

B4. Recollect the Buddha's Great Kindness with Gratitude

C1. The Author's Recollection of the Buddha's Great Kindness

D1. Recollect the Buddha's Sacrifice for Seeking the Dharma in his Causal Stage

Verse 41

*For its sake you have given away,
Again and again over countless eons,
Sometimes your body, at others your life,
As well as your loving kin and resources of wealth.*

It is for this purpose that you offered over and again, through countless eons, at some times your body, at other times your life, as well as your dear relations and your stores of wealth.

This verse tells us that over countless eons, over and again, the Buddha offered everything to achieve the realization of dependent arising. In his causal stage, over many lifetimes, the Buddha gave away his precious body, his life, his beloved families, and his wealth, not just once, but countless times. As is stated in *The Flower Adornment Sutra*, "Because he valued the dharma, he did not cherish even his own body or life, how much the less did he crave a king's throne, the cities, settlements, palaces, forests, and all the possessions that go with it. Furthermore, he exerted himself to the extreme in various ascetic and difficult practices."

There was once a great enlightened master of the Kagyu lineage. While performing prostrations to the Jowo Shakyamuni in Lhasa, he offered his respect for Buddha Shakyamuni in this way, "In the beginning we were the same, in the middle you gathered the two accumulations of merit and wisdom, and at the end you attained Buddhahood; now I shall pay homage to you." We should remember that for the sake of living beings, the Buddha, over countless eons gave away his life and everything that he owned, so it is right that we followers should now pay homage and make offerings to him. Why? Because the Buddha has accumulated immense merits and bestowed on us the sublime teaching of dependent arising; furthermore, the Buddha has exhausted all defects and perfected all qualities. Now that he has attained such an exalted state, it is only reasonable that we take refuge in the Buddha and pay homage to him.

The One Hundred and Fifty Praises of the Buddha says: "Undaunted over countless eons, you persevered on the Bodhisattva path; to seek the dharma nectar, you offered your body over many lifetimes." On the causal stage, over countless eons, the Buddha exerted diligence unremittingly and surrendered his most precious body and gave up his life, in numerous situations and over numberless lifetimes. To follow his example, it is necessary for us to take upon hardships and austerity in our pursuit of the noble Dharma; even to hear only one single dharma lecture, whatever difficulty we may have to bear, it is worth many times more than whatever we have to overcome to do so.

We must be aware that a spiritual path will always involve some kind of hardship, and that it is worth it. Remembering this, we shall not shrink from minor sufferings or frustrations when travelling on the Dharma path. The truth of dependent arising and emptiness is unequalled by any worldly knowledge, thus we must vow to learn it diligently. On this spiritual path, on the one hand, we must constantly pray to the Three Jewels that our conviction in the sublime teaching of emptiness will never decline; on the other hand, we should have the determination to spread the wonderful teaching to all beings around us who have never heard the names of the Buddha or the Dharma. As Mahayana practitioners, it is our responsibility to help others to make an auspicious connection with the sublime teaching of emptiness. Padmasambhava said, “If people see the true meaning of emptiness, compassion will arise effortlessly.” Therefore, once we cultivate the right view of emptiness, we shall make use of all means to pass it on to other beings.

D2. Recollect the Sadness of Not Being Able to Receive the Dharma Directly from the Buddha

Verse 42

*Seeing the qualities of this teaching
Pulls [hard] from your heart,
Just like what a hook does to a fish;
Sad it is not to have heard it from you.*

What poor fortune not to have heard that Dharma (directly) from you, to whose mind I am drawn, like a fish to a hook, by seeing your good qualities.

- a. The Dharma draws one’s heart, like a hook draws a fish

Lama Tsongkhapa tells us modestly, even humbly, that he feels great sorrow at not having received the teaching directly from Buddha Shakyamuni. The teaching of dependent arising is so profound and marvelous that by seeing its qualities (or the qualities of the Buddha), one’s heart is hooked by this supreme teaching, in the same way that a fish becomes fastened to a hook. The teaching can dispel all obstacles and expose their profound and wonderful meanings. Whoever accepts these teachings, will find themselves totally attracted, like a fish that is drawn to a glittering hook and pulled along regardless of his will. When one hears this profound teaching, one can’t help take delight in it and soon comes to rely on it. That is why Lama Tsongkhapa felt very sad that he was not able to hear it from the Buddha himself.

When the Buddha taught Prajnaparamita at Vulture Peak, there was a large audience, including Manjushri, Maitreya, and many other great Bodhisattvas, It filled Lama Tsongkhapa with great regret and sadness that he was not being able to join them there. What is this feeling like? It is explained in the following verse.

Verse 43

*The intensity of that sorrow
Does not let go of my mind,
Just like the mind of a mother
[Constantly] goes after her dear child.*

*By the strength of that sadness, my mind shall never give up (its regard for you),
like the mind of a mother continually following after her dear child.*

- b. The intense sadness of not having heard the Dharma directly from the Buddha

Lama Tsongkhapa said that no words could express the intensity of the sorrow that he felt every time that he thought about not having seen the Buddha when he was in this world and receiving the Tathagata's instruction in person. Lama Tsongkhapa's feelings were like those of a mother who is so filled with love for her dear child, that as soon as the child is out of her view, she misses him constantly.

It is very common that when one has a strong faith in the Buddha or in one's guru, this person will always yearn to be by his side. Khenpo Sodargye, for example, has said that before he met his root guru, His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, whenever he heard people talking about Rinpoche's virtues and behaviors, the feeling that he had of wanting to meet this great master and rely on him, was beyond anything that words could describe.

Of course, the way that Lama Tsongkhapa describes himself in these verses is nothing more than a manifestation. In actuality, he is a great and highly realized Bodhisattva who, according to the Mahayana sutras, as he is above the path of great accumulation¹, has the ability to go to the Pure Lands and receive the teachings of numerous Buddhas within the same moment.

Also, there was a prophecy made about Lama Tsongkhapa at the time that the Buddha came into this world. In those days, there was a Bhikshu named Lotus-Scent, who was a previous incarnation of Lama Tsongkhapa. The Buddha concealed a conch shell as a terma and prophesied that Bhikshu Lotus-Scent would reveal it at a certain point in the future. This was an auspicious sign for Lotus-Scent's career of spreading the Dharma and benefiting living beings, and it is also the reason why Drepung Monastery² makes ceremonial use of conch shells to this day.

Before receiving his prophesy, Bhikkhu Lotus-Scent had offered a crystal mala to the Buddha, and the prayer that follows, describes this interaction between Lama Tsongkhapa's earlier incarnation and Buddha Shakyamuni,

*In front of the Buddha at Bodh Gaya,
You offered a crystal mala.
Generating supreme bodhicitta,
You had the right views and favorable conditions.*

¹ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Path_of_accumulation

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drepung_Monastery

Therefore, here Lama Tsongkhapa manifests to ordinary beings that he hasn't seen the Buddha in person and is therefore filled with sorrow.

c. Reflect on our current situation

It is truly a cause for regret, that we ordinary beings didn't have the honor to see the Buddha, or to directly receive his teachings while he was in this world. Even if we had been animals at that time, if we had been in the presence of the Buddha for even a few moments, we would not have had to wander in the samsara for countless generations. When the Buddha's relics were exhibited in Taiwan, Master Hsing Yun quoted this verse from the *Essentials of the Pure Land Teachings*:

*When the Buddha was in this world, I was sunken;
After the Buddha entered parinirvana, I was born.
I repent of this body's karmic obstacles, that are so heavy
That I was not able to see the Tathagata's gold-colored body.*

When the Buddha was on the earth, we all sank into the three lower realms; when the Buddha entered parinirvana, we were born into this Saha World. We should feel so ashamed of our negative karma and obscurations, which were the reasons that we did not meet the Buddha.

