

THE VICTORS' HIGHWAY: A ROOT TEXT ON THE GREAT SEAL IN THE GEM-LIKE GANDEN/KAGYU TRADITION

(*dGa' ldan bka' brgyud rin po che'i*
Phyag chen rtsa ba rGyal ba'i gzhung lam)

by the First Panchen Lama
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Translated by Joseph Loizzo

HAIL THE GREAT SEAL!

I. Invocation

I bow devoted at the feet of my peerless Mentor,
Lord of Divine Adepts who nakedly reveals
Ineffible mind's diamond realm, inseparable
From the Great Seal, pervasive nature of all!

I write to explain the Great Seal lineage
Of Prime Adept Dharmavajra and his heirs,
The Ganden/Kagyu tradition of holy instruction,
Quintessence of the oceans of Sutra and Tantra.

II. Explanation

This is in three [parts]: preliminary, actual and concluding [practices].

A. Preliminaries

First, you must take refuge and conceive the spirit
In earnest, not by mere rote or lip-service,
Since these are the entryway and mainstay
Of the Teaching and Universal Vehicle.

Next, since seeing the reality of the mind
Requires amassing virtues and purifying obscurations,
You must prepare with at least a hundred thousand Vajrasattva mantras
And as many hundreds of prostrations as possible
[Following] *The Confession of Downfalls*.
Then, pray from the heart to your root Mentor,
[Viewed as] inseparable from all Buddhas of all times.

B. Actual Practice

Although there are many ways of explaining
The actuality of the Great Seal,
They are of two sorts, Sutric and Tantric.
In the latter, the great bliss and clear light

Born of arts like tapping the vital points
Within the diamond body itself
Is the Great Seal of Masters Saraha and Nagarjuna,
Quintessence of the Unexcelled Yoga Process
Taught in the [*Seven*] *Adepts'* [*Texts*] and [*Three*] *Essence Commentaries*.

The former is the method of voidness meditation
Openly taught by the three *Transcendent Wisdom Scriptures*;
“There is no path of liberation other than this,”
Thus spoke most Noble Nagarjuna.

Here, I will explain the Great Seal
According to [Nagarjuna’s] intention,
And the methods of confronting the mind
Formulated by lineage masters [in India and Tibet].

Although the different technical terms taught
Are many, including “Natural Communion,”
“The Amulet,” “Fivefold Endowment,” “One Taste,”
“Four Syllables,” “Pacification,” “Cutting,”
“Great Perfection Sphere” and “Central View,”
The spiritually experienced practitioner
Who masters the definitive meaning of philosophies and texts,
Critically determines that they have one intent.

Therefore, of the two procedures,
Pursuit of meditation grounded in insight,
And pursuit of insight grounded in meditation,
Here, we will follow the latter.

On a comfortable meditation seat,
Body in the seven-pointed posture,
Purge the breath in nine-round cycles.

Thoroughly clear your primal awareness,
And with a purely positive state of mind,
First take refuge and conceive the spirit,
Then practice the deep path of Mentor-bonding,
Making hundreds of urgent prayers,
And dissolve the Mentor into yourself.

In that altered state of perception,
Stay absorbed a while without vascillating,
Not making any kind of production
Out of constructs like hope and fear.
Let nothing block your attention

As when falling asleep or into trance;
Tether your mind with unwavering mindfulness,
And keep vigil with rational awareness.

Finely focused, look nakedly
At the actual translucency of consciousness;
Whatever constructs arise
Should be recognized just as they are.

Or else, like your opponent in a duel,
Instantly shred whatever constructs arise,
And with the last cut, when you rest,
Gently relax without losing mindfulness.

“Gently relax your tight focus,
The settled state of mind is there!”
So it is said, and likewise, elsewhere,
“The same mind that is caught in a tangle,
Once relaxed, without doubt frees itself!”
So, as is said, relax without wavering.

Once you see the essence of constructs that arise
They automatically vanish and clear void dawns;
Likewise, when you analyze that settled mind,
Its unobstructed void is crystal clear.

In what is known as “seeing motion merge with rest,”
Whatever constructs arise are recognized
As unobstructed [mind] waves, then settle in their actuality
In the manner of a bird on a ship at sea:
“Just as a bird that flies from a ship
After circling all points must return...”

Though precisely such cultivation,
One is absorbed in the nature [of mind],
An unobscured lucid clarity,
Not given with any material form at all—
A space-like sheer void
Letting anything whatever vividly dawn.

While a special insight directly perceives
The true nature of mind as such,
Nothing can be shown or grasped as “this,”
Whatever dawns, it rests naturally, without grasping.

The great Himalayan meditators of today
Proclaim more or less in unison
That this is the prime directive which grants
Attainment of the Buddha's illumination.
Be that as it may, I, Chokyi Gyalsten,
Pronounce this method as [no more than]
A technique of remarkable effectiveness
For diligent beginners to gain mental stability
And to recognize the superficial mind.

As for the method of precisely identifying
The ultimate reality of mind,
I offer the personal advice of my root Mentor,
Who cleared the deluded gloom from my mind,
And who, in the guise of a saffron-clad monk,
Embodied all the intuitions of the Buddhas!

From within the prior state of equipoise,
Like a minnow darting within still, clear waters,
The subtle consciousness critically examines
The nature of the person of the meditator.

You should investigate it following the formulation
Of the Savior, Noble Nagarjuna,
“Since the person is not solid, not liquid,
Not gas, not energy, not space,
Nor consciousness, nor their sum,
Nor apart from them, what person is there?
As the person has no ultimate reality,
Because it is composed of sixfold elements,
So each of its elements has no ultimate reality,
Because each in turn is also composite.”

