konchog Gyaltsen	82
Panchen Losang Yeshe	90
Losang Trinlay	98
Drubwang Losang Namgyal	104
Kachen Yeshe Gyaltsen	114
Phurchog Ngawang Jampa	122
Panchen Palden Yeshe	130
Khedrub Ngawang Dorje	138
Ngulchu Dharmabhadra	146
Yangchen Drubpay Dorje	154
Khedrub Tenzin Tsondru	162
Dorjechang Phabongkha Trinlay Gyatso	174
Yongdzin Dorjechang Losang Yeshe	184
Dorjechang Kelsang Gyatso Rinpoche (<i>included at the request of faithful disciples</i>)	196

Acknowledgements

Because there is great interest in the practice of Buddhist Tantra, a comprehensive guide is needed from a fully qualified Tantric Master. This need is met in this book, *Tantric Grounds and Paths*, by Venerable Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, who has prepared here a definitive manual for pure Tantric practice.

Tantric Grounds and Paths explains the relationship between Sutra and Tantra, and the necessity of basing Tantric practice upon Sutra. It then provides an authoritative and comprehensive guide to the four classes of Tantra in general, and to the generation stage and completion stage of Highest Yoga Tantra in particular.

The author describes directly from his own experience all the stages of the path to enlightenment. Never before in the history of Buddhist literature has such a clear, profound and comprehensive guide been published. From the depths of our hearts, we thank Geshe Kelsang Gyatso for his inconceivable kindness in composing this book.

We also thank all the dedicated, senior Dharma students who assisted the author with the rendering of the English and who prepared the final manuscript for publication.

Roy Tyson,
Administrative Director,
Manjushri Kadampa
Meditation Centre,
May 1994.



Vajradhara

Introduction

So that living beings might attain great liberation, or full enlightenment, Buddha revealed two paths: the common path and the uncommon path. Here, 'path' refers to an internal path or spiritual realization that leads us to liberation from suffering, or permanent inner peace. The uncommon path is the Vajrayana path. Vajrayana path, Tantric path, and path of Secret Mantra are synonyms. These are explained extensively in this book. The common path is revealed by Buddha in his Sutra teachings. The stages of the common path are the twenty-one spiritual paths from the realization of relying upon the Spiritual Guide up to the realization of superior seeing. These are known as 'Lamrim', or the 'stages of the path'. Training in these common paths is the foundation for the practice of the Vajrayana path. The Vajrayana path is like a vehicle that takes us directly to our final destination, and the common paths are like the road on which that vehicle travels. Therefore, to extract the greatest essence from this precious human life by attaining full enlightenment, we need first to train in the common paths of Lamrim, and then in the uncommon Vajrayana paths.

The practices of all the common paths are included in a very condensed Lamrim text composed by Je Tsongkhapa, which is usually known as the *Prayer of the Stages of the Path*. This text is like the root text of Lamrim. It does not require a separate commentary, because if we study a complete presentation of Lamrim, such as that found in *Joyful Path of Good Fortune* or *The New Meditation Handbook*, we shall naturally understand the entire meaning of this root text.

If you want to practise the Vajrayana paths explained in this book, you should receive a Highest Yoga Tantra empowerment such as the empowerment of Heruka or Vajrayogini, and train in Lamrim, the stages of the path. You should memorize the *Prayer of the Stages of the Path* and recite it mentally or verbally every day while concentrating on its meaning. Then, whenever you want to read this book, please begin by reciting this root text. First visualize the holy beings as follows:

In the space before me is the living Buddha Shakyamuni, surrounded by all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, like the full moon surrounded by stars.

Then recite the prayer:

PRAYER OF THE STAGES OF THE PATH

The path begins with strong reliance
On my kind Teacher, source of all good;
O Bless me with this understanding
To follow him with great devotion.

This human life with all its freedoms,
Extremely rare, with so much meaning;
O Bless me with this understanding
All day and night to seize its essence.

My body, like a water bubble,
Decays and dies so very quickly;
After death come results of karma,
Just like the shadow of a body.

With this firm knowledge and remembrance
Bless me to be extremely cautious,
Always avoiding harmful actions
And gathering abundant virtue.

Samsara's pleasures are deceptive,
Give no contentment, only torment;
So please bless me to strive sincerely
To gain the bliss of perfect freedom.

INTRODUCTION

O Bless me so that from this pure thought
Come mindfulness and greatest caution,
To keep as my essential practice
The doctrine's root, the Pratimoksha.

Just like myself all my kind mothers
Are drowning in samsara's ocean;
O So that I may soon release them,
Bless me to train in bodhichitta.

But I cannot become a Buddha
By this alone without three ethics;
So bless me with the strength to practise
The Bodhisattva's ordination.

By pacifying my distractions
And analyzing perfect meanings,
Bless me to quickly gain the union
Of special insight and quiescence.