In Gendün Chöphel's *Guide to India*, he said that there are two footprints of the Buddha at Bodhgaya, one that is real, and the other, which is a replica. The Buddha has told us that people with great capacity, after reading his teachings, will be certain that he had existed in this world and will feel joyous. For people with less capacity, upon seeing the Buddha's footprint, they will also feel joyful, for this footprint will be the strong evidence that they need that the Buddha had truly appeared in this world.

Typically, those of lesser capacity believe what they see, or are convinced as a result of some special or supernatural power. On the other hand, throughout history it has happened that those with great capacity, upon hearing of dependent arising and emptiness, have become instantly enlightened without the need of further explanation from any master. So, for all living beings in the future, the Buddha left his footprint in this world for us to remember him by.

When we study the scriptures on emptiness, we will probably all have the same feeling. We haven't had the great fortune to meet the Buddha in person, but we can still feel joyous and gratified that in this lifetime, we have been able to receive his teachings, and in particular, those of dependent arising and emptiness. So we should be truly grateful that the Dharma still exists in the world and that we are now able to receive these great teachings and generate faith in the Buddha and the Dharma. For this, we should all be grateful and never forget the compassionate kindness of the Buddha.

D3. Recollect the Joyfulness that the Buddha Had Taught the Teaching of Dependent Origination

Verse 44~45

*Here too, as I reflect on your words, I think,
“Blazing with the glory of noble marks
And hallowed in a net of light rays,
This teacher, in a voice of pristine melody,
Spoke thus in such a way.”
The instant such a reflection of the Sage’s form
Appears in my mind it soothes me,
Just as the moon-rays heal fever’s pains.*

*And so, for this, when I think of your statements, I think of (you,) that Teacher,
radiant with the glory of the physical signs and exemplary features, surrounded
completely by an aura of light,*

*And, in that manner, proclaiming these (teachings) with your Brahma-like voice.
The mere arising in my mind of the image of your physical form, O Sage, is a medicine
like moonlight for the torment of my fever.*

a. Visualize the scene of the Buddha teaching the Dharma

Lama Tsongkhapa visualizes the scene of Buddha Shakyamuni teaching the Dharma at Vulture Peak in India. In order to emphasize the precious value of Prajnaparamita, Buddha Shakyamuni himself prepares the Dharma throne, and then expounds the teaching on emptiness to countless living beings. During the teaching, the Buddha is radiant with the glory of the noble marks and is completely surrounded by an aura of light. His voice is a pristine melody, endowed with the sixty-four aspects of Brahma³. Just from hearing this voice, numerous living beings are able to achieve liberation from the ocean of samsara. This is how the Buddha inculcated his disciples. When this scene appears clearly in Lama Tsongkhapa’s mind, his sadness and pain are completely wiped out, and it is as if in his mind, clear and cool moonlight arises, dispelling his fever pains and bringing coolness and joy. As followers, we should also visualize the glorious scene when the Buddha was turning the wheel of the Dharma.

Lama Tsongkhapa manifested sadness for not having received the profound teaching from the Buddha himself. Yet he found it a relief to receive such teachings from the lineage masters, and as a result was able to attain full enlightenment. Indeed, achieving such enlightenment is not different from having seen the Buddha himself, because in the latter case, the Buddha also had to use his teaching to guide his followers to realize the nature of all phenomena.

Throughout history, many other great masters had similar experiences, and would meet the Buddha in their pure visions. As an example, in Han Buddhism, Master Chih-che, once saw the Dharma assembly at Vulture Peak in his own vision. Having entered into a profound meditative state, he perceived Buddha Shakyamuni was teaching *The*

³ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Sixty_aspects_of_the_melodious_speech_of_a_buddha

Lotus Sutra, so he said, “The assembly at Vulture Peak is still going on!”

Initially Master Chih-che relied on a Zen Master named Hui-si, who told him that in a previous life, they had studied together at the feet of the Buddha, and that he should dedicate himself to the study of *The Lotus Sutra*. So Master Chih-che kept studying this sutra, until one day during his chanting, the moment he chanted the sentence that appears in the chapter of Bodhisattva Bhairava⁴, “This is the true perseverance. This is called the true Dharma offering to the Tathagata”, he attained full enlightenment. Meanwhile, he perceived the whole scene as if he were listening to the teachings while in the presence of the Buddha himself. He later founded the Tiantai School, and used different approaches to lead his students to recognize the nature of mind, in a manner that was similar to the symbol lineage of the Great Perfection.

b. Repay the great kindness of the Buddha

In the past, when great masters, such as Chak Lotsawa⁵, went to India, they would not climb the mountain but rather would stay at its foot, in order to better visualize how the Buddha taught Prajnaparamita at that place, and to reflect on his great kindness. As followers of the Buddha, we should always be thinking about how we can repay the Buddha’s kindness. As *The Shurangama Sutra*⁶ says, “Offer up the body and mind to the myriad Buddha-lands and thus endeavor to repay the Buddha’s boundless grace.” If we could contemplate and practice the Dharma with persistence, and devote ourselves to spreading the Dharma by offering our bodies and minds to sentient beings in innumerable realms, we will indeed be repaying the Buddha’s kindness.

Each time that we receive the Dharma teachings, we should think that if in the past we had attended the teaching given by the previous lineage masters, Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, we would by now have achieved a high level of accomplishment. Or maybe, it is because we were there in previous lives, that in this life we have the opportunity to receive the Dharma. Indeed, there are many textual references stating that it must have been the offerings that we made to numerous Buddhas in our past lives that has led to our having encountered this teaching in this life. Therefore, we should be filled with gratitude and recognize that by merely listening to the Dharma in this life, we will accumulate great merits. In the *Essence of Clear Light*⁷, Mipham Rinpoche has said that even if one hasn’t the least understanding of its profound meaning, just hearing the verses or seeing the texts is enough, in itself, to generate great merits.

Some people have a deep karmic link with Prajnaparamita, and thus they have realized the meaning of emptiness in a very short time and possess the wisdom that is neither reversible nor deprivable. For others, without having achieved this deep sense of

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lotus_Sutra

⁵ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Chak_Lotsawa_Chöjé_Pal

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%9A%C5%ABra%E1%B9%85gama_S%C5%ABtra

⁷ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Essence_of_Clear_Light

realization, with the blessing of the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas, as well as because of their own merits, they will also arouse great joy when receiving the teaching of emptiness. For some, even if they do not generate a joyful attitude at the sound of these words, just listening to the teaching, even if only for one time, can bring great benefit to them, because in that moment, the seed of emptiness has been planted in their mind. Regardless of what our experience is, we should appreciate how powerful the blessing of Prajnaparamita is and have faith in it.

