

**LAM RIM CHEN MO**  
**A TIBETAN CLASSIC ON THE PATH OF ENLIGHTENMENT**

*by*

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### TRANSACTION No. 73

In 1984 a series of lectures and discussions were held at the Indian Institute of World Culture on the Great Books of the World. Lam Rim Chen Mo, a text by Tsong Ka Pa, has deeply influenced Buddhism and Buddhists of Tibet.

Professor S. K. Ramachandra Rao, a renowned Buddhist scholar of Bangalore, was invited to deliver a talk on this great book. Reproduced here is the text of his talk.

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# LAM RIM CHEN MO

## A TIBETAN CLASSIC ON THE PATH OF ENLIGHTENMENT

By Professor S. K. Ramachandra Rao

### I

In the Tibetan hagiology, the name of TSong~KHa-Pa (1357-1419), the author of *Lam-Rim CHen-Mo*, is an honoured one. He is variously described as ‘the valuable all-knowing’ (*sarvajna*), as the second Buddha, and as an incarnation of the celebrated Bodhi-sattva Manjusri. He is usually referred to as the ‘most precious master’ (rJe-Rim-Po-Che, *arya-maha-ratna*), and as ‘the most excellent teacher’ rJe-bTsun-Dum-Pa, or *parama-bhatta-raka-sri*). He is worshipped to this day as a living presence, next only to the Buddha, in the monasteries belonging to the dGe-Lugs-pa sect (which he founded). His tomb in the DGah-1 Dan monastery (which he established) continue to be a place of pilgrimage for the pious Tibetans.

One of the factors which contributed to the celebrity of TSong-KHa-Pa was the secular and religious power which the sect he founded came to wield in Tibet. His nephew, who was also an abbot of renown, dGe’-Dun-Grub (pronounced Geden-dub, 1391-1478) was honoured by the Chinese emperor with the title of ‘precious monarch’ (rGyal-po) and was recognized as an incarnation of the great Bodhi-sattva Avalokites-vara, the patron divinity of Tibet. His successor in 1650 was given the all-powerful status of Dalai-lama by the Mongolian emperor. Since them, the abbots who succeeded him have been absolute rulers over Tibet in religious and secular affairs.

But this factor is really not as important as the reformation that he brought about in the Buddhist monastic organization in Tibet. The Mahayana Buddhism, which was introduced into Tibet as early as 640 A.D., had fallen on evil days owing to the heavy impact of the occult and the bizarre Bon cults (indigenous to Tibet). Most of the Buddhist monasteries had become dens of licentious living; and even serious-minded monks spent all their time and energy in magical abracadabra. The hold of the Tantrik practices had become strong, and both the monastic fraternity and the laity were more preoccupied with mundane and magical accomplishments than with austerity or enlightenment.

TSong-KHa-Pa set out with a missionary zeal to correct this condition and to bring back the ideas of austere and ethical living, earnest aspiration for enlightenment, and a deep commitment to the welfare of the suffering folk. The monastery that he established in 1409, DGah-1Dan (Tibetan for the Buddhist paradise, Tushita) contained only monks who were earnest, austere, learned and totally committed to spiritual progress. The appeal of the Tantrik practices were minimal for than. And the sect that TSong-KHa-Pa founded, the dGe-Lugs-Pa (pronounced Gelugpa), or ‘The Way of the Virtuous Ones’, insisted on the strict observance of the Vinaya rules and on the cultivation of the liberating wisdom and compassion only within the context of uncompromising adherence to monastic discipline as laid down by the Buddha. Thanks to the untiring efforts of TSong-KHa-Pa, “the teaching of Vinaya shone like the Sun in this country of Tibet” (*Blue Annals*, I, 83).

TSong-KHa-Pa (meaning “the man from the Onion Country”) was not his real name. He was so called because he hailed from the TSong- KHa area (meaning “the onion-bank”) in the Amdo district of Central Tibet. His monastic name was bLo-bZang Grags-Pa’i dPal (being the Tibetan version of the Sanskrit Sumati-kirti-sri). He took the monastic vows at the tender age of seven, and began learning Sanskrit soon after. He was recognized as an authority on the vast Mahayana Sanskrit literature by the time he was twenty-two years of age.

The Vinaya aspect of the Buddha’s teaching, which he studied under Don-Gurb Rin-CHen of Amdo, made a deep impression on his mind, and so did the five treatises of Maitreya-natha as received by Asanga. *Abhisamayalankara* impressed him as the best ornament of the liberating wisdom (‘prajna-paramita’); *MahayanaSutralankara* gave him an insight into the path and practice of the bodhi-sattva;

*Madhyanta-Vibhanga* revealed to him the essence of the ‘midale path’; *Dharmadharmata-vibhanga* made him understand how *samsara* provided the foundation for *nirvana* and *Mahayanottara-tantra* opened his vision into the pure nature of consciousness which lies hidden in all living beings (‘tathagata-garbha’). Thus was he provided with an “armour of knowledge”. He became convinced that the practice of wisdom (*prajna*) alone was the path for emancipation, and that Vinaya was the sure foundation for it.

