# A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

By Atisha Dipamkara Shrijnana (982–1054)

Homage to the bodhisattva, the youthful Manjushri.

1. I pay homage with great respect

To the conquerors of the three times,

To their teaching and to those who aspire to virtue.

Urged by the good disciple Jangchub Ö

I shall illuminate the lamp

For the path to enlightenment.

2. Understand that there are three kinds of persons

Because of their small, middling and supreme capacities.

I shall write clearly distinguishing

Their individual characteristics.

3. Know that those who by whatever means

Seek for themselves no more

Than the pleasures of cyclic existence

Are persons of the least capacity.

4. Those who seek peace for themselves alone,

Turning away from worldly pleasures

And avoiding destructive actions

Are said to be of middling capacity.

5. Those who, through their personal suffering,

Truly want to end completely

All the suffering of others

Are persons of supreme capacity.

6. For those excellent living beings,

Who desire supreme enlightenment,

I shall explain the perfect methods

Taught by the spiritual teachers.

7. Facing paintings, statues and so forth

Of the completely enlightened one,

Reliquaries and the excellent teaching,

Offer flowers, incense—whatever you have.

8. With the seven-part offering

From the *[Prayer of] Noble Conduct*,

With the thought never to turn back

Till you gain ultimate enlightenment,

9. And with strong faith in the Three Jewels,

Kneeling with one knee on the ground

And your hands pressed together,

First of all take refuge three times.

10. Next, beginning with an attitude

Of love for all living creatures,

Consider beings, excluding none,

Suffering in the three bad rebirths,

Suffering birth, death and so forth.

11. Then, since you want to free these beings

From the suffering of pain,

From suffering and the cause of suffering,

Arouse immutably the resolve

To attain enlightenment.

12. The qualities of developing

Such an aspiration are

Fully explained by Maitreya

In the *Array of Trunks Sutra*.

13. Having learned about the infinite benefits

Of the intention to gain full enlightenment

By reading this sutra or listening to a teacher,

Arouse it repeatedly to make it steadfast.

14. The *Sutra Requested by Viradatta*

Fully explains the merit therein.

At this point, in summary,

I will cite just three verses.

15. If it possessed physical form,

The merit of the altruistic intention

Would completely fill the whole of space

And exceed even that.

16. If someone were to fill with jewels

As many buddha fields as there are grains

Of sand in the Ganges

To offer to the Protector of the World,

17. This would be surpassed by

The gift of folding one’s hands

And inclining one’s mind to enlightenment,

For such is limitless.

18. Having developed the aspiration for enlightenment,

Constantly enhance it through concerted effort.

To remember it in this and also in other lives,

Keep the precepts properly as explained.

19. Without the vow of the engaged intention,

Perfect aspiration will not grow.

Make effort definitely to take it,

Since you want the wish for enlightenment to grow.

20. Those who maintain any of the seven kinds

Of individual liberation vow

Have the ideal [prerequisite] for

The bodhisattva vow, not others.

21. The Tathagata spoke of seven kinds

Of individual liberation vow.

The best of these is glorious pure conduct,

Said to be the vow of a fully ordained person.

22. According to the ritual described in

The chapter on discipline in the Bodhisattva Stages,

Take the vow from a good

And well-qualified spiritual teacher.

23. Understand that a good spiritual teacher

Is one skilled in the vow ceremony,

Who lives by the vow and has

The confidence and compassion to bestow it.

24. However, in case you try but cannot

Find such a spiritual teacher,

I shall explain another

Correct procedure for taking the vow.

25. I shall write here very clearly, as explained

In the *Ornament of Manjushri’s Buddha Land Sutra*,

How, long ago, when Manjushri was Ambaraja,

He aroused the intention to become enlightened.

26. “In the presence of the protectors,

I arouse the intention to gain full enlightenment.

I invite all beings as my guests

And shall free them from cyclic existence.

27. “From this moment onwards

Until I attain enlightenment,

I shall not harbor harmful thoughts,

Anger, avarice or envy.

28. “I shall cultivate pure conduct,

Give up wrong-doing and desire

And with joy in the vow of discipline

Train myself to follow the buddhas.

29. “I shall not be eager to reach

Enlightenment in the quickest way,

But shall stay behind till the very end,

For the sake of a single being.

30. “I shall purify limitless

Inconceivable lands

And remain in the ten directions

For all those who call my name.

31. “I shall purify all my bodily

And verbal forms of activity.

My mental activities, too, I shall purify

And do nothing that is non-virtuous.”

32. When those observing the vow

Of the active altruistic intention have trained well

In the three forms of discipline, their respect

For these three forms of discipline grows,

Which causes purity of body, speech and mind.

33. Therefore, through effort in the vow made by

Bodhisattvas for pure, full enlightenment,

The collections for complete enlightenment

Will be thoroughly accomplished.

34. All buddhas say the cause for the completion

Of the collections, whose nature is

Merit and exalted wisdom,

Is the development of higher perception.

35. Just as a bird with undeveloped

Wings cannot fly in the sky,

Those without the power of higher perception

Cannot work for the good of living beings.