C2. The Author Exhorts All Beings to Recollect the Buddha

D1. Exhortation to Seek the Profound Teaching of Dependent Origination

E1. One Should Rely on the Writings of the Learned

F1. One Should Not Rely on the Words of the Unlearned

Verse 46

*This excellent system, most marvelous,
Some individuals who are not so learned
Have entangled it in utter confusion,
Just like the tangled balbaza grass.*

Although this excellent system of yours is so wondrous, yet unlearned people have made contentions over so many points, like tangled vines.

This excellent system, which imparts the knowledge of dependent arising and emptiness, is one of Buddhism's truly marvelous and most perfect teachings. Unfortunately, many people have become confused and misled by wrong views and ignorance, and this has prevented them from following the right path of spiritual practice. In their utter confusion, they are unable to maintain their concentration and their thoughts are in such a mess that they can be only compared to tangled balbaza grass. Therefore, not only have they misunderstood the wonderful teaching of dependent arising, but in their arrogance, they have also misinterpreted the ultimate meaning of the profound wisdom of emptiness. Lama Tsongkhapa warns us not to follow people such as these.

There are some who have stated that during Lama Tsongkhapa's time, there were a certain number of Tibetan commentators who had failed to properly comprehend the ultimate meaning of dependent arising and emptiness, and that in this verse, Lama Tsongkhapa is warning his disciples not to subscribe to the mistaken point of view expressed in these poorly informed commentaries. This is an alternative explanation that is also fine, since this verse has a broad meaning.

Certainly, if Buddhist scholars and teachers had any real concerns regarding these teachings, we would not stick to them so stubbornly nor would we use all possible means to preserve and safeguard them. If we had any real doubts, or if we were faced with a greater truth that contradicted what we had believed to be true, we would quickly admit

our error, because we believe that everyone should approach the truth in an objective, unbiased and logical manner.

In this modern age, people have so many discriminating thoughts, some of which may call upon so-called “scientific theory” to refute basic tenets of Buddhist philosophy. Yet, regardless of whether it is being examined and analyzed from a macro or a micro perspective, Buddhist philosophy has shown its overall superiority and has consistently and effectively conveyed the advantages that it offers to those who choose to align their lives in accordance with it. As Buddhists, we should examine different ideas through rigorous reasoning and debate. By doing so, we will not only be able to develop a strong and solid faith in the Buddha, but also, by having been so attentive to our own process of observation, we can help others to develop the right attitude towards Buddhist philosophy. This is very meaningful.

F2. One Should Follow the Teachings of the Learned

Verse 47

*Seeing this situation, I strove
With a multitude of efforts
To follow after the learned ones
And sought your intention again and again.*

Seeing this manner (of theirs), I have followed with a great deal of effort (only) the learned and thereby have repeatedly sought your intended meaning.

Lama Tsongkhapa saw that in Tibet many people had founded their own religious sects and were spreading perverted views based on their own opinions. For this reason, he told those that would listen, that one should never seek the truth from such ignorant people, but should maintain caution and follow such great masters as the Six Ornaments⁸, giving themselves whole-heartedly to the wonderful teachings of these enlightened beings. As a matter of fact, Lama Tsongkhapa has many great teachers himself, and some of them were able speak to Manjushri, face to face, because of the purity of their spiritual vision.

History has recorded that because there were not many great masters near to his hometown, Lama Tsongkhapa left his home and family to seek the Dharma elsewhere. After he had been away for many years, he received a letter from his mother, in which she had included a lock of her hair. The realization that he had been away from his home for so long that his mother’s hair had turned grey came upon him suddenly, and his heart was heavy with thoughts of how much he missed her.

Lama Tsongkhapa sought the intention of the Buddha again and again, until eventually he was able to realize the Buddha’s ultimate meaning through the teachings of

⁸ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Six_Ornaments

Nagarjuna and Buddhapalita. As followers of the Buddha, we must constantly be wary of our own arrogance and sincerely rely on a qualified teacher who holds the right view of the Middle Way. If we try to rely only on our own abilities, it will be too difficult for us to understand the Buddha's ultimate teachings, and by not having followed the guidance of the learned ones, we will be left with our mind and thoughts as chaotic and confused as a tangled ball of balbaza grass.

E2. Other Doctrines Cannot Dispel Doubts

Verse 48

*At such times as I studied the numerous works
Of both our own [Middle Way] and other schools,
My mind became tormented ever more
Constantly by a network of doubts.*

At that time, when I studied the many various texts of the systems of our own and others' tenets, my mind was completely tormented by a web of one doubt after the next.

In the manifestation of Lama Tsongkhapa, during the course of his study, he became extremely dissatisfied after having read the works of both Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools that did not fully accept emptiness. Thus he felt overcome by a great sadness and his mind was in a state of constant torment. It was as if he had been caught in a web of doubt that had been caused by reading their various theories and philosophical treatises.

The same situation can also happen to us. When we read different kinds of books during our study, we can easily get confused by all of the various points of view and soon we cannot tell which view is the right one. When this happens, we can become so entrapped in doubts and confusion that we can hardly find the right way out. Therefore, it is a necessity that we limit our choice of reading material to only the most essential Buddhist texts that are necessary for our study and practice. Otherwise, it is possible that we can become so tormented that our lives become an endless cycle of suffering as we wander from one doubt to the next. That is why, regarding the Middle Way, it will be of great benefit for us to complete the study of its three major treatises, which are *The Root Stanzas of the Middle Way*, *Introduction to the Middle Way*, and *Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way*. If we can come to understand these three texts, we can fully grasp the ultimate meaning of emptiness.

E3. Illuminating the Meaning of Dependent Origination Should Depend on the Treatises of Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti

Verse 49~50

*The night-lily grove of Nagarjuna's treatises –
Nagarjuna whom you prophesized*

*Would unravel your unexcelled vehicle as it is,
Shunning extremes of existence and non-existence –*

*Illuminated by the garland of white lights
Of Candra's well-uttered insights –
Candra, whose stainless wisdom orb is full,
Who glides freely across scriptures' space,*

But, my mind found relief from its exhaustion when, through the kindness of my gurus, I beheld the garden of moonflowers of the textual tradition of Nagarjuna – whom you prophesied would comment correctly upon the ways of your unsurpassable vehicle, getting rid of the extremes of existence and nonexistence – illumined by the array of white light of the excellent explanations of the Glorious Moon, Chandrakirti – the full orb of whose stainless understanding passes without hindrance through the sky of the scriptural pronouncements, dispelling the darkness of the heart of grasping for extremes and outshining the constellations of the speakers of distorted (views).

a. The excellent teaching of Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti

This verse explains by means of metaphors that the Buddha prophesied that the teachings of the unsurpassable Mahayana vehicle, which is free from the extremes of existence and non-existence, would be perfectly unraveled by Nagarjuna whose textual tradition is likened to a night-lily grove. What then can cause these night-lilies to fully bloom? It is Chandrakirti's excellent explanations, which are like the Glorious Moon that illuminates these teachings by its array of white light. The name Chandra, in Sanskrit, means the moon, and his stainless wisdom orb unravels the teachings of Nagarjuna. In other words, Nagarjuna, in his treatises, has most excellently explained the Buddha's ultimate teaching on emptiness, and Chandrakirti has fully expounded them.