He also studied all the extant tantras, and obtained several initiations. He found *Sri-guhya-samaja-tantra* to be the chief of all the tantras, and he searched for its essence. He also wrote a Tibetan commentary on this text. He meditated in solitary hermitages and realized the patron-god of the wisdom and compassion, Manjughosha, who became his unfailing guide for the rest of his life. An erudite scholar who was also saintly in personal life, he began to teach; and he gathered round him a band of devoted students. As recorded in the *Blue Annals*, “he purified the minds of three kinds of human beings, and by a mind filled with disgust towards all phenomenal existence (he and his disciples) transformed the ordination vows into the very essence of the pratimoksha monastic code.” (I, 83) “He has been a being with a straight-forward Mind, dwelling on a lofty stage (of spiritual evolution), who had come here for the welfare of living beings.” (*ibid.*, II, 1079)

## II

Among, the Indian texts that he studied under Las-Kyi rDo-rJe, (Karma-vajra), a great abbot of his days, was one that made a profound and lasting impression on him: *Bodhi-patha-pradipa* (“Light on the Path of Enlightenment”) by .Dipankara-Srijnana, more familiarly known as Atisa (982-1054) A.D). TSong-KBa-Pa not only tried to put into practice the teachings of this great work and founded a new sect (reformed bKa-gDams-Pa) to propagate these teachings, but wrote an enormous treatise to explain, illustrate and defend the message of Atisa to the Tibetan aspirants. This work became famous as *Lam-Rim CHen-Mo*, or the “Great Book on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment”.

The immediate inspiration to write this monumental work was the accidental access that he had to Gro-Lung-Pa’s *bsTan-Rim* (“Instructions Concerning the Stages”) at Lo-Ro, as he was planning to visit India on a pilgrimage. The author of this work was a disciple of the disciple of ‘Brom (1005-1064), who was a disciple and colleague of Atisa himself. This work sought to explain Atisa’s teachings in the light of *Abhisamayalankara*, which TSong-KHa-Pa had studied earlier; and this opened a new line of thought for him. Learning that there were oral traditions concerning Atisa’s Manual to he had in the monasteries of LHo-Brag, he abandoned the idea of going to India and instead went in search of these oral traditions.

After obtaining oral instructions, TSong-KHa-Pa retired to the solitude of the monastery of Rva-sGren (pronounced Rading, established in 1056 A.D by Atisa’s disciple ‘Brom) for writing *Lam-Rim CHen-Mo*, which he completed A.D. He was a prolific writer, and amongst his works are commentaries and glosses on several important Mahayana works in Sanskrit, and a compendium of the tantras. But his celebrity justly rests on this *Lam-Rim CHen-Mo*. There are in Tibetan many works called ‘Lam-Rim, explaining stages on the path to enlightenment, according to different traditions. They are generally known as ‘path literatures distinguished from works on logic, philosophy and metaphysics. But TSong-KHa-Pa’s *Lam-Rim* is not only the most outstanding among them, but the most popular among Tibetan . Students and scholars.

## III

TSong-KHa-Pa’s *Lam-Rim* cannot be understood unless one is acquainted with Atisa’s *Bodhipatha-pradipa*, which serves as the core text for the Tibetan treatise. Dipankara-Srijnana (the monastic name of Atisa), the saintly and scholarly abbot Of the Vikramasila university in Bengal, was earnestly entreated to visit Tibet to help in the translation of Indian texts bearing on Mahayana into

Tibetan. He was not only proficient in the Sutra aspect of the Buddha's teaching, but was well-versed in the Tantra. He had himself received tantrik initiations and was a famous master in India, celebrated alike for his erudition and austerity. He arrived in mNa-Ris in Tibet in 1042 A.D; after spending a year in Nepal. He had agreed to spend only three years in this country, but at the expiry of the stipulated period, he chanced to meet hBrom-STon-Pa (1005-1064), a remarkable Tibetan student who was fired with a missionary zeal to restore Buddhist practices (which had become corrupt in Tibet with magical involvements) to their original purity. Atisa changed his mind and Staged on in Tibet till his death in 1054. hBrom who was his chief disciple worked with him for ten years, and after the master's death, continued his cleansing operations for another ten years.

