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**“The Essence of Superfine Gold”**

**A Guide on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment by the Third Dalai Lama**

**Commentary by Geshe Lobsang Nima**

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**Introductory remarks**

The Indian master Shantideva said, “All the happiness we get in this world comes from cherishing other people; all the suffering we get in this world comes from cherishing oneself.” So through this perspective, each and every day we think how we get happiness, and how we get suffering.

In this world, usually it’s said there are seven or eight billion people. And out of those, most people seek or try to get happiness based on the ego-centered attitude and self-cherishing attitude. If we seek or try to get happiness based on this ego-centered attitude, then our happiness is very, very fragile. Like thin glass, it’s very easy to break. Instead of getting happiness, this kind of attitude creates something like an evil dictator in us. This evil dictator has no tolerance or room for anyone who criticizes or says anything negative about him or her. If someone comes to him or her with praise and words of appreciation, the evil dictator is happy. But if someone comes to him or her with criticism, the evil dictator becomes hateful and causes problems. So this is very dangerous if we’re always thinking about ourself.

Actually, we should try to cherish ourself, but we should do it in the middle way like the Buddha and the bodhisattva. They cherish themselves, but they cherish through their skillfulness, through the wise way. So they make a difference in their life.

When we talk about cherishing others or cherishing oneself, we never say that we should *not* cherish ourself. We must cherish ourself, but we must cherish in the middle way. We must think again and again in our day-to-day life how this self-centered attitude—this narrow-minded attitude—brings us lots of problems in our life. If we think about this again and again, then one day we can understand by our own experience. Because of our grasping at the self, our cherishing of the self, we become more sensitive people—we’re easily offended and hurt emotionally. If we think this way again and again, we become very narrow-minded and feel alone in this world. We’re putting too much emphasis on one person. You are only one, I am only one. If we emphasize this way of thinking, there is no room within ourselves to forgive, or to be tolerant, or to extend compassion. You may become alone in this world. This is very dangerous.

Not only that, but because of too much emphasis on the one, the “I” or self, this creates an attachment toward the self—very strong, very strong. And this serves as the basis of all other problems—just because of this kind of attitude. So instead of cherishing oneself, if you wish to be happy—wish to be a kind and compassionate person, instead of cherishing self, try to exchange self-cherishing with other-cherishing.

This is the source of all happiness, as Shantideva said. Cherishing the self is the source of all problems and suffering. Cherishing others is the source of all happiness.

Actually, if you directly cherish others, you indirectly cherish yourself. Because if you cherish others more and more, then you get more happiness in your life. You will be more happy, more content, more forgiving, more tolerant. So, the more you extend cherishing to others, then you can extend compassion toward others, generosity towards others, all these kinds of things. It's logical to say that all our happiness comes from cherishing others. But this is just speaking in nice words. If we check our own feelings, if we can extend cherishing to others or extend our attitude, it is a change for the best. So far, we've been emphasizing our own self too much. Now you just exchange. Instead of cherishing yourself, you try to cherish other people. Through this you can become a very transparent person, you can become a realistic person—very open.

Too much cherishing toward oneself is the source of fearfulness, the source of suspicion. You make yourself very holy, very important. Because of this, you ignore the happiness of others. Neglecting the benefit of cherishing others, your intention is to only make yourself happy. You don't care for other people. So because of this kind of action again and again, you become very suspicious of people, very fearful of people, very afraid of losing this thing or that thing.

If you extend the other-centered attitude more, or cherishing others more, then you become a friend to other people. Then you have more and more friends. Whether you face a problem, whether you are happy, or whether you face suffering, you don't keep it a secret—you just can share it with others, you can open up to others. This is not a religious perspective. We can share this kind of attitude, or this kind of thought, according to a secular perspective. This is a logical way to be if we think again and again in our life.

On top of that, if we train in this kind of thought or this kind of view, gradually we become an other-centered person. Then sometimes if we get angry, we can control the anger, we can control the jealousy, and this kind of thing. Because we spend the whole of our attention toward other people, we consider others more important than ourselves. If some people react negatively we can be tolerant.

For example, in our family if there is some senior—like our aunt or uncle—who shows us anger, we can tolerate it, because we consider our aunt or uncle or father or mother as an important person in our life. We consider them to be very important in our life, so whatever they say or do in response to us we can tolerate. We can forgive them. So if we consider other people as more important than us, then for ourselves we can get short term and long term happiness.

Then we try to exchange self-cherishing with other-cherishing, and through this kind of training we can conquer many difficulties with other people in our life. Instead of fighting with them, instead of arguing, we try to use many skillful means to tame these kind of people, to make friends with them. For example, in one family you can have a somewhat difficult person. Because of that person you always feel unhappy when you meet with that person or when you see that person. If you make friends with that person, all of that unhappiness is solved.