The well-uttered insights of Chandrakirti are described as the full moon, which is free to glide unrestrainedly across open space, meaning that the stainless wisdom orb of Chandrakirti is able to glide freely across the scriptures' space with no one being able to stop him. Chandrakirti's great wisdom dispels the darkness of the extremes of existence and non-existence, and outshines the constellations of all false speakers.

This description indicates that the well-spoken teaching of Chandrakirti has four features. First, it explains Nagarjuna's textual tradition. Second, it explains the ultimate truth in accordance with the Buddha's intention. Third, it shuns the extremes, and fourth, it overwhelms all wrong views. So, the brilliant lights of Chandrakirti's wisdom have illuminated the entire world. What Lama Tsongkhapa yearned for was the Buddha's ultimate intention, which can be attained by following the teachings of Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti.

b. The Buddha's prophesy to Nagarjuna

In the *Lankavatara Sutra* the Buddha prophesied to Nagarajuna,
In the south, in the area of Vidarbha,

*Will be a monk known widely as Shriman.
Who will also be called Naga.
Destroying the extreme positions of inherent existence and conventional
nonexistence.*

The Buddha also indicated,

*He will thoroughly teach to the world
The unsurpassed Great Vehicle—my vehicle.
Having done this, he will achieve the Very Joyful ground
And then go to the Blissful Pure Land upon passing away.*

The *Mahamaya Sutra* also contains a prophesy that, 700 years after the Buddha entered pairnirvana, a Bhikshu would be born who would be named Nagarjuna, and who would excel at explaining the profound Dharma, pull down the canopy of wrong views and light the torch of the authentic Dharma. According to this scripture, Nagarjuna was, in fact, the one who dismantled the canopy of wrong views and lit the torch of the sublime Dharma.

Therefore, in Chapter 6 of Chandrakirti's *Introduction to the Middle Way*, it is said,

*One who grasped profound and ultimate reality,
Through force of reasoning and by the light of scripture,
Was the Noble Nagarjuna; and following his tradition,
As this still exists, I will proceed to speak.*

As followers of the Buddha, we should by all means dispel our wrong views and realize the ultimate meaning of dependent arising and emptiness conveyed by Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti. This is of great importance.

E4. One Should Rely on Qualified Teachers Who Can Expound These Treatises

Verse 51

*Who dispels the darkness of extremist hearts
And outshines the constellations of false speakers –
When, through my teacher's kindness, I saw this
My mind found rest at last.*

Lama Tsongkhapa said that through the kindness of his root gurus, he realized the true meaning of dependent arising and emptiness imparted by Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti. At that moment, his mind found rest, and abided in a joyful and peaceful state. As Shantideva said in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*,

*When real and nonreal both
Are absent from before the mind,
Nothing else remains for mind to do
But rest in perfect peace, from concepts free.*

It is a state of the non-duality of luminosity and bliss, or the non-duality of

emptiness and bliss, which can be attained through one's own aspiration, and with the help of the blessings from various gurus, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. With the coming together of all of these proper causes and conditions, everyone can achieve such realization.

Generally speaking, there are two ways to achieve the realization of dependent arising and emptiness. One way is to follow the logical reasoning described in the texts of the Middle Way, and use analytical intelligence to infer the true reality of everything. In this way, one will eventually find that nothing possesses an intrinsic nature, and that intrinsic nature is a quality that exists only in our conceptual thoughts. The other way is to engage in the preliminary practices and pray for the blessings from the lineage gurus. Following this path, a disciple can recognize the nature of mind when a guru, who has a deep karmic link to this disciple, directly points it out.

Regardless of which method one follows, the truth that is realized is the same, it is that of the inseparable union of dependent arising and emptiness. Therefore, the ultimate intention of all buddhas and bodhisattvas, as well as all the great masters in India, Tibet and the Han area is the same. Once this truth is realized, this person is free of suffering or attachment, and all of his activities will be dedicated to the benefit of all living beings.

D2. Remember the Buddha through His Teaching of Dependent Origination

Verse 52

*Of all your deeds, your speech is supreme;
Within that too it is this very speech;
So the wise should remember the Buddha
Through this [teaching of dependent origination].*

*Of all your enlightening deeds, the deeds of your enlightening speech are supreme.
Because that indeed is (in reference to) this very (teaching), learned ones, be continually
mindful of Buddha from this!*

- a. The deeds of the Buddha's enlightening speech

In *The Sutra of the Great Assembly*, it mentions that all Buddhas are born with the ability to perform four kinds of deeds to benefit sentient beings. They are: 1) the deeds of the body, which refers to the Buddha's ability to benefit sentient beings through manifesting his solemn and luminous appearance; 2) the deeds of magical power, which refers to the Buddha's ability to benefit sentient beings through the use of magical powers; 3) the deeds of the Buddha's names, which refers to the Buddha's ability to benefit sentient beings through letting them remember or call out his various titles or names. The sutras state that it is possible for one to achieve liberation simply through the hearing of the name of Buddha Shakyamuni; 4) the deeds of teaching the dharma by speech, which refers to the Buddha's ability to benefit sentient beings through turning the dharma wheel.

Among all the deeds that can benefit sentient beings, the deeds of speech are the most supreme. The deed of the body and the deed of magical power can only be done while the Buddha is alive. The Buddha passed into parinirvana after living in this world for eighty-one years; therefore, bringing benefit to sentient beings through the body or through the use of magical power could not have lasted any longer than that. The speech of the Buddha, on the other hand, has been recorded by the learned in the Tripitaka, which covers all the teachings of the Three Vehicles including the Tantrayana, and has thus been passed forward to present times. It is through these words of the Buddha that followers in later generations have been able to attain liberation. While Shakyamuni Buddha was alive, the deed of speech was expressed most often through the direct teachings that he gave to benefit sentient beings.

b. The speech of dependent origination is the most supreme among all

The Buddha is said to have taught the Dharma for 49 years. According to the Tiantai School, Shakyamuni Buddha's teaching life can be divided into five stages, which Master Zhiyuan of Tiantai School⁹ has summarized in this short verse: In the first twenty-one days after enlightenment, the Buddha taught the *Flower Adornment Sutra*; then for the next twelve years he taught the *Agamas*¹⁰; during the third stage, he taught *Extensive Discourse*¹¹ for eight years; and during the fourth stage, he taught the *Prajnaparamita Sutras* for twenty-two years; in the final eight years before entering into parinirvana, he taught the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Nirvana Sutra*. This makes it clear that the Buddha spent the majority of his teaching time on Prajnaparamita, the essence of which is the teaching of dependent origination and emptiness.