This combination of the Indian master and the Tibetan pupil gave Buddhism in Tibet a popular appeal. Till then, only kings, noblemen and chieftains had espoused the cause of Buddhism, mostly for political reasons. But now the mass got interested in this religion hBrom founded a new sect known at the bKa-gDams-Pa (the School of Oral Precepts) on the basis of the teachings of his master Atisa. This was the closest among the Tibetan schools to Indian Buddhism. The watchword of tins sect was that Tantra (spiritual practices) must be combined with Vinaya (monastic discipline), and Vinaya with Tantra. TSong-KHa-Pa belonged to this sect, before he founded his more austere and rigorous sect, originally known as "the new bKa-gDams-Pa" but later identified as the deG-Lugs-Pa ('The Way of the Virtuous order').

Atisa, while sojourning in the monastery of Gu-ge wrote *Bodhi-patha-pradipa* ('The Light on the Path of Enlightenment') at the request of his good disciple, Byang-CHub-'od, to explain the common basis of Sutra and Tantra. A small poetical work in Sanskrit consisting of sixty-six verses, and equipped with author's own commentary known as *Panjika*, it explains the idea of emptiness (*sunya-vada*) and brings out the value of quiet meditation, as distinguished from wild tantrik practices. Moral conduct, devotion to the guru practices, of calming (*samatha*), generation of super-normal faculties and the perfection of the natural equipments of merit and knowledge are explained as constituting a graded series.

The text underlines the need to generate thoughts committed to enlightenment: the *bodhi-chitta*. And this is derived from Asanga's teaching in *Yoga-charya-bhumi*. Atisa gave in this work a balanced approach to the goal of enlightenment giving due importance to the practice of the *paramitas* (perfections) as well as to the tantrik initiations. It was this approach that appealed to TSong-KHa-Pa. The burden of his *Lam-Rim CHen-Mo* was to show that this approach had the sanction of all the masters of Mahayana, and that all the great books constituting the Mahayana canon commended this integrated approach.

TSong-KHa-Pa's book is in fact a monument of immense erudition. He cites from almost all the Mahayana classics; many of them were of course from Tibetan translations, but quite a few were directly from Sanskrit sources. Many of the Sanskrit works that he cites from are no longer available to us in their original form. His acquaintance with the Madhyamika, Yogacharya, Prasangika and other schools is found to be intimate and extensive. He was versed in the entire range of Mantra-yana. However, his wide scholarship does not interfere with his attention to the essentials. The whole work presents a unitary and methodical character Respite frequent reference to the views of a large number of earlier masters and a larger number of manuals.

In the concluding stanzas of the work, he gives expression to his own idea of how the work should be: "I tried to draw all the essentials of the meaning, without verbosity, though not incomplete, so that even a person with slight intelligence could understand it easily, and do this by way of the path of methodical pondering with scripture and principle." (Alex Wayman's translation, p. 428). He held that knowledge of the scriptures was indispensable for understanding the principles of bondage and release, of *samsara* and *nirvana*. But scriptural knowledge must be reinforced by earnest reflection on the ideas

got from the texts. Reflection to be effective needs to be methodical. 'Methodical pondering' is thus prescribed as a path. TSong-KHs-Pa has here not only brought together a variety of scriptural views, but has sought to weave a meaningful fabric out of the whole mass.

#### IV

In the invocatory as well as the concluding verses of the work, TSong—KHa—Pa pays homage to the three masters, to whom he is most indebted and whom he regards as most Authoritative in the Mahayana tradition : Nagarjuna, Asanga and Dipankara, Atisa. We have already acquainted ourselves with the significance of Dipankara, Atisa to TSong-KHa-Pa's work. *Lam-Rim*, in fact, opens with an account of the development of *dharmā* in Tibet, culminating in the advent of "the great Bandit Dipankara (i.e., Atisa), who illumined the snowy range". TSong-KHa-Pa says that, thanks to the work of this great Pandit in Tibet, the "eye which views the good, path of the Victor did not close for a long time."

If Dipankara-Atisa may be regarded as almost his immediate predecessor in the path- literature, and as having a direct bearing on the Tibetan sect to which TSong-KHa-Pa owed allegiance Nagarjuna and Asanga were more distant. But TSong-KHa-Pa regards them as "head-ornaments of all the learned ones in India, the famed emblems of victory, shining for the living beings", and as comprising "the essentials of the scriptures of the Victor (the Buddha)" (of concluding stanzas): It is a fact that Tsong-KHa-Pa relies, not only in *Lam-Rim* but in his other works as well, on the views of Nagarjuna (and of his sixth century commentator, Chandra-Kirti) and of Maitreyanatha-Assnga.

