

GATES TO BUDDHIST PRACTICE

Gates to Buddhist Practice
Essential Teachings of a Tibetan Master

REVISED EDITION

Chagdud Tulku

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Editors' Preface

GATES TO BUDDHIST PRACTICE, the first volume of The Living Dharma Series: Oral Teachings of Chagdud Tulku, presents traditional Tibetan Buddhist wisdom to Western readers in His Eminence Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche's uniquely accessible style, interweaving stories from his native Tibet with a step-by-step exploration of the foundation and essence of Vajrayana Buddhism.

Son of Dawa Drolma, one of Tibet's most renowned female lamas, Chagdud Rinpoche received extensive training from many great lamas and belongs to the last generation of teachers to have inherited the vast wealth of Tibetan Buddhist teachings and methods before the Chinese Communist consolidation of power in Tibet. In 1959, he was forced into exile and, during the two decades that followed, served the Tibetan community in India and Nepal as lama and physician. He also aided in refugee resettlement, as well as the artistic development of new monasteries.

Abbott of Chagdud Gonpa in Tibet—a centuries-old monastery and one of the few to survive the Chinese Communist invasion—Rinpoche came to the United States in 1979. In 1983 he established Chagdud Gonpa Foundation, which has centers throughout the United States, South America, and Europe. Rinpoche now lives at Khadro Ling, in Três Coroas, Brazil, Chagdud Gonpa's main center in South America. His wisdom and com-

Editors' Preface

passion, which derive from a treasury of human experience, scholarly training, and profound meditative insight, permeate his presentation of the Buddhadharmā—a presentation that, rich with metaphor, transcends cultural and religious barriers, and spirals through the extensive body of Buddhist teachings to their very heart.

Since Rinpoche came to the West, thousands of spiritual practitioners have gained insight into mind's nature through his instruction on the Vajrayana. A master of the most profound teachings of the Buddhist path, the Great Perfection (Dzogchen), he is committed to making the full range of Vajrayana methods available to Western students. His teachings, imbued with the Great Perfection perspective and transmitted with warmth and humor, reveal to those who are receptive a glimpse of their intrinsic awareness.

Most of Rinpoche's public talks have been tape-recorded. The Living Dharma Series consists of edited transcripts of those teachings. In *Gates to Buddhist Practice*, Rinpoche speaks of why we suffer and how we can eliminate the causes of suffering to create ultimate freedom for ourselves and others. He presents a multitude of methods for working with the mind in daily life; for reducing anger, attachment, ignorance, jealousy, and pride; for practicing effortful and effortless meditation; and for developing wisdom and compassion. Readers will find spiritual truths that are relevant to and of immediate benefit in their daily lives, truths that when applied with sincerity will produce unequivocal changes in their own minds and in their interactions with others. The book also contains an introduction to the Vajrayana, the "lightning path," which can be pursued with a qualified teacher.

Editors' Preface

The teachings presented here serve as an introduction to Chagdud Rinpoche's presentation of the Buddhadharma. Individual chapters are self-contained, yet the book proceeds through a progression of ideas, themes, and practices. The depth of these teachings will become increasingly apparent upon repeated readings, but more so through the application of the principles taught. *Gates to Buddhist Practice* is a book not only about the philosophy of the Buddhist religion, but also about Buddhist practice, the methods taught by the Buddha Shakyamuni 2,500 years ago that have produced profound transformation in the minds of those who have diligently applied them.

May this book be the cause of liberation for all who read it, and may all find freedom from the cycles of suffering and awaken to their mind's true nature.

Giving Rise to Bodhicitta

IN ORDER TO DIRECT ourselves along the spiritual path, we need a goal to work toward, as an arrow needs a target. With bodhicitta, the next gate to practice in the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions, we aim at enlightenment for the benefit of others in every moment. This is the best of all possible goals.