When you cannot discover even a subatomic particle
Of equipoise or someone equipoised,
Then cultivate space-like equipoise,
With unwavering single-pointedness.

Or, in an equipoised state, [examine] the mind:
Pure openness with no static material,
[Where] diversity dawns and evolves unobscured;
An incessant stream of clarifying awareness
That engages [objects] without interruption.
Though it seems independent as an object
Of [mental] perception, [when examined]
By reasons and references like Savior Santideva's,

“So-called ‘masses,’ ‘continua’ and such
Are as artificial as garlands and armies,”
The way it appears is unfounded [on analysis];
So rest single-pointedly in its [true] nature.

In short, my spiritual guide,
Whose omniscience agrees with reality,
Sangyay Yeshe proclaimed, “When, whatever comes,
You are fully aware of objects as mental constructs,
The sphere of ultimate truth dawns without relying on anything else,
So focus single-pointedly poised
To live the dawn of natural awareness—aha!”
And likewise, [Pa] Dampa [Sangyay] said,
“Whirl the lance of natural awareness in the void,
And see without block or limit, you of Dingri!”
Such statements have one intention.

C. Conclusion

In conclusion, whatever virtues come
From practicing the Great Seal,
Along with the ocean of worth amassed throughout time,
Dedicate to unexcelled perfect enlightenment!

Through such practice, may whatever appearances
Dawn as objects of the six sense fields
Be exquisitely realized the way they appear
Yet dawn with naked clarity the way they are.
Recognizing what dawns [thus] is key to the view.

In brief, never grasp any appearance,
Including your own mind, as objectively there,
But take constant care to ascertain
Its [ultimate] mode of being.

Knowing [one thing] thus, [you know]
All things, mundane and transcendent,
As joined in a singular nature.
Hence Aryadeva’s statement,
“Whoever is a seer of one thing,
Should be known as a seer of all;
For the voidness of one thing
Is the voidness of all.”

In the immediacy of this mode of equipoise
[Knowing mind’s] reality just as it is,

You are free indeed from extreme fabrications,
 Mundane and transcendent, like being and nothing;
 Once you emerge from it and examine
 The undeniable workings of relativity,
 They exist as mere designations of language.
 Like a dream, a mirage, moon in water,
 Like illusion, they naturally dawn—
 Their appearance not obscuring their voidness,
 Their voidness not negating appearance—
 When voidness and relativity are synonymous,
 The excellent path [to Buddhahood] is directly realized.

This text was composed by the scholar-meditator
 Known as Losang Chokyi Gyalstan.
 By virtue of [writing this]
 May all beings triumph quickly *via* this path,
 Aside from which there is no way to peace.

[I have recorded] these methods of recognizing the Great Seal
 At the repeated request of Gedun Gyalstan,
 A Master of the Ten Sciences, and Sherab Senge of Hatong
 A Master of the Ten Treatises, both of whom
 Have seen worldly life with its eight states as a mad drama
 And live a corrective way of life in solitary hermitage,
 Having made this path their heart practice.
 Many other students of mine have made [similar] requests,
 Wishing to practice the Great Seal's definitive meaning.

In particular, [I have composed this text now]
 Since the great Victor Ensapa, omniscient lord of adepts,
 In one of his enlightenment songs written to edify
 Himself and others, himself said, "I have written explanations
 Of the gradual path from the Kadam [tradition]
 From the art of relying on a spiritual guide to insight and quiescence,
 But have not reached the instructions on the Great Seal,
 Which are not included in paths explained thus far
 And not well known to our Tibetan contemporaries."
 Thus what was not necessary at that time
 Due to restriction, was reserved for a later time.
 This is supported by scriptural references
 Like this statement from the *Lotus Scripture*,
 "Since a Buddha's intuition must be full realized,
 You would never announce 'I have attained enlightenment,'
 To those who would write about this art on their own.
 Why is that? Because protectors look after the times."

Having upheld the holy precepts of Sutra and Tantra
And properly clarified and observed without breach
The commitments of the unfailing lineage of inspiration
Of those who have taken to heart the direct experience of this path—
From the peerless Teacher, the Victor Shakyamuni,
To the living presence of my dear root Mentor, the omniscient seer Sangyay Yeshe,
I, the meditator Losang Chokyi Gyaltsan,
Composed this at Ganden Monastery.

Colophon: This Introduction to the Great Seal by bLo-bzang Chos-kyi rGyal-mtshan (1570-1662) was written at the request of Rab-'byam mGyal-msthan and Hlag-mthong sKabs-cu-pa Shes-rab Seng-ge at Ganden Monastery, to explain the dGa'-ldan bKa-rgyud oral tradition he received from rJe Tsong-kha-pa (1357-1419) through Chos-kyi rDo-rje (late 15th), rGyal-ba dbEn-sa-ba (1505-1566) and Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes (1525-1662). It was translated from the Tibetan for the 1995 Jewel Heart Winter Retreat at the request of Khyab-rje Nga-dbang dGe-legs bDe-mo Rin-po-che by Joseph Loizzo, revised with consultation of the autocommentary translated by Alexander Berzin, revised again in consultation with dGe-legs Rin-po-che and Ari-dge-bsnyen bsTan-'dzin Chos-drags (Robert A.F.Thurman) at the 1996 (Fire Rat) Jewel Heart Winter Retreat, and completed consulting a manuscript draft kindly furnished by Professor Thurman.