According to Tibetan tradition (*Blue Annals*, Bu-Ston and Taranatha), Nagarjuna was born in Vidarbha (in Maharashtra), was ordained at Nalanda and was taught by Rahula- bhadra (whose date is around 119 A.D., as he lived during the reign of Kanishka II). Then he went to Andhra-Pradesh (literally 'Naga-loka.' or "the dragon world") and recovered the Prajna-paramita literature of a hundred-thousand (*sata-sahasrika*). He traveled all over the country, teaching and writing books, but returned to- Andhra during his last days. His Madhyamika viewpoint, expounded in his several works in Sanskrit, was systematized by Chandra-Kirti who lived in the sixth century. To his credit is the consistent treatment of the two levels of truth (empirical, *samvrti*, and transcendental, *paramartha*), and exposition of 'emptiness' (*sunyata*) as the highest philosophical principle. Chandra-Kirti wrote elaborate commentaries on Nagarjuna's works, but his *Madhyamakavatara* made a great impression on TSong-KHa-Pa.

Nagarjuna, in fact, may be regarded as the 'father-figure' for Mahayana. It may also be mentioned in passing that Nagarjuna as well as his chief disciple Aryadeva are associated with South India, for it was in South India that Mahayana originated. *Ashta-sahasrika- prajna-paramita*, one of the earliest Mahayana texts (translated into Chinese as early as the second century A.D.), mentions that Mahayana (*paramitanaya*) arose in South India, then spread to the East, and then to the North. The other early works like *Ganda-Vyuha*, *Lankavatara-sutra*, and *Ratna-kuta-sutra* are all associated unmistakably with South India. Naropa's *Sekoddesa-tika* locates the origin of *mantra-naya* in Sri-dhanyakataka (modern Dharnikota, on the banks of the river Krishna in Andhra Pradesh). The only available manuscript of *Arya-Manjusri-mula-kalpa* was recovered only from South India. There is a Japanese tradition that the Buddha instructed Vajra-sattva to deposit the 'mantra-naya' in a pagoda in South India, so that they remain hidden until capable men recover it, and that Nagarjuna recovered it.

The concepts of the *paramitas* ("stages of perfection") and the *bodhichitta* ("the will to enlightenment") were crystallized in South India, principally by Nagarjuna and his followers. This gave an esoteric *pan* to the otherwise purely intellectual Buddhism that prevailed in the North. The Siddhas, among whom Nagarjuna figures prominently, bridged the gap between academic discussions and praxis

(*prayoga*).

If Nagarjuna represents the emergence of the Madhyamika viewpoint emphasizing the praxis, Asanga (about 290-350 A.D.) from Purushapura in Gandhara (presently Peshawar) in North India represents the emergence of the Yogacharya viewpoint emphasizing the idealist outlook (*vijnandvada*). Asanga's master Maiteyanatha (author of *Abhisamayalankara*) is credited with ideas that made Vajrayana a system of thought, and not merely a set of practices as it was with the early Siddhas. Asanga, who taught for a long time at the Nalanda University before he passed away at Rajagrha, wrote several works which projected the integrated Mahayana approach, combining the *paramitas* with the 'bodhi-sattva' ideal (taught initially by Arya-deva, disciple of Nagarjuna in his works *Chatuh-sataka* and *Sqta-sastra*). Among Asanga's works, his commentary on *Sandhi-nirmochana*, and his independent works *Mahayana-sutralankara* and *Yogachara-bhumi-sastra*, became very popular. Asanga was also the first to compose invocatory verses comprising *Sadhana* texts, which in due course became indispensable aids in Vajrayana.

TSong-KHa-Pa, even as a student, was exposed to the Maitreyanatha-Asanga literature. He was told by his teacher Don-Grub Rin-CHen that *Abhisamayalankara* of Maitreyanatha was 'the ornament of the three "mothers" (viz. the large, middle and abridged versions of the *Prajnaparamita*), and that it must be studied earnestly, for "if you become learned in it, you will be able to master all the Scripture" (*Blue Annals*, H, 1074). The impression created in the young TSong-KHa-Pa's mind by the study of the five treatises of Asanga (however, attributed to Maitreyanatha) has already been mentioned.

It was thus that Nagarjuna and Asanga represented to TSong-KHa-Pa the entirety of the Mahayana tradition: the *sunyata*, the *paramitas*, the *bodhi-chitta*, and the *bodhi-sattva* ideal. It was a perfect unison of Sutra and Tantra that the two masters together signified. *Lam-Rim*, which expounds this approach, naturally owes heavily to these two masters. TSong-KHa-Pa declares that the steps to the path of enlightenment (have descended from Nagarjuna and Asanga, "by the gathering in the thousand rivers of texts and schools, it is the ocean of glorious well-expressed teachings" (colophon to *Lam-Rim*).