Bodhicitta is foundational to all we do, like the root of a medicinal tree whose branches, leaves, and flowers all produce life-enhancing medicine. The quality and purity of our practice depend on its permeating every method we use. With it, everything is ensured. Without it, nothing will work.

This is why from the very first time we listen to the teachings we are told to establish the liberation of all beings as the purpose of our practice. We render ourselves fit vessels for spiritual teachings and practice by changing our motivation from one of self-interest to one of altruism.

Bodhicitta has three components: arousing compassion for the suffering of beings; aspiring to attain enlightenment in order to benefit all beings, called *wishing bodhicitta*; and actively engaging in the path of liberation in order to accomplish that goal, called *engaging bodhicitta*.

The Tibetan term for the Sanskrit *bodhicitta* is *jang chub sem*. *Jang* means the removal of obscurations; *chub*, the revealing of

all perfect qualities within, and *sem*, mind. Through the practice of bodhicitta, we purify obscurations and enhance our intrinsic positive qualities, revealing enlightened mind.

We can compare mind's obscurations to the clay covering a crystal that has long been in the ground. If we pick up the encrusted crystal, it looks like a clay ball. Yet its essential qualities are in no way reduced; they are only obscured. If we wash away the clay, the crystal becomes clear, its qualities apparent. In the same way, by purifying and removing the mind's obscurations, we reveal our true crystalline nature.

Though it lies within, we always look outside for this nature. It's like searching everywhere for a missing horse, following countless hoofprints through the forest, only to discover, finally, that the horse has never left the stable.

Compassion, the first aspect of bodhicitta, is also inherent within us. Although we naturally have good heart, it is usually rather limited. Through practice, we can expose and awaken our own perfect, boundless compassion.

Jang chub sem is thus both a method and the fruit of practice. Due to the momentum of bodhicitta, the sunlike essence of mind becomes completely revealed and benefit for others arises spontaneously and effortlessly, like the sun's reflection in every vessel and body of water.

We begin the practice of removing mind's obscurations by reducing our self-centeredness and redirecting our attention to others. Our habit of focusing on ourselves has been reinforced for countless lifetimes, which is why we're trapped in samsara. Buddhas have eliminated selfish and ordinary thoughts, developed selfless motivation, and thus achieved enlightenment.

The development of this kind of motivation rests on four cor-

nerstones called the *four immeasurable qualities*. The first is equanimity, an attitude of equal regard toward all beings. If we can live free of prejudice or bias, without making a distinction between friends and enemies, then we have grasped the essence of existence and planted the seeds of our own and others' happiness and freedom.

Right now our love and compassion extend only to certain people, our family, friends, and loved ones, but not to those we perceive as enemies. We may not wish ill fortune on unpleasant or dangerous people, yet we might have trouble not rejoicing if something bad happens to them. Or our compassion for a sick child may derive simply from our attachment to her. Through the practice of equanimity, we develop a noble attitude of compassion for all beings without distinction, from the depths of our heart. Unless we have this kind of pure heart, our practice will remain superficial—we won't truly understand the purpose of dharma.

We develop equanimity, first, by realizing that all beings, equally, want happiness. Nobody wants to suffer. Second, we contemplate the fact that every being, at one time or another through countless lifetimes, has been our own mother. The Buddha Shakyamuni and other buddhas and bodhisattvas, who revealed the crystalline nature of their minds and became omniscient, taught that there is not one being who has not been our parent. This is something we too could perceive if we purified our mindstreams. Each being—no matter how antagonistic to us now—has been as kind and essential to us as our parents in this lifetime. A person who now plays a seemingly insignificant or even threatening role in our personal drama was once loving and helpful.

To develop an appreciation for this kindness, we need to recognize the enormous generosity of our parents. First and

foremost, they gave us the gift of a human body. Upon death in our last incarnation, when our mind was plunged into the bardo, the frightening and chaotic intermediate state between death and rebirth, we were blown about helplessly, like a feather in the wind, without any stable frame of reference or support, experiencing terrifying sights and sounds. We finally found safety in our mother's womb at the moment of conception. From then on, our mother carried us in her body for nine months, putting up with discomfort and perhaps illness to give us our human birth.