36. The merit gained in a single day

By one who possesses higher perception

Cannot be gained even in a hundred lifetimes

By one without such higher perception.

37. Those who want swiftly to complete

The collections for full enlightenment

Will accomplish higher perception

Through effort, not through laziness.

38. Without the attainment of calm abiding,

Higher perception will not occur.

Therefore make repeated effort

To accomplish calm abiding.

39. While the conditions for calm abiding

Are incomplete, meditative stabilization

Will not be accomplished, even if one meditates

Strenuously for thousands of years.

40. Thus maintaining well the conditions mentioned

In the *Collection for Meditative Stabilization Chapter*,

Place the mind on any one

Virtuous focal object.

41. When the practitioner has gained calm abiding,

Higher perception will also be gained,

But without practice of the perfection of wisdom,

The obstructions will not come to an end.

42. Thus, to eliminate all obstructions

To liberation and omniscience,

The practitioner should continually cultivate

The perfection of wisdom with skillful means.

43. Wisdom without skillful means

And skillful means, too, without wisdom

Are referred to as bondage.

Therefore do not give up either.

44. To eliminate doubts concerning

What is called wisdom and what skillful means,

I shall make clear the difference

Between skillful means and wisdom.

45. Apart from the perfection of wisdom,

All virtuous practices such as

The perfection of giving are described

As skillful means by the Victorious Ones.

46. Whoever, under the influence of familiarity

With skillful means, cultivates wisdom

Will quickly attain enlightenment—

Not just by meditating on selflessness.

47. Understanding emptiness of inherent existence

Through realizing that the aggregates, constituents

And sources are not produced

Is described as wisdom.

48. Something existent cannot be produced,

Nor something non-existent, like a sky flower.

These errors are both absurd and thus

Both of the two will not occur either.

49. A thing is not produced from itself,

Nor from another, also not from both,

Nor causelessly either, thus it does not

Exist inherently by way of its own entity.

50. Moreover, when all phenomena are examined

As to whether they are one or many,

They are not seen to exist by way of their own entity,

And thus are ascertained as not inherently existent.

51. The reasoning of the *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness*,

The *Treatise on the Middle Way* and so forth

Explain that the nature of all things

Is established as emptiness.

52. Since there are a great many passages,

I have not cited them here,

But have explained just their conclusions

For the purpose of meditation.

53. Thus, whatever is meditation

On selflessness, in that it does not observe

An inherent nature in phenomena,

Is the cultivation of wisdom.

54. Just as wisdom does not see

An inherent nature in phenomena,

Having analyzed wisdom itself by reasoning,

Non-conceptually meditate on that.

55. The nature of this worldly existence,

Which has come from conceptualization,

Is conceptuality. Thus the elimination of

Conceptuality is the highest state of nirvana.

56. The great ignorance of conceptuality

Makes us fall into the ocean of cyclic existence.

Resting in non-conceptual stabilization,

Space-like non-conceptuality manifests clearly.

57. When bodhisattvas non-conceptually contemplate

This excellent teaching, they will transcend

Conceptuality, so hard to overcome,

And eventually reach the non-conceptual state.

58. Having ascertained through scripture

And through reasoning that phenomena

Are not produced nor inherently existent,

Meditate without conceptuality.

59. Having thus meditated on suchness,

Eventually, after reaching “heat” and so forth,

The “very joyful” and the others are attained

And, before long, the enlightened state of buddhahood.

60. If you wish to create with ease

The collections for enlightenment

Through activities of pacification,

Increase and so forth, gained by the power of mantra,

61. And also through the force of the eight

And other great attainments like the “good pot”—

If you want to practice secret mantra,

As explained in the action and performance tantras,

62. Then, to receive the preceptor initiation,

You must please an excellent spiritual teacher

Through service, valuable gifts and the like

As well as through obedience.

63. Through the full bestowing of the preceptor initiation,

By a spiritual teacher who is pleased,

You are purified of all wrong-doing

And become fit to gain powerful attainments.

64. Because the *Great Tantra of the Primordial Buddha*

Forbids it emphatically,

Those observing pure conduct should not

Take the secret and wisdom initiations.

65. If those observing the austere practice of pure conduct

Were to hold these initiations,

Their vow of austerity would be impaired

Through doing that which is proscribed.

66. This creates transgressions that are a defeat

For those observing discipline.

Since they are certain to fall to a bad rebirth,

They will never gain accomplishments.

67. There is no fault if one who has received

The preceptor initiation and has knowledge

Of suchness listens to or explains the tantras

And performs burnt offering rituals,

Or makes offering of gifts and so forth.

68. I, the Elder Dipamkarashri, having seen it

Explained in sutra and in other teachings,

Have made this concise explanation

At the request of Jangchub Ö.

# Colophon

This concludes *A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, by the Acharya Dipamkara Shrijnana. It was translated, revised and finalized by the eminent Indian abbot himself and by the great reviser, translator and fully ordained monk Geway Lodrö.

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