## V

The short title of TSong-KHa-Pa's treatise, *Lam-Rim Chen-Mo*, literally means great book (CHen—Mo) of the stages (Rim) on the Path (Lam) "The expression 'Rim' is Tibetan for the Sanskrit 'karma': order, succession, series, degrees or stages, And the 'Path' refers to the Path of Enlightenment (*bodhi-patha*), as spelt out in the title of Atisa's little book which inspired this large treatise (*Byang-CHub Lam-gyi Rim~Pa*). The full title of TSong-KHa-Pa's work, when translated, reads, "Stages of the Path to Enlightenment" clearly illustrating all the stages which must be taken to heart by the three classes of persons.'

The three classes of persons are (1) the 'lesser' ones, who seek their own pleasures at all costs ; (2) the 'middling' ones, who are averse to material enjoyments and therefore refrain from sinful action, but with the intension of obtaining tranquility for themselves; and (3) the 'superior' ones, who aspire to work for the right cessation of suffering of others, and do not mind suffering for themselves in he bargain. This division is made by Atisa at the very beginning of his work, and there is a suggestion that he has adapted this idea from Asanga's *Vinischaya-Samgrahani*.

TSong-KHa-Pa devotes an entire chapter for each of these classes, preceded by a chapter containing general precepts for all the three classes. According to Mm, the 'superior' ones are eligible for the teachings concerning the *bodhi-sattva* path.

The title of the book also contains a reference to what these three -classes of persons must 'take to heart' in order finally to attain to enlightenment. The expression 'taking to heart' (Nams su Blang-ba) is taken to refer to the actual practices that must be undertaken by the aspirant.

The word 'Nams' Actually means spirit, soul, thought of idea; 'Su' is a terminal suggesting direction; and 'Blang-ba' is "to receive or take". The whole phrase, thus, means 'received in the spirit', 'accepted by the soul'; viz. 'taken to heart'. The significance is the earnest application of practical procedures in order to accomplish a goal that has already been set. It is different from mere intellectual understanding or academic approval; it involves a definitive will for enlightenment.

Given this will for enlightenment, the three classes of persons differ not so much in the appreciation of the goal as in the practices that enable them to move in the direction of the goal. The thesis that TSong-KHa-pa put forward is that a correct understanding of the scriptural texts and a methodical reflection on the principles contained in them are indispensable tools for one who is committed to the goal. In one of the introductory stanzas, he regrets: "In our day, practitioners of Yoga have lit le learning {lit. 'hearing'}, and those who are learned are ignorant of how to put into practice what they have learnt." This is what is meant by the Sutra being devoid of Tantra, and Tantra being divorced from the Sutra. The two together function like the two wings of the bird, conjointly helping its flight in the air.

*Lam-Rim* explains in some detail how bondage is caused when insight or wisdom (Ses-Rab, *prajna*) is divorced from practical application, or means of spiritual progress (Thabs, *upaya*), or when practical application is divorced from insight. The aspirant is advised to avoid onesidedness. This explanation occurs in the context of the cultivation of the 'wisdom-gone-beyond' (*prajna-paramita*), without which there can be no elimination of obscuration of reality or freedom from bondage, While TSong-KHa-Pa insists on the paramount value of knowledge (viz. study of the scriptures and methodical reflection on the principles), he recognizes the necessity of getting initiated into Tantrik practices so that one obtains the Buddhahood in this very life.

Thus the expression 'taking to heart' (Nams su Blang-ba) means a total motion of the theory-practice complex as it comes from a competent Guru, (technically called a *Kalyana-mitra*, or spiritual guide, who is regarded as "the root of the pad"), with an eagerness to put it into practice. The treatise also explains that what is really 'taken to heart' is guidance in the matter of training, in the form of exorcism or discrimination (Blo-Sbyong). 'Bio' means "to train the mind"; and 'Sbyaong-pa' is -to remove", "to clean," "to wash away", "to exorcise" (in Sanskrit, 'prakshalana'). The idea is that the mind (viz. the stream of individual consciousness), which is originally pure (being of the nature of. the void), gets contaminated owing to ignorance, actions and the consequently unfavourable states of phenomenal existence. Spiritual endeavour consists in cleaning this mind, and to restore its purity. This is exorcism. To recognize the innate and essential purity or void nature of the mind is discrimination. This does not happen naturally. It presupposes training.

The purpose, of *Lam-Rim* is to provide the framework for this training for the three, classes of persons mentioned above. The 'lesser' person must seek out a competent spiritual guide, and develop an earnest desire to accomplish the 'favourable states' (Dal-ba) before he dies (for then an opportunity would have been lost). He must think of the fearful consequences of negligent or wicked actions, and must take refuge in the three 'jewels' (the Buddha, the Dharma and the Samgha). In order to intensify the faith he recalls and regrets his prior transgressions of the moral code, rejoices that in this life he has fortunately been led to the good path, pleads for the continued turning of the wheel of Dharma by the Buddhas, and feels anxious to transfer whatever merit he has acquired to the welfare of his fellow-beings.