Dependent origination can be classified as belonging to two categories, the relative and the ultimate. Dependent origination, in the ultimate sense, is related to the ultimate truth of the universe, which has been explained clearly in *the Root Stanzas of the Middle Way*. Relative dependent origination, in contrast, is more related to worldly truth, which is the law of cause and effect. These two types of dependent origination cover all secular knowledge, and moreover, expound upon the reality of all worldly phenomena. With a thorough understanding of dependent origination, the reality of all phenomena can be utterly realized, leaving one in a state that is similar to standing on a mountain peak, wherein everything can be beheld in a single glance. It is for this reason that it is said that the teaching of emptiness and dependent origination is the best among all of the Buddha's teachings, as through its understanding, all wrong views and fallacies can be destroyed.

c. How to remember the Buddha

⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiantai>

¹⁰ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Āgama_\(Buddhism\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Āgama_(Buddhism))

¹¹ <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198605607.001.0001/acref-9780198605607-e-1958>

Here, we are reminded that remembering the Buddha doesn't mean to recall him by gazing at Buddha statues or other images, nor does it mean to remember him by thinking of his magical powers. Rather, it is because of the teaching of dependent origination that we should remember the Buddha.

When we thoroughly comprehend the truth of dependent origination, we will forever hold in our hearts, the Buddha's kindness. No one else in this world, including the greatest scholars of all of history, has had the wisdom and clarity to discover such a profound truth on their own. Only the Buddha had the unparalleled wisdom to realize the truth of dependent origination that subverts all wrong views. The wise will develop this conviction by learning the Buddha's teachings, just as Lama Tsongkhapa and Mipham Rinpoche did.

In *Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way*, it is said that, "there is nothing on earth, that does not amaze the wise." Indeed, seeing the truth of dependent origination and emptiness, the wise will be amazed at two points: 1) all seemingly existent phenomena are empty in nature when examined by the reasoning of the Middle Way; 2) sentient beings, in their ignorance, are so attached to the phenomenal world that they do not realize that it does not truly exist.

Through reading the scriptures in the Tripitaka, regardless of whether it is the *Flower Adornment Sutra*, *The Sutra of the Heap of Jewels*, the Vinaya or the tantric scriptures, a person of wisdom will naturally develop confidence in the Buddha and will gradually become more and more aware of the Buddha's unparalleled wisdom. It would be great if everyone would try to calm down, find some time to study the Buddhist texts and develop a logical and unbiased understanding of Buddhism.

B5. Summary

Verse 53

*Following such a teacher and having become a renunciate,
Having studied the Conqueror's words not too poorly,
This monk who strives in the yogic practices,
Such is [the depth of] his reverence to the great Seer!*

In the footsteps of (you,) this Teacher, I became a monastic, and my study of (your) statements, Triumphant One, has not been poor. As a monk who makes effort in the actions of a yogi, I pay respect like this to (you,) that Great Seer.

- a. Lama Tsongkhapa's intelligence in knowledge and diligence in practice

According to Lama Tsongkhapa's biography, following in the footsteps of Shakyamuni Buddha, he received the novice ordination at the age of seven. By diligently studying Buddhist teachings from that point on, Lama Tsongkhapa became proficient in all Buddhist teachings and even from a very young age was able to teach them to others.

It is for this reason that Lama Tsongkhapa says he has “studied the Conqueror’s words not too poorly”. In actuality, Lama Tsongkhapa is claimed by many in Tibet to be an emanation of Manjushri, and as such, is considered to be a great master endowed with profound wisdom.

Once, while Lama Tsongkhapa was talking with some disciples, one of them asked him who was the wisest and most extraordinary Dharma teacher in all of Tibet. Lama Tsongkhapa answered that there had been a great master called *Wisdom Lion*, who was able to open eleven different Buddhist courses at the same time and teach eleven classes every day. Hearing this, the disciples all praised this master’s ability and sincerely requested Lama Tsongkhapa to teach extensively in the same way, to which he agreed.

Later, during a Dharma Assembly, Lama Tsongkhapa announced that he was going to teach fifteen different Buddhist scriptures at the same time. During the period that this was taking place and after having finished teaching two smaller scriptures, Lama Tsongkhapa added two more, so that in the end, he ended up teaching a total of seventeen scriptures. These included Five Treatises of Maitreya¹², five treatises of the Middle Way, *Commentary on Valid Cognition*, *Compendium of Abhidharma*¹³, *Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way*, *Introduction to the Middle Way*, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, *Treasury of Abhidharma*¹⁴ and a text of Vinaya. Sometime later, Lama Tsongkhapa was able to teach twenty-one texts at the same time. This ability to teach so many courses simultaneously, gives us some idea of the profound wisdom of Lama Tsongkhapa.

As a renounced monk, Lama Tsongkhapa was not only diligent in studying the teachings, but also practiced various kinds of yoga in accordance with the Sutrayana and Tantrayana teachings.

It was with tremendous joy and great devotion to Shakyamuni Buddha, that he composed the poem of *In Praise of Dependent Origination* as an offering to the Buddha.

b. How can we learn from Lama Tsongkhapa

This verse also reminds followers to act in accordance with the teachings in *Treasury of Abhidharma*. First, if we have the opportunity to become a monastic, we should do so; if not, we should keep at least one of the five precepts that have been laid out for lay people to follow. Next, we should, as Lama Tsongkhapa did, study Buddhist teachings extensively and diligently. Third, we need to actually practice what we have learned, otherwise, the Buddha’s teachings will never penetrate into our minds and bring us benefit. In summary, we should keep pure precepts, and at the same time study, contemplate and meditate on the Buddhadharma.

It is only because of Shakyamuni Buddha that we are able to learn which precepts

¹² http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Five_Treatises_of_Maitreya

¹³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abhidharma-samuccaya>

¹⁴ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Treasury_of_Abhidharma

to adopt and what authentic Dharma to study and practice. Thus, we should remember the Buddha's kindness and always be grateful to him. If, for one reason or another, we are unable to do much to requite the Buddha's kindness, we can, at least, frequently recite *The Sutra of The Recollection of the Noble Three Jewels*¹⁵; remember the Buddha's kindness when you get up in the morning and recite the names or mantras of the Buddha before going to sleep in the evening. A good practitioner will pray to the Buddha at any time and in any situation; whereas, a lazy practitioner would not recall the Buddha's kindness even while in solitary retreat.

In summary, there is much that we can and should learn from Lama Tsongkhapa, particularly as regards upholding pure precepts, and studying, contemplating and meditating on the Buddhadharma throughout our lives. This is also the systematic method of following the Buddha that is pointed out by His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche in *The Heart Essence: My Heart's Advice*¹⁶.

c. How can we benefit sentient beings

One of the best ways to return the Buddha's kindness is to act to bring benefit to sentient beings. If we can bring benefit to even one sentient being, directly or indirectly, it is worth doing. If we don't have the capability or the opportunity to do so at present, we can aspire to act in accordance with the Bodhisattva vows and to never be apart from Bodhicitta. This is, in itself, a dharma offering to all Buddhas of the ten directions and is actually the cause of benefiting sentient beings in the future. Therefore, one can make an aspiration, by repeating the words found in *The King of Aspiration Prayers: Samantabhadra's "Aspiration to Good Actions"*¹⁷,

*Taming my mind, and striving in the present,
I will never forget bodhicitta;
May all my harmful actions and the obscurations they cause
Be completely purified, every single one!*