When I become a pure container
Through common paths, bless me to enter
The essence practice of good fortune,
The supreme vehicle, Vajrayana.

The two attainments both depend on
My sacred vows and my commitments;
Bless me to understand this clearly
And keep them at the cost of my life.

By constant practice in four sessions,
The way explained by holy Teachers,
O Bless me to gain both the stages,
Which are the essence of the Tantras.

May those who guide me on the good path,
And my companions all have long lives;
Bless me to pacify completely
All obstacles, outer and inner.

May I always find perfect Teachers,
And take delight in holy Dharma,

Accomplish all grounds and paths swiftly,
And gain the state of Vajradhara.

It is often said that the path of Tantra is superior to the path of Sutra, but to understand why this is so we need to engage in a precise study of both Sutra and Tantra; otherwise our statements about the superiority of Tantra will be mere words. Moreover, if we do not study both Sutra and Tantra well, we shall find it difficult to understand how to practise the union of Sutra and Tantra, and then there will be a great danger of our either rejecting the practice of Tantra or ignoring the practice of Sutra.

The teachings of Tantra, or Secret Mantra as it is sometimes called, are the rarest and most precious of Buddha's teachings. It is only by following the path of Secret Mantra that we can attain enlightenment, or Buddhahood. Why can we not attain full enlightenment just by practising the paths of Sutra? There are two main reasons. First, to attain Buddhahood we need to accomplish both the Truth Body and the Form Body of a Buddha. Although Sutra teachings present a general explanation of how these two bodies are accomplished in dependence upon the stages of the path of wisdom and method, they do not give precise explanations of the actual direct, substantial causes of these two bodies. The direct, substantial cause of the Truth Body is meaning clear light, and the direct, substantial cause of the Form Body is the illusory body. These are explained only in Secret Mantra.

The second reason why Sutra paths cannot lead us to full enlightenment is that Sutra teachings do not present methods for overcoming the very subtle obstructions to omniscience – the subtle dualistic appearances associated with the minds of white appearance, red increase and black near-attainment. These three minds become manifest when our inner winds dissolve within the central channel during sleep, during the death process or during completion stage meditation. Although these minds are subtle minds, they are nevertheless contaminated minds because

their objects – the appearance of space pervaded by white light, the appearance of space pervaded by red light and the appearance of space pervaded by darkness – appear as inherently existent. These appearances of inherent existence are subtle dualistic appearances and very subtle obstructions to omniscience. Because Sutra teachings do not explain how to recognize the subtle minds of white appearance, red increase and black near-attainment, Sutra Bodhisattvas are unable even to recognize the subtle dualistic appearances associated with them, let alone abandon them. In general, dualistic appearance is the appearance to a mind of both its object and inherent existence. All the minds of living beings, with the exception of the exalted awareness of meditative equipoise of Superior beings, have this appearance.

A direct realization of emptiness with a gross mind does not have the power to overcome the subtle dualistic appearances associated with the minds of white appearance, red increase and black near-attainment. The only way to abandon these subtle dualistic appearances is to realize emptiness directly with a very subtle mind of clear light. Since the methods for manifesting and using the very subtle mind of clear light are explained only in Secret Mantra, anyone who wishes to attain Buddhahood definitely needs to enter this path.

It is said that only the fourth, eleventh, and last of the thousand Buddhas of this Fortunate Aeon will teach Secret Mantra. Does this mean that the followers of the other Buddhas will not have the opportunity to attain enlightenment? For example, will no one attain enlightenment under the guidance of Buddha Maitreya? Although Buddha Maitreya will not teach Tantra, many of his followers will reach the tenth Sutra ground of a Bodhisattva by practising his Sutra teachings. Then the Buddhas of the five families throughout the ten directions will appear to them, grant them Tantric empowerments and show them how to attain meaning clear light, the fourth of the five stages of completion stage. By meditating on meaning clear light, these

Bodhisattvas will eventually attain Buddhahood. Therefore, even though Buddha Maitreya will not personally reveal the path of Secret Mantra, he will nevertheless open the way for countless living beings to attain Buddhahood.

Buddha taught three 'vehicles', or means to progress towards enlightenment: the Hinayana, the Paramitayana and the Vajrayana. Of these, the Vajrayana, or Secret Mantra Vehicle is the supreme vehicle because it takes us directly to Buddhahood. If we engage in Tantric practice wholeheartedly, with a pure motivation and deep faith, we shall attain full enlightenment easily and swiftly without having to endure great hardships. We should therefore consider ourselves extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to study these teachings on Secret Mantra.

The gateway to the practice of Secret Mantra is receiving a Tantric empowerment from a qualified Tantric Spiritual Guide. We then need to learn precisely how to practise Secret Mantra, and how to progress through the spiritual grounds and paths by depending upon Tantric practice. If we understand this clearly and unmistakably, and put our understanding into practice sincerely, we can attain Buddhahood in this very life.