The 'midling' person must dwell on the evils of the phenomenal existence (*sumsara*) and the causes thereof (viz. the *Karma* and its consequences), and develop an earnest desire to stop the cycle of phenomenal existence. He must then apply himself seriously to liberate himself, by faithfully observing the rules of moaastic discipline (*pratimoksha*). He must realize that unless the mind is trained to be tranquil (*samatha*, calming, a precondition for *Samadhi* or meditative absorbtion), supernatural faculties

like personal achievement, craving for doctrine, moderation in food, morality, mindfulness etc. cannot arise, and unless these are aroused, perfection of merit and wisdom are impossible.

The 'superior' person is characterized by the realization that there are other beings like himself, who are oppressed by phenomenal existence and are eager to get liberated, and that it is his duty to work for their welfare. He also realizes that the best way to save them is to arouse in them the will for enlightenment (*bodhi-chitta*). He therefore prepares himself for this mission by practicing the five perfections (*paramitas*): generosity (*dana*), right conduct (*sila*), forbearance (*kshanti*), striving for spiritual welfare (*virya*), and the development of insight by meditation (*dhyana*), which are collectively called the 'Means' (*upaya*).

## VI

*Lam-Rim* is functionally divided into two distinct parts, although the Tibetan text itself does not suggest this division. Alex Wayman who has translated into English the second part (*Calming the Mind and Discerning the Real and Unreal*, Columbia University Press, 1978, reprinted by Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1979) claims that this division is justified by the Mongolian translation of this text (*Bodhi Mor*) which is annotated and printed in two parts.

The first part comprises of three chapters giving details of guidance (*Blo-sbyong*) with respect to the three classes of persons (viz. the 'lesser', the 'midling', and the 'superior'), besides an introductory chapter tracing the development of the Buddhist doctrine in Tibet until Atisa's days, and giving the reasons for the preparation of this treatise, and another, chapter containing general precepts for all the three classes of persons. The chapter on guidance given to the 'superior' person expatiates on the 'perfections' (*paramitas*) that must be cultivated. The first four of these (viz. *dana*, *sila*, *kshanti* and *virya*) are accommodated in this chapter.

The fifth 'perfection' (viz. *dhyana*) is taken up for detailed treatment in the second part of the book. And this is followed by another chapter on the intuitive wisdom which liberates (*prajna*). This final chapter presents the Madhyamika approach to the right understanding of reality. Calming the mind (*Zi-Gnas, samatha*) and the discernment of reality (*LHag mTHong, upasana*) are to be practiced together, and hence their combined treatment in the second part of the book.

TSong-KHa-Pa gives an excellent illustration. If one wants to look at an icon in darkness, he has to have a lamp which burns brightly. But this is not enough. The lamp must be free from the influence of breeze. Likewise, to understand the profound reality, one must have discernment (*vipasyana*), but must also take care to see that the mind is not swayed by the distractions of sense, but is calm (*samatha*), for otherwise mind strays and the discernment gets lost. Discernment is calculated to eliminate erroneous ways of looking at the world and also wicked attitudes; and calming is to make the mind 'immobile.' TSong-KHa-Pa quotes from *Chandra-pradipa-sutra* (otherwise called *Samadhi-raja-sutra*): "By the power of calming (*samatha-balena*), it becomes immobile (*akampyah bhavati*); by means of discerning (*vipyasanaya*) it becomes like a mountain (*sailopamo bhavati*)" (op. int., p. 89). He also cites a passage from the celebrated *Siksha-samucchaya* (where the passage in turn is cited from (*Dharma-sangiti*): "The vision of reality is possible only for one whose mind is tranquil" ('samahita manaso yathabhutadarsanam bhavati').

The book naturally closes with a section on the practice of calming and discernment together, and this is entitled 'The Method of Pair-yoking' (*Zung-du-hBrel-pa, yuganaddha*). There is an exhortation that this method must be understood only according to the traditional explanations given in words like *Sravaka-bhumi* and *Prajna-paramitopadesa*. TSong-KHa-Pa has laboured hard to provide the correct perspective by citing hundreds of passages from authoritative sources.

## VII

There is a short note on Vajrayana at the end of the book. It may be recalled that Vajrayana (the Diamond Vehicle) is the peculiar brand of Mahayana Buddhism that originated in South India and spread to the North, especially in the universities of Nalanda, Vikramsila and Odantapuri, before it entered into Tibet. It took its roots in Tiber, Mongolia and China. It is characterized by a large involvement in Tantrik practices, principally incantations (*mantras*) and visualization of deities (*sadhana*). Hence, the alternate name for Vajrayana is ‘mantra-yana’. The ideology of Vajrayana as it spread in Tibet, tended to ignore not only the Sutra aspect of the Buddha’s teaching but also the monastic regulations and obligations of morality. This paved the way for degeneration of religion in Tibet and deterioration in the spiritual standards. Atisa and his disciple hBrom were concerned about this state of affairs, and attempted to remedy it by suggesting a combination of Sutra and Tantra.