Longchenpa said, in *Finding Comfort and Ease in Meditation*¹⁸, that a bird not fully grown is not able to fly high into the sky. Likewise, it is hard for fledgling practitioners with little ability to actually be of benefit to others. However, if they make aspirations and call upon the powers of Bodhicitta, their wishes to benefit all beings may come true. Some elderly people, though not well educated, will pray with good aspirations whenever they're turning the prayer wheels, or as they are about to set out on a pilgrimage to the holy mountains or to meet one of the great masters. If we can also dedicate the merits accumulated from any good deeds, for the benefit of all sentient beings, even this simple act of dedication can be very meaningful. There are people that

¹⁵ <https://www.nalandatranslation.org/offerings/notes-on-the-daily-chants/commentaries/the-sutra-of-the-recollection-of-the-noble-three-jewels/>

¹⁶ <http://www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/khenpo-jigme-phuntsok/drops-advice-my-heart>

¹⁷ <http://www.lotsawahouse.org/words-of-the-buddha/samantabhadra-aspiration-good-actions>

¹⁸ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Finding Comfort and Ease in Meditation>

pray to the Three Jewels for wealth, longevity, good children, a peaceful life and so on; although it is possible for secular wishes like these to be fulfilled by the blessing of the Three Jewels, the benefit is, at best, only temporary. Therefore, we should try to abandon shortsighted wishes such as these and make an aspiration to uphold the Dharma and to benefit sentient beings.

Though difficulties may exist during the process of spreading the dharma, if we can strengthen our motivation, things will become easier to accomplish. These days, there are many Buddhist practitioners who are quite confused and uncertain as to the best way to make progress along the path. Comparatively speaking, many of us have been following qualified teachers and through constant study, contemplation and meditation, are now able to fully comprehend the profound teachings of Mahayana Buddhism. Therefore, if we can help even one person around us to make the slightest progress on the spiritual path, we're actually taking on the responsibility of spreading the Dharma and benefiting beings.

A3. Ending

B1. Aspiration and Dedication

C1. Dedicate the Merits for All Beings to Be Sustained by Qualified Spiritual Masters

Verse 54

*Since it is due to my teacher's kindness
I have met with the teaching of the unexcelled teacher,
I dedicate this virtue too towards the cause
For all beings to be sustained by sublime spiritual mentors.*

To have met like this with the teachings of (you,) the Unsurpassable Teacher, is due to the kindness of my gurus. Thus, I dedicate this constructive force as a cause for all wandering beings, barring none, to be upheld by hallowed spiritual masters.

Here, Lama Tsongkhapa says that due to his teacher's kindness, he has met with the supreme Mahayana teachings of the unexcelled teacher, Shakyamuni Buddha. Without the kindness and blessing of our teachers, we may not have enough merit to meet such precious Mahayana teachings; and even if we have met such teachings, without our teachers, we may not be able to fully comprehend the meaning of dependent origination and emptiness. Therefore, Lama Tsongkhapa dedicates the virtue of his actions, "towards the cause for all beings to be sustained by sublime spiritual mentors" rather than towards the cause for all beings to become wealthy, healthy and happy. Likewise, we should emulate Lama Tsongkhapa in dedicating our merits of teaching or studying this poem and the merits of studying, contemplating and meditating on the Buddhadharma in general, for all beings to be sustained by qualified spiritual masters.

This verse reminds us of the importance of meeting with qualified spiritual

teachers. For any being, especially beings in this degenerate age, it is only through the guidance of spiritual teachers who know all kinds of expedient means that one can step onto the path of liberation. People with power or wealth may bestow status or money upon us, but all these things are temporary and won't lead us to ultimate liberation.

Being sustained by qualified spiritual masters will bring us a lot of merits. In the chapter *Entry into the Realm of Reality* of *The Flower Ornament Sutra*, it says "Sustained by spiritual benefactors, enlightening beings¹⁹ do not fall into bad ways; supported by spiritual benefactors, enlightening beings do not fall away from the Great Vehicle; minded by spiritual benefactors, enlightening beings do not overstep the precepts of enlightening beings..." It is said in a great Gelug master's writing called *The Jewel Garland from a Mountain Hermitage*, that, as it is a rare chance to meet with sublime spiritual teachers, once one has found a teacher, they should stay as close to them as a child who tightly grasps onto his or her mother's clothing. Otherwise, without the guidance of a spiritual teacher, one may get lost on the path to liberation. His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche says that it is a sign of being possessed by Mara for a student to want to leave their teacher.

Therefore, everyone should make an aspiration to be sustained by a qualified spiritual teacher and to always have the opportunity to receive teachings directly from them. Our aspiration can follow the words found in *The King of Aspiration Prayers*,

*May I always meet spiritual friends
Who long to be of true help to me,
And who teach me the Good Actions;
Never will I disappoint them!*²⁰

Why is it so extremely important to be sustained by sublime spiritual teachers? It is because they can bring positive influence on our mentality and behavior. Where there are qualified spiritual teachers, the Buddhadharma will flourish and the knowledge that sentient beings require to attain liberation is easy to find. On the other hand, if there are unqualified spiritual teachers who preach wrong or mistaken views, it is likely that many people will be negatively influenced by them and will then fall into the Hell Realm, for who knows how many lifetimes. For this reason, we should always pray for all sentient beings to be sustained by qualified spiritual teachers. Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche has said that, for himself, though he hasn't made any great contribution to Buddhism, he has a sincere and irreversible faith in the Buddha and feels joyful to be learning the Buddhist teachings. He owes all this to his guru, saying that, "I know that this is all due to His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche and I am truly grateful for his guidance."

C2. Dedicate the Merits for the World to Be Filled With Those Who Find Conviction in the Dharma

¹⁹ *Enlightening beings* refers to *bodhisattvas*, those who have generated the mind of bodhicitta

²⁰ <http://www.lotsawahouse.org/words-of-the-buddha/samantabhadra-aspiration-good-actions>

Verse 55

*May the teaching of this Beneficent One till world's end
Be unshaken by the winds of evil thoughts;
May it always be filled with those who find conviction
In the teacher by understanding the teaching's true nature.*

Till the end of existence, may the teachings, as well, of (you,) that Benefactor, remain unshaken by the winds of misconception. And may they always be filled with those who have found confident belief in (you), their Teacher, by having understood this manner of (your) teachings.

a. Two key points of dedication

First, Lama Tsongkhapa dedicates the merits to the teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha, and wish for it to exist until the world's end and never be shaken by wrong views or evil thoughts. These days, there are people who, though they know nothing about Buddhism, claim that they are true Buddhists, great Dharma masters or reincarnated lamas. They advocate wrong views but claim that they are promoting Buddhism, while, in fact, they are exerting a negative influence on Buddhism. Therefore, we should pray for the true Buddhadharma, that it will not be shaken by wrong views such as these.

Moreover, Lama Tsongkhapa aspires that all beings may understand the true meaning of the profound Dharma, and generate genuine faith in the Buddha. There are many people who seem to believe in Buddhism, but have little understanding of Buddhist principles or Buddhist philosophy. It seems that they suffer from a kind of blindness, as they can neither differentiate Avalokitesvara from worldly deities, nor can they differentiate the Buddha from the gods of other religions. There are even some so-called great masters who, in spite of the fact that they may have a great number of disciples, will bring no benefit to either the disciples or themselves, because they do not even know the wisdom and realization level of the Buddha, or the merits of the Buddhadharma. Therefore, it's important not to have a blind faith in Buddhism, but rather to develop a faith that is logical and based on reason and understanding.