Some people say that Buddhahood is an unattainable goal, while others say that Secret Mantra is too advanced and that it is better to concentrate on Sutra. Such ideas are quite common nowadays, but those who have received Tantric empowerments must not allow themselves to become discouraged in this way. If we give up the wish to attain Buddhahood because we think it is unattainable we shall incur a root downfall of our Bodhisattva vows; and if we abandon the intention to practise Secret Mantra because we think it is too difficult we shall incur a root downfall of our Tantric vows. Through studying the teachings on Tantric grounds and paths given in this book, we shall understand how it is possible to attain Buddhahood by relying upon Secret Mantra, and we shall develop great enthusiasm for Tantric practice. In this way, we shall be protected from breaking our Bodhisattva and Tantric vows.

INTRODUCTION

We may wonder why, if Secret Mantra is the direct path to Buddhahood, did Buddha teach the Sutra paths at all? The reason is that Sutra is the foundation for Tantra. Tantra is like an aeroplane that takes us directly to Buddhahood, but Sutra is like the runway. Without a runway an aeroplane cannot take off, and without the foundation of Sutra we cannot attain authentic experience of Secret Mantra. Therefore, those who wish to attain Buddhahood need to practise the union of Sutra and Tantra.

To become a fully enlightened being we must accomplish all the paths to Buddhahood. In general, there are two types of path: external paths and internal paths. We can understand external paths by consulting maps and so forth, but they do not help us to reach liberation. Even if we travelled in a spaceship to the other side of the universe, we would never reach liberation. The only way to reach liberation is to follow correct internal paths, which are explained only in Dharma.

Buddhas have ten special qualities not possessed by sentient beings, which are called the 'ten forces', and one of these is the force knowing all paths. Buddhas know all internal paths and where they lead to. Out of their great compassion, they teach living beings how to discriminate between correct paths and incorrect paths. If Buddhas did not teach Dharma, we would never know about the paths to liberation and, because of our familiarity with self-grasping, we would wander in samsara forever with no hope of escape. We have been following incorrect paths since beginningless time but now, through the kindness of Buddha Shakyamuni, we have the opportunity to study a complete presentation of the spiritual paths to liberation and full enlightenment.

There are two types of internal path: mundane internal paths and supramundane internal paths. Mundane internal paths lead us deeper into samsara, whereas supramundane internal paths lead us to liberation and enlightenment. There are two types of mundane path: virtuous mundane



Manjushri

INTRODUCTION

paths and non-virtuous mundane paths. Virtuous mundane paths are virtuous actions that lead to rebirth as a human being, demi-god or god, and non-virtuous mundane paths are non-virtuous actions that lead to rebirth as an animal, a hungry ghost or a hell being. Detailed explanations of mundane paths can be found in Buddha's teachings on karma and the twelve dependent-related links.

Supramundane paths are virtuous minds that lead to liberation and enlightenment. With respect to supramundane paths, path, ground, spiritual vehicle and exalted awareness are synonyms. The definition of spiritual path is an exalted awareness conjoined with non-fabricated renunciation. There are two types of spiritual path: Hinayana paths and Mahayana paths. There are five Hinayana paths: the Hinayana paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, meditation and No More Learning. Hinayana paths lead to the small enlightenment of a Hearer or the middling enlightenment of a Solitary Conqueror. There are also five Mahayana paths: the Mahayana paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, meditation and No More Learning. Mahayana paths lead to the complete enlightenment of a Buddha.

The definition of spiritual ground is a clear realization that acts as the foundation of many good qualities. Like spiritual paths, spiritual grounds are of two types: Hinayana grounds and Mahayana grounds. There are eight Hinayana grounds, all of which are included in the five Hinayana paths; and there are ten Mahayana grounds, all of which are included in the five Mahayana paths. Just as the earth is the basis for the growth of plants, trees, crops and so forth, so the Hinayana grounds are the basis for the development of Hinayana good qualities, and the Mahayana grounds are the basis for the development of Mahayana good qualities.

The definition of spiritual vehicle is an exalted awareness that leads to one's final spiritual destination. There are two types of spiritual vehicle: the Hinayana, or Lesser Vehicle, and the Mahayana, or Great Vehicle. The Mahayana is

subdivided into the Paramitayana, or Perfection Vehicle, and the Vajrayana, or Vajra Vehicle. Of the five paths, the first four are known as 'progressing paths', or 'progressing vehicles', because they take us to our final spiritual destination; and the fifth path, the Path of No More Learning, is known as the 'Resultant Path', or the 'Effect Vehicle'.