TSong-KHa-Pa took up this lead and attempted to revive the efforts of Atisa and hBrom. He pleaded for the complete and unremitting observance of the *pratimoksha* rules by the monastic community, and he emphasized the value of the study of scriptural texts and methodical reflection on the principles contained in them. But he was also an adept in Tantrik practices and recognized that if one wished to become a Buddha in this very life, Tantra was the only way. But Tantrik practices become effective only on the sure foundation of proper conduct. He quoted *Manjusri-mula-tantra* to the effect that the Buddha declared that there could be no success in the *mantra-path* by one whose conduct was improper (‘*duhsilasya munindrena mantra-siddhir na chodita*’).

In this short note, he brings out the significance of proper initiation by a competent master, guarding of all the pledges and vows, purification of the discursive thoughts by the stage of generation (bsKyed-Rim, *utpanna-krama*), eligibility to the next stage of completion (rDZogs-Rim, *sampanna-krama*), and the obtainment of the correct knowledge of reality in the Tantrik practices. He proposes to play down the wild fancies that usually characterize the Sadhana of various divinities, and to eliminate the outlandish and obscurantist involvement in the Tantrik practices.

The two stages are distinguished by the relevance of the first to the “path” (*marga*) and of the second to the ‘fruits’ (*phala*). The former is the developmental stage and consists in the purification of body, mind and speech through meditation on *mandala* and employment of *mantra* in accordance with one’s own preceptor’s guidance. The latter signifies the realization of the void (*sunyata*) by yogic practice on the *avadhuta* (*viz. sushumna*) for the obtainment of pure, blissful and free consciousness. The two stages belong to the class of spiritual practices known as the ‘highest’ (*anuttara* or *ati-yoga*), which represents the balanced employment of body, speech and mind (in contradistinction to *kriya-tantra*, which represents the body, *charya-tantra* which represents speech, and *yoga-tantra*, which represents mind). This complex of spiritual practices emphasizes the original nature of consciousness (*chitta*), which is likened to the clear and cloudless sky.

The tantras which crystallized this approach are usually grouped into “Father-tantras”, dealing with the stage of generation (bsKyed-Rim) and the “Mother-tantras,” dealing with the stage of completion (rDZogs-Rim). The former ‘tantras’ invoke the aid of male divinities (and hence called “Father-tantras”) for the perfection of what is known as the projection body (*maya-deha*, rGyu-Lus), while the latter tantras invoke the aid of female divinities (and hence called “Mother-tantras”), for the perfection of clear and bright insight (*prabha-svara*, ‘od Gsal). There is also a third group of tantras which are described as ‘non-dual’, where the two sets of divinities are together invoiced for the integrated benefits of both the stages.

This distinction obtains in the ‘New System’ (gSar-Ma), which was crystallized by Atisa, and which provided the basis for TSong-KHa-Pa’s reformations. In this system, as distinguished from the ‘Old System’ (rNYing-Ma), which prevailed from the earliest of times till Rin-chen bZang-po (958-1051 A.D.), the emphasis was on the ‘graded path’ (Lam) as illustrated by the great text of Atisa, *viz. Bodhi-patha-pradipa*. The idea of the ‘path’ or ‘way’ involved the attitudinal facility as well as the

mental ability to see things differently from how the ordinary people see, or how the practitioner himself saw before he entered the stage of generation. It is a matter of cognitive transformation together with a widening of the spiritual horizon. TSong-KHa-Pa views this as a noetic experience, involving detachment from wordly cares, cultivation of an enlightened attitude, and unprejudiced and free outlook.

In the Tibetan lineage of the 'Path'-makers beginning with Atisa, there are three principal divisions. One of them relies exclusively on the interpretation of the teachings of Atisa as provided by his direct disciple, hBron-Ston-Pa and as preserved by the famous saint dGom-Po-Pa (1079-1153); and this is represented by the Sa-Skya school of Tibetan Buddhism. The second division (represented by the Ka-Gyus school of Marpa and Milarepa) prefers to rely on the oral traditions as received by Chan-nGa-Pa. The third division, which is known as Kadam Zhung-pa, relies on textual explanations as transmitted by Po-To-Ba. It is this division which TSong-KHa-Pa's work represents: "by gathering in the thousand rivers of texts and schools, it is the ocean of glorious, well-expressed teachings" (Colophon).