Liang Qichao²¹, a famous scholar in the Qing Dynasty, said: "Buddhism is a rational faith rather than a superstition. It believes in universal goodness rather than individual goodness. Buddhism is more engaged rather than seclusive." Indeed, Liang has comprehended the true essence of Buddhism. It is not as some people think, that it is only those who can't be successful in a secular society that would choose to live in the seclusion of the mountains as monastics. It is, in fact, a choice of the wise.

b. The current situation and how can we change

Indeed, Buddhists should always seek to improve themselves. These days, there are

²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liang_Qichao

many so-called Buddhists that have only what can be called a blind faith in Buddhism. This situation must change and the quality of Buddhist practice improved in such a way that the number of Buddhists with faith that is based on rationality, and wisdom that is based on valid knowledge, is increased.

During the Tang Dynasty, the Emperors not only praised Buddhism, but were Buddhists themselves. In that period of history, the ruling powers established many translation bureaus, and many famous translators, such as Xuanzang²², Yijing²³ and Amoghavajra²⁴, came forward and made important contributions to the Buddhist philosophy in the history. It was also the time when many of the patriarchs of the eight schools of Chinese Buddhism were born into the world, including Master Xuanzang of the Dharma Characteristics' school, Master Huineng²⁵ of the Zen school, Master Jizang²⁶ of the Three-Treatise school, Master Shandao²⁷ of the Pure Land school, Master Daoxuan²⁸ of the Vinaya school and Master Subhakarasiṃha²⁹ of Esoteric Buddhism. It was a period during which Buddhism flourished and Buddhist study, contemplation and meditation on the Buddhadharma was widespread. The fact that we in the modern era are able to study the complete and authentic Buddhadharma, including the Dharma of transmission and the Dharma of realization, is because the patriarchs of each of these schools, who transmitted the Dharma to us, were not driven by blind faith, but had a true understanding of the teachings. Therefore, Lama Tsongkhapa's aspiration was that the world would become filled with Buddhists who had true conviction in the Buddha's teachings, and that those others, who spread wrong views in the name of Buddhism, would cease to exist in the world.

Nowadays, in both Tibet and the Han region, it is not easy to find genuine Buddhist practitioners. This is due, in part, to the bad karma of sentient beings in general, along with various other causes and conditions. If we are able to set up Dharma centers or in any other way, help to spread the Buddhadharma, we should do our best to provide both monastics and lay people with the opportunity to study the Buddhist teachings. If people are able to truly comprehend the Buddha's teachings, their conduct, as well as their state of mind, will change in a positive way, thus, it is important to make an aspiration for this to happen; reciting Lama Tsongkhapa's five verses for dedication is one relatively easy method to make this aspiration.

c. What is real Buddhism?

²² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xuanzang>

²³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yijing_\(monk\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yijing_(monk))

²⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amoghavajra>

²⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huineng>

²⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jizang>

²⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shandao>

²⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D%C3%A0oxu%C4%81n>

²⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%9Aubhakarasi%E1%B9%83ha>

During the reign of King Songtsen Gampo³⁰ and King Trisong Detsen³¹, Buddhism was thriving in Tibet, and was in many ways experiencing the same kind of prosperity that Buddhism enjoyed during the Tang Dynasty in the Han region. When we mention the flourishing of Buddhism during those periods of history, it is not a reference to the splendid temples that were built during those time periods, as in spite of the magnificent appearance of these structures they do not actually represent anything meaningful about Buddhism.

It is true that these magnificent Buddhist buildings help create favorable conditions for promoting Buddhism, as well as support for the practice of genuine Buddhist followers, however, although the construction of a sutra hall is a good way to accumulate merit, in the end, it is nothing more than a concrete building. What matters most is that the existence of such a building offers people the opportunity to develop rational faith and right views, which, in truth, convey the meaning of Buddhism far better than any architectural achievement. By establishing right view, people will perform virtuous actions that will bring them long-term happiness and joy. With this in mind, we should seek to develop the right understanding that contributes to a rational faith in Buddhism.

C3. Dedicate the Merits for Having the Courage to Sacrifice Life to Uphold the Dharma in All Lifetimes without Slacking Off

Verse 56

*May I never falter even for an instant
To uphold the excellent way of the Sage,
Which illuminates the principle of dependent origination,
Through all my births even giving away my body and life.*

In all my lifetimes, may I uphold, even at the cost of my body or life, this excellent system of (you,) the Sage, which clarifies reality in terms of dependent arising, and never loosen (my hold), for even a mere instant.

a. The importance of upholding the Dharma

Lama Tsongkhapa aspires to uphold the authentic Dharma through all his lives and disseminate the profound teaching of dependent origination, and to even sacrifice his life, if necessary, to uphold, propagate and practice the precious teachings, without allowing himself to become slack, sluggish or lazy for even an instant. Thus, every one of us should also aspire in this way at every moment throughout all of our present and future lives. As Buddhist followers, we should not waste time, aspiring towards smooth-skinned hands or long and shiny hair in our future lives. The most important aspiration is to meet the authentic Dharma and uphold and propagate the Buddhadharma, which is so precious that it is worth even sacrificing our lives to protect it, just as Shakyamuni Buddha did in

³⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Songtsen_Gampo

³¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trisong_Detsen

his causal stage.

In the sutra of *The Lion's Roar of Queen Srimala*³², Queen Srimala made three great aspirations that we should always bear in mind. The three great aspirations that Queen Srimala made in the presence of the Buddha are:

“Lord, by this blessing of truth and by the virtuous root consisting of accumulated merit from bringing benefit to innumerable sentient beings, may I comprehend the Illustrious Doctrine in all my lives.

Lord, having obtained the comprehension of the Illustrious Doctrine, may I teach the Doctrine to the sentient beings without rest or weariness. This is my second great aspiration.

Lord, while teaching the Illustrious Doctrine, then, without regard to my body, life force, or possessions, may I seek to protect and to uphold the Illustrious Doctrine. This is my third great aspiration.”

To sum it up, we should first obtain a true comprehension of the Buddhadharma and then tirelessly teach it to others. Moreover, we should uphold and propagate the Buddhadharma without regard to the body or its life force.