The definition of exalted awareness is a spiritual realization that knows perfectly the nature of its principal object. All spiritual paths are exalted awarenesses. Exalted awareness differs from wisdom in that wisdom necessarily realizes its object through its own power, whereas exalted awareness may realize its object through the power of another mind. Bodhichitta, for example, is an exalted awareness but not a wisdom. Bodhichitta knows the nature of its principal object, enlightenment, but it does so through the power of its attendant mental factor wisdom rather than through its own power. By the same token, other mental factors associated with bodhichitta, such as concentration, intention and feeling, are also exalted awarenesses but not wisdoms.

Thus, bodhichitta is at once a path, a ground, a spiritual vehicle and an exalted awareness. From the point of view of its leading to enlightenment, it is a path; from the point of view of its being the foundation of the many good qualities of the Mahayana, it is a ground; from the point of view of its being the means to progress towards enlightenment, it is a vehicle; and from the point of view of its knowledge and its way of understanding its object, it is an exalted awareness.

Because living beings have varying inclinations and mental capacities, Buddha Shakyamuni taught three vehicles: the Hinayana, the Paramitayana and the Vajrayana. To suit those of limited aspiration who are mainly concerned with their own release from suffering, Buddha taught the Hinayana. Hinayanists are very aware of the faults of attachment and regard attachment as their main object to be abandoned. For this reason, the Hinayana is sometimes known as the 'Separation from Attachment Vehicle'. To abandon attachment temporarily, Hinayanists renounce

their families, homes and so forth, retire to an isolated place, and meditate on unattractiveness; and to abandon attachment completely they meditate on emptiness.

For those who are attracted to the vast path, Buddha expounded the Paramitayana, in which he taught the six perfections and the ten Bodhisattva grounds. The main objects to be abandoned by Bodhisattvas are the obstructions to omniscience. Bodhisattvas are not afraid of attachment, because they know how to transform it into the spiritual path. Just as farmers use impure substances such as manure to fertilize their soil, so Superior Bodhisattvas use delusions such as attachment as aids to attaining Buddhahood, having rendered them harmless through the strength of their wisdom and compassion.

For those who are attracted to profound Dharma, Buddha taught the third vehicle, the Vajrayana. The Vajrayana, or Secret Mantra Vehicle, is sometimes called the 'Attachment Vehicle' because, instead of trying to abandon attachment immediately, practitioners of this vehicle use attachment as an aid to generating spontaneous great bliss, with which they then meditate on emptiness. Furthermore, when they finally attain enlightenment, even though they have no desirous attachment they nevertheless display the aspect of having attachment by appearing as Tantric Buddhas in the aspect of Father and Mother in sexual embrace.

Although we can transform attachment into the spiritual path by practising Secret Mantra, we need great skill to be able to do this because normally, when attachment develops strongly, it automatically disturbs our peaceful mind. The main reason why most Buddhas will not expound Secret Mantra is that there is a danger that unqualified practitioners will use it for the sake of worldly pleasure; and qualified practitioners among disciples are very rare. Buddha Shakyamuni, however, is an exception. Through the power of his previous prayers and special determination, his disciples have special karma to practise Secret Mantra.

There is a prophecy that when the Dharma of Buddha Shakyamuni is about to end, the practice of Secret Mantra will briefly flourish very widely in this world, as a candle flame flickers brightly just before it finally burns out. It appears that nowadays there are many books about Tantra, many Teachers teaching Tantra and many students trying to practise Tantra. However, not all these books and teachings are pure and authentic. Therefore, it is becoming increasingly important to discriminate between authentic Tantric teachings and those that have been mixed with non-Buddhist teachings. We are extremely fortunate to have met the completely pure Tantric teachings that have been passed down from Buddha Shakyamuni through Je Tsongkhapa and many realized Teachers of the new Kadampa Tradition. Je Tsongkhapa, who was an emanation of the Wisdom Buddha Manjushri, clarified many aspects of Tantric practice that had frequently been misunderstood in the past. In particular, he showed how it is possible, and indeed essential, to practise the union of Sutra and Tantra. Before Je Tsongkhapa appeared, many people thought that Secret Mantra and Vinaya moral discipline were contradictory, and that one person could not practise both; but Je Tsongkhapa showed how, rather than being contradictory with the Vinaya, the practice of Secret Mantra is the supremely skilful means for keeping the Vinaya discipline purely. I feel extremely fortunate to be able to pass on the pure Tantric teachings of Je Tsongkhapa, and the reader too should feel fortunate to have the opportunity to study them.

THE GOOD QUALITIES OF SECRET MANTRA

We can understand the nature, functions and good qualities of Secret Mantra by considering the various names that Buddha gave to it: Secret Vehicle, Mantra Vehicle, Effect Vehicle, Vajra Vehicle, Method Vehicle and Tantric Vehicle. These will now be explained.

End of preview

*If you have enjoyed this sample, please order from tharpa.com
where all profits go to the International Temples Project,
an international charity building for world peace.*