### VIII

The immediate inspiration for TSoag-KHa-Pa to prepare this great treatise appears to have been the work known as *bSTan-Rim* by the celebrated translator (lo-tsa-ba), Blo-IDan-Ses-Rab (1059-1109). Disciple of hBrom-STon-Pa (disciple of Atisa). TSong-KHa-Pa acknowledges the importance not only of this work but of a "loss on it by gRo-Lungs-Pa (a disciple of the author of *bSTan-Rim*). While Atisa's Sanskrit work is no doubt the core-text, the organization of the "steps" of the Path is principally due to these two authors. TSong-KHa-Pa made the organization more broad-based and inclusive. He not only explained many a concept that was but implicit in the previous "path-writings", but added illustrations and cited supporting passages from a large number of Sanskrit texts pertaining to Madhyamika and Yogachara systems.

It was also TSong-KHa-Pa's contribution that he interpreted the Path largely in terms of "engagement and disengagement (Blang dang dor bya'i dNos Po, acceptance-rejection), which he described as the "very life of the Path". The human being, whose present existence was an excellent opportunity to work out his destiny, needs to apply himself to the doctrines and practices leading to welfare (viz. the 'good') and at the same time to withdraw from aspects of life which would result in bondage and sorrow (viz. the 'bad'). He should constantly accept the virtuous way (*upadeya*) and reject the vicious way (*heya*); and this incessant, discriminating and careful pursuit of spiritual life constitutes the 'Path'. Indeed, TSong-KHa-Pa's *Lam* appears to have been specially written to dilate on the dimensions and dialectic of this acceptance-rejection praxis, which is a matter of "pair-yoking" (viz. "mutually bound", "without gap").

Although TSong-KHa-Pa sought to integrate Sutra and Tantra in the *Lam*, he indicated that he Tantra is more relevant to the practice of the Path. In foot, he undertook to compile, immediately after the preparation of the *Lam*, a sort of source-book of the four classes of Tantra (Kriya, Charya, Yoga, and Anuttara), on *Snag-Rim Jghen-Mo*, and also as many as 135 short manuals on Tantrik subjects collectively called 'Thus-Bu'. He himself prescribes at the end of the *Lam* that one should finally "enter the Tantra, because "this path is a more rare *dharma* than other *dharms* and speedily fulfills the two collections" (*op. cit.*, p. 475). Elsewhere, he describes the *Lam-Rim* and the *sNags-Rim* as but two stages: the former being "the shared path of the two vehicles" (viz. Vsrayana and Paramita-naya), and the latter being 'the unshared path' (cf. his *Rang-nyid kyi rTogs brJod*, or 'Personal Narration', tr. by Alex Wayman, Translation of classical Tibetan, p. 175).

It is interesting to discern the stages of development of TSong-KHa-Pa's own understanding of the Path. His brief text known as *Personal Narration* (mentioned above) allows us as insight into this. He first acquainted himself with the writings of "the six ornaments of India" (viz. Aryadeva, Vasubandhu, Dignaga, Dharmakirti, Gunaprabha and Sakyaprabha), and the teachings of "the two best"

(viz. Nagarjuna and Asanga). He then exerted himself with many efforts in the difficult spots of these texts. He realized that mere studying was not of much help in the practice; he then delved deep into “all the essentials of Nagar-juna’s textual school that lead in perfect theory through the path of fine principles to the opening of the Deep”. His doubts thereupon cleared up.

Subsequently he exerted himself in the Vajra-yana (viz. the *mmtra*-path), which far surpasses the vehicle of perfected and altruistic virtues (*Paramita*). He concluded that Anuttarayoga-tantra was the chief of the Tantra divisions, after becoming conversant with the Kriya. Charya-, and the Yoga-tantra, in that order. He benefited by works such as *Subahu-pariprccha* and *Dhyanottara* (of the Kriya division), *Maha-vairochanabhi-sambodh* (of the Charya division), *Hevajra-se* (of the Yoga division), and *Guhya-samaja-tantra*, *Hevajra-tantra*, *Sri-chakra-samvara-tantra* and *Kala-chakra-tantra* (of the last division).

It was then that he “prayed and persevered in all the set of reasons so as to get the textual matter to arise (in my mind) as counsel”. He contemplated on Manjughosha, “who dispels the darkness of cognition in the candidates”. Thus he obtained “uncommon certainty in the stages of the Path to Enlightenment, descended in sequence from Nagaijuna and Asanga”. He perfected his cognition of the Path by collating “two fine compositions’ (*BodhiSattva-bhumi* and *Sutralankara*), and studying (once again the works of Maitreya-natha and Dharma-svamin. He profited greatly from Santideva’s *Siksha-samucchaya*, Buddhaguhya’s gloss on *Dhyanottara*, *Maha- Vairochanabhi-sambodhi* and *Sri-tattva-samgraha*.

He became in due course “a treasury of counsel”; the doorway to discrimination was opened for him; and he “exercised with engagement on the Path”. The ‘auspicious preparation’ (mDun-Legs-Ma) was thus completed.

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