Based on the last part of the sutra of *The Lion's Roar of Queen Srimala*, Lama Tsongkhapa wrote a verse, which summarizes the essence of all the Bodhisattva aspirations. The verse says, although a Bodhisattva's aspirations are as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, they can all be contained within the aspiration to uphold the Buddhadharma: therefore we should dedicate all virtuous roots accumulated in all our lives so that the Buddhadharma may flourish.

b. The stories of great masters of the past

There are many true stories of those great beings, who were ready to give up their lives in order to uphold the Dharma, one of which is the story of Master Faxian³³. One day, his teacher said to Faxian and his other disciples, “you must uphold the Dharma after I have passed away, even at the cost of your lives”. Later, with the teacher's words still resonant in their minds, Faxian and his dharma friends left for India to seek further Dharma knowledge. During the trip, some of them fell into an abyss and died, some starved to death, and some died from bad weather. Faxian was the only one that survived these hardships. Along the way, he also encountered such fierce animals as tigers, leopards and lions etc. In the end, he survived the arduous journey to India and after having studied Mahayana Buddhism there, he returned to India by sea bringing with him such classic Buddhist texts as the *Nirvana Sutra*, *Dirgha Agama Sutra*, *Sa'yukta Agama Sutra*³⁴, as well as miscellaneous other Buddhist texts which he then translated into

³² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Śrīmālādevī_Simhanāda_Sūtra

³³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faxian>

³⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Āgama_%28Buddhism%29

Mandarin Chinese.

In the twenty-third chapter of *Pancavi satisahasrika Prajnaparamita Sutra*³⁵, it also records a similar story of Bodhisattva Sadaparudita who was willing to give up his life in pursuit of the teaching of prajnaparamita. In history, there were a lot of great masters who would give up their lives while seeking the Dharma. Therefore, we should also aspire to uphold the Dharma by following in their courageous footsteps.

C4. Dedicate the Merits for Being Able to Constantly Reflect on Skillful Means of Spreading the Dharma

Verse 57

*May I spend day and night carefully reflecting,
“By what means can I enhance
This teaching achieved by the supreme savior
Through strenuous efforts over countless eons?”*

May I spend day and night in examination, thinking of methods by which I can further these (teachings), which (you,) that Supreme Guide, realized by taking earnestly to heart immeasurable hardships.

a. The importance of spreading the Dharma

Here Lama Tsongkhapa aspires to spend day and night, life after life, reflecting on the most proper means to spread the entire Buddhadharma, particularly the essence of it, including the Mahayana teaching of dependent origination, which was achieved by the Buddha through immeasurable effort. We should also always be mindful of the importance of spreading the Buddhadharma, which is the only way to truly benefit all sentient beings. If, rather than taking on this meaningful mission, we pay attention only to such trivial things as food and clothing, we will be no different from the animals and will have wasted the value of a life as a human being.

If we were to give such material things as money, high position, villa, and luxury cars to sentient beings, it may not bring them any benefit, because these things only serve to increase their attachment and will thus make them suffer even more. Being aware that the only thing that can bring true benefits is the Buddhadharma, we should think constantly about applying various kinds of proper means to spread its wisdom. We could utilize such modern technologies as the Internet or television to spread the teachings, or we might engage in charity activities such as building hospitals, which would certainly benefit others; both of these are appropriate ways of spreading the Dharma. During the process, the key is to strengthen our own aspiration to spread the Dharma by thinking of the hardships that the Buddha endured without regard even to his life and body, in order to achieve the Dharma.

³⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahaprajnaparamita_Sutra

It is because the teachings of Buddhism, including the idea of compassion, equality and emptiness, can bring true benefit to all sentient beings, that we should always be thinking of spreading the Dharma.

b. Who should spread the Dharma and how can we spread it

This is an aspiration that every Buddhist should have. Some lay people may think that only monastics have the ability to spread the Dharma and that it is their responsibility to do so. Actually, due to the limited number of monastics, lay Buddhists should also take on the responsibility of spreading the Dharma. This was actually requested by the Buddha, in *The Sutra of the Heap of Jewels*, where the Buddha says “lay Bodhisattvas should take the responsibility to spread the Dharma and benefit beings...they should endeavor to liberate sentient beings tirelessly.”

Therefore, we should think about sharing the jewel-like sublime Buddhadharma with all beings with whom we have karmic connections. It’s as if, all the students at a particular school were climbing a mountain. Everyone is hungry and thirsty. Then, one of them suddenly finds a tree covered in delicious and nutritious fruits. It is certain that his first thoughts will be about sharing these fruits with his classmates. We should also think in the same way, while we’re enjoying the teaching of compassion and emptiness. Always aspire to benefit others, and gradually we’ll be able to achieve it. Even if we, especially the old who are in poor physical condition, are not able to spread the Dharma to benefit others within this lifetime, we can make the aspiration to achieve the goal in our very next life after having been reborn as a capable human. We can find many examples of this in *The Sutra of the Wise and Foolish*³⁶.

C5. Dedicate the Merits for Being Protected by Dharmapalas When Practicing and Spreading the Dharma

Verse 58

*As I strive in this with pure intention,
May Brahma, Indra and the world’s guardians
And protectors such as Mahakala
Unswervingly, always assist me.*

When I make efforts in that manner, with pure exceptional resolve, may I always be unswervingly assisted by worldly protectors, such as Brahma and Indra, and guardiāns (of the Dharma), like Excellent Mahakala and the rest.

Here, Lama Tsongkhapa aspires that when striving in his practice, and upholding and spreading the Buddhadharma with an altruistic intention, he will always be protected and blessed by Dharmapalas.

It’s difficult to succeed in practicing and spreading Buddhism by oneself.

³⁶ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Sutra_of_the_Wise_and_the_Foolish

Therefore, we must rely on the Dharma guardians such as Brahma³⁷, Indra³⁸, the Four Heavenly Kings³⁹, the 12 tenma goddesses⁴⁰, Mahakala⁴¹ and others, who vowed in front of Shakyamuni Buddha and the great masters of the past, to lend their support to Buddhist practitioners like us. During ancient times in the Han Region, Kublai Khan of the Yuan Dynasty was a devout believer in Mahakala. In the Qing Dynasty, Kangxi Emperor and Qianlong Emperor also often prayed to Mahakala. In order to gain the assistance of Dharma guardians, praying to them is very important. Without praying, we won't get their assistance, in the same way that without praying to the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel, we won't receive its benefits.

B2. Conclude by the Five Perfections of Writing Background

This hymn entitled “Essence of Well-Uttered Insights,” praising the unexcelled Teacher – the great friend to the entire world [even] to the unfamiliar – for teaching the profound dependent origination, was composed by the well-read monk Lobsang Drakpai Pal. It was written at the heavenly retreat of Lhading on the towerng mountain of Odé Gungyal, otherwise known as [Ganden] Nampar Gyalwai Ling. The scribe was Namkha Pal.

Here, “Essence of Well-Uttered Insights” is the subtitle of *In Praise of Dependent Origination*. The first perfection is regarding the perfect object of praise, which is the unexcelled teacher, Shakyamuni Buddha. The second perfection is regarding the perfect subject of praise, the poem of *In Praise of Dependent Origination: Essence of Well-Uttered Insights*. The third perfection is the perfect author of this poem, the well-read monk Lobsang Drakpai Pal, which was the original name of Lama Tsongkhapa. He received the name “Tsongkhapa”, because he was born in the Tsongkha region of Amdo. The fourth perfection is the perfect environment where the poem was written, which was Nampar Gyalwai Ling where Lama Tsongkhapa was living when composing the poem. The fifth perfection is the perfect scribe, Namkha Pal who wrote down the words to the poem as, they were recited by the master.

³⁷ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Brahma>

³⁸ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Indra>

³⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Heavenly_Kings

⁴⁰ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Twelve_Tenma_Sisters

⁴¹ <http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Mahakala>