
The Background of the Text

This short text was paid high attention by many great masters throughout the history. H.H. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche regarded this text as the principal instruction among all the Dharma teachings he imparted. In his life, he had taught this text dozens of times. Once His Holiness told his students, “To be a genuine Dharma practitioner, one must grasp the meaning of three commentaries, which are *The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva* by Thogme Zangpo, the *Three Principal Aspects of the Path* by Lama Tsongkhapa and the *Eight Verses for Training the Mind* by Geshe Langri Thangpa.” He required the sangha at Larung Gar to recite these three commentaries.

Patrul Rinpoche had a story about this text in his famous book *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*:

Once, Geshe Chekawa, who knew many teachings of both the New and the Old Traditions and who knew many texts by heart, went to see Geshe Chakshingwa. On his pillow he saw a small text, and when he opened it he came across this sentence:

*I will take defeat upon myself,
And give the victory to others.*

“What a wonderful teaching!” Chekawa thought, and he asked Chakshingwa what the teaching was called.

“It’s *The Eight Verses of Langri Thangpa*.” said Chakshingwa.

“Who holds these instructions?”

“Geshe Langri Thangpa himself.”

Chekawa was determined to receive these teachings. First he went to Lhasa and spent some days circumambulating the sacred places. One evening, a leper from Langthang told him that Langri Thangpa had passed away. Chekawa asked who was the successor of the lineage and was told that there were two potential successors, Shangshungpa and Dodepa, but they could not agree on the succession matter.

However, they were not arguing out of competitiveness. Shangshungpa would tell Dodepa, “You are the older, you take the succession. I will serve you as though you were Langri Thangpa himself.” But Dodepa would answer, “You are the more learned. You shall be the successor!”

Although their disagreement about the succession was out of their pure perception of each other, Chekawa interpreted it as a shortcoming and considered neither of them to be the holder of Langri Thangpa’s teaching. He tried to find out who was its best holder, and everybody told him that it was Sharawa.

Sharawa was giving a teaching of many volumes to thousands of the Sangha members. Chekawa had listened to him for a few days, but did not hear him say a word about the teaching he sought.

“He seems not to have it either,” he thought, “but I’ll ask him. If he has this teaching, I’ll stay. Otherwise I’d better move on.” So Chekawa went to see Sharawa, who was circumambulating a stupa. He spread out a cloth on the ground and invited Sharawa to sit down for a moment saying, “I have something to ask you.”

“Venerable Monk,” said Sharawa, “what is your problem? Personally, I’ve always found all my answers on my meditation cushion.”

“I read these words in a text: ‘I will take defeat upon myself, and give the victory to others.’ I liked them very much. Is this a profound teaching or not?”

“Venerable monk,” Sharawa replied, “whether or not you like this teaching, it is the one you can only dispense with if you don’t want to attain Buddhahood.”

“Do you hold this teaching?”

“Yes. It’s my main practice.” Sharawa replied.

“Then I beg you, teach it to me.” said Chekawa.

“Can you stay with me for a long time?” Sharawa asked. “If you can, I will teach it to you.”

From him, Chekawa received guidance according to his experience in a continuous course of mind training that lasted six years. Through practicing it he was able to rid himself completely of every trace of selfishness.

Some Words from Khenpo Sodargye

The *Eight Verses for Training the Mind* can bring tremendous benefits to the practice of both Sutrayana teachings and Tantrayana teachings. I give the teaching on this text on the request of a few disciples, and I am very grateful to them.

The words of this text are simple, but their meaning is profound. I have added some scriptural evidences and stories, so that you may get a better understanding. I wish I could talk more, but I regret to tell you that I, myself, have not practiced it so well and have had only a little understanding and relevant experience. Perhaps, relying on that small amount of experience, I can share a bit more of this topic with you. I believe that this text will be of great help to the majority of dharma practitioners, both in their practices and as a way to help them to behave properly.

Actually, only Bodhisattvas abiding on the first level or above, can fully perfect the practice of *Eight Verses for Training the Mind*. Nevertheless, we can do similar practices. With these pith instructions, and with the blessing of the guru, work with it in our mind continuum as much as we can, and gradually, we will veer to such a status in our spiritual practice.

The Author of the Text

Kadampa Geshe Langri Tangpa was one of the two main disciples of Geshe Potowa, who was among the six senior disciples of Lord Atisha. Langri Tangpa once made an aspiration: May I benefit sentient beings in the appearance of a Bhikshu in all my lifetimes. Then Palden Lhamo (Glorious Goddess), a Dharma protector, also made an aspiration: As Langri Tangpa made such a wish, I also promise to protect and support him to accomplish all his activities. Because of this, the lineage disciples of Langri Tangpa all have Palden Lhamo as their Dharmapala.

Geshe Langri Tangpa upheld the pure precepts during his whole life. After practicing in a secluded place for a long time, he began to accept disciples and imparted Dharma teachings to them. It is said that he had over 2000 disciples as his retinue. He built the Langtang Monastery at the place called Langtang, so people named him “Langri Tangpa”. He never smiled in his life except on one occasion when a mouse tried to move a piece of turquoise on his mandala plate. The mouse was trying desperately to push the turquoise but could not manage, so he called over another mouse to come and help him and together they tried to move it. That made Langri Tangpa smile, which was the only time that he smiled.

He had a permanently gloomy expression, so people used to call him “Langthangpa Gloomy Face”. One of his disciples asked him not to be so gloomy, and he replied, “When I think about all the endless suffering in the samsara, and there is no happiness in the three realms, how could I ever possibly smile?”

Patrul Rinpoche once said, “When you meditate on the suffering of samsara, you should meditate it at all times, like Langri Tangpa, and thus arouse a genuine renunciation of samsara from the bottom of your heart.”

The detailed biography of Geshe Langri Tangpa can be found in the *Blue Annals*.

The Title of the Text

The *Eight Verses for Training the Mind* is not a complete commentary. According to the defined structure of Buddhist scriptures originated in India, a special feature of a text is to have a homage verse at the beginning, and a dedication verse in the end. This feature is used to differentiate the Buddhist scriptures from non-Buddhist ones. The homage verse can tell if the text belongs to the sutra pitaka, vinaya pitaka or abhidharma pitaka, and what is the tradition and deity of the author, etc. But this text has no homage verse nor dedication verse, actually it is a lojong (mind training) among Langri Tangpa’s pith instructions on Dharma practice.

Lojong means observing and training one’s own mind, and is the most important practice in Buddhism. This text was composed on the basis of the bodhichitta pith instructions of Lord Atisha and Geshe Potowa. The eight verses in this text are eight key instructions of Mahayana practice. They look independent but are in a logic sequence, and form a complete lojong system.

For some beginners or those who don’t really want to put them into practice, the eight verses might seem simple. For the genuine Dharma practitioners, however, the practice of even

one of these verses is of great benefit. One can even attain enlightenment by just practicing one or half of the verse in his or her life.