When we were helpless in our cradle, our mother provided care and protection so that we could grow strong and healthy. Had she not nurtured us, or asked another to do so, we would surely have died.

She saved our young life again and again, protecting us from falling, from eating things that would make us sick, from coming too close to fire, water, traffic. She fed and clothed us, washed us, and kept our home clean. Think how much we would have to pay now for someone to clean our house or cook our meals. These days, when someone gives us a cup of tea or some trifle and doesn't ask for anything in return, we think of that person as tremendously kind. But such kindness pales in comparison with the generosity of our mother.

Our ability to speak, to conduct ourselves in society, and to get along with people are all gifts from our parents. Rather than be satisfied with our own cleverness, we should remember that there was a time when we didn't know how to say a single word, how to wipe, feed, clothe, or clean ourselves. Our mothers and fathers helped us learn to speak, walk, eat, and dress. They were our first teachers.

Glossary

Non-English entries are Sanskrit terms, unless otherwise indicated.

Abhidharma one of the collections of the Buddha's teachings; serving as antidotes to ignorance, these teachings discuss logic, psychology, and cosmology

absolute truth the pure, immutable essence of phenomena; also refers to the true nature of mind

Amitabha the buddha of limitless light, whose aspirations and dedication of merit facilitate rebirth in his pureland, Dewachen

anu yoga the category of practice in the Nyingma school of Vajrayana in which one works with the channels, energies, and bindu of the subtle body to realize the true nature of desire and the inseparability of bliss and emptiness

ati yoga *See* Great Perfection

bardo(s) (Tib.; lit. "interval between two points") the six intermediate states of cyclic existence; often refers exclusively to the intermediate state between death and rebirth

bindu (Tib. *tiglé*) concentration of energies in the subtle body, which one works with in the training of anu yoga

bodhicitta (Tib. *jang chub sem*; lit. "mind of enlightenment") on the relative level, it involves arousing compassion equally for all beings and the wish to attain buddahood for their sake, as well as engaging in practice and activity in order to achieve this; on the absolute level, it is awareness of the true nature of reality

Glossary

- cludes the 84,000 methods for revealing mind's true nature and attaining enlightenment; the second of the Three Jewels of refuge
- dharmaprotector** (*dharmapala*; Tib. *gonpo*) a worldly or enlightened being pledged to guard Vajrayana practitioners against obstacles and protect the Buddhist teachings from dilution or distortion
- dharmakaya** the sphere of absolute truth; the essence of mind as emptiness
- dharmata** the true nature of reality
- dream yoga** a meditation method in which one trains in recognition of the dream state and then uses that state to further one's spiritual development
- dualistic perception** the perception that reality is divided into subject (self) and object (other), each with an independent identity
- empowerment** a ceremony during which a qualified lama introduces a student to his or her true nature as the body, speech, and mind of the deity, authorizes the student to meditate on the mandala of the deity, and transmits the blessings of the practice lineage
- emptiness** the essence of mind; also, the lack of inherent existence of self and phenomena
- enlightenment** buddhahood; the awakened state of mind in which all obscurations have been purified and all enlightened qualities revealed
- five poisons** negative emotions that lead to rebirth in the realms of samsara: anger or aversion, pride, desire, jealousy, and ignorance
- five wisdoms** (five aspects of pristine awareness) mirror-like wisdom, wisdom of equanimity, discriminating wisdom, all-accomplishing wisdom, and wisdom of the basic space of phenomena
- four immeasurable qualities** limitless equanimity, love, compassion, and joy
- four kinds of activity** four kinds of enlightened activity that arise spontaneously from realization of mind's true nature: pacifying, increasing, magnetizing, and wrathful