In society all of us have someone we call the enemy, or people who are against you or me. In that challenging situation, use your own intelligence to be very careful. Instead of fighting or opposing them, take them as the object of your tolerance or your forgiveness. Consider this kind of person as very dear to you. Because of him or her, you learn a lot of lessons, a lot of good ethics. A compassionate mind, or heart mind, can be learned from this kind of person. So because of him or her, you can extend your good qualities through this training. Shantideva advises us it's very important.

When we're talking about Dharma, it means changing our way of thinking, way of behaving, way of speaking. This is real Dharma. Otherwise, we can learn some very deep philosophical thinking such as quantum physics, which is very difficult, but if we carry it into our life it may not give us much satisfaction or happiness. Shantideva taught about this kind of thing—it's very, very helpful. On the basis of this kind of attitude, we hope to develop or generate genuine compassion as the Buddha always has described to us. Otherwise there is no hope to develop genuine compassion or genuine love. If we have the kind of attitude which considers others or extends full importance to others instead of oneself, then we can extend

genuine compassion even toward our enemy.

We can divide human beings into three groups: some are very close to you, some are neutral—you don't know much about them—and the third group is your enemy. You can extend compassion to your loved one or close one, and you can extend your love or compassion toward the second level or category: this is the stranger, or someone you don't know much about. And the third level is the enemy. How can we extend our love or compassion toward the third group of people? It is very hard. Shantideva gave many talks about this kind of thing related to reasoning and logic. If you think logically, "I want happiness and don't want suffering," on the basis of that, from the stranger's side, or enemy's side, or loved one's side, it's the same. We all want happiness and don't want suffering. From the enemy's side, they want happiness and they don't want suffering. But due to ignorance, or due to negligence, or whatever, they do wrong things or do negative things. This is due to ignorance. So through training in this way, sometime you can forgive even your enemy. And then instead of getting angry with him or her, you can extend your compassion or your love toward this person, because he or she also wants happiness and doesn't want suffering. This is a logical way of explaining. Then when we think about these kind of people, though we consider their actions are in opposition to our love and compassion, we never are against them personally, although they are our enemy. But we must oppose their action. We call that person our enemy because of his or her action. When that person changes their action, they are not our enemy. They are our friend. "Friend" or "enemy" is imputed or labeled on the basis their action. Once the person turns away from that action, they are no longer an enemy. In the world of samsara—the world of cyclic existence—an "enemy" and a "friend" is not something independent or permanent. Today's friend may be tomorrow's enemy; today's enemy may be tomorrow's friend. This is just the nature of the world, the nature of ordinary people.

So training the mind is very, very important. If we train more and more, one day this kind of training will become part of our mind. And then you won't care if you are surrounded by your enemy, if you're standing in the center of a group of your enemies. You can spend your life happily and peacefully. They cannot impact you. Because from your side, you think of them as very, very dear to you. You appreciate them. You can extend gratitude toward this kind of person. Because of this person, you can change. If you always stay with the people who cherish you, who love you, you cannot change. The more you encounter those you think of as enemies, you can change. You can change your behavior, you can change your way of thinking. So this is another way of practicing. If we not only study, but carry this kind of thinking and practice into our life, this is very useful and very beneficial.

As we mentioned the other day, we were talking about the three types of wisdom. The first type of wisdom we get through hearing. For example, many times we say "life is impermanent, death is uncertain." But in our mind, we don't think that way. If we look deep down in our day-to-day life, we think as if we're going to live one hundred or a thousand years. Death is uncertain, life is impermanent. But deep down, we work as if we're going to stay here a hundred or a thousand years. What we think and what we speak is opposite. Many people say they study more and more and more, but see no change. But they don't practice, or think, or meditate continuously. So the wisdom they get through just studying is very superficial. Very, very low level. It's no good deep down in your mind, so there's no change.

When we study any Buddhist thing—most parts of the Lamrim, most parts of Buddhist theory—it's based on logic, based on experience—one's own experience. Not much is related with blind faith or blind belief. If we think about this in our daily life or daily existence it will definitely impact our thinking and our feeling. So study the Lamrim. If you study the Lamrim then it can be the main objective or main goal of studying for this life. Even if you are in a group of enemies, still you can stay happy or peaceful. You can achieve the goal of studying the Lamrim in this lifetime. Then next lifetime, liberation or enlightenment will come if you study this kind of thing and practice again and again, step by step. I just want to share this with you before we start reading the text.

## **1. The Authenticity and Excellence of the Lamrim**

The first chapter is entitled "The Authenticity and Excellence of the Lamrim". Whether the teaching is

authentic or not authentic is determined by tracing it to its source. *The Essence of Superfine Gold* was taught by the Third Dalai Lama (1543–1588). It is a commentary on Lama Tsongkhapa’s “A Song of Experience”. Lama Tsongkhapa (1357–1419) actually wrote three different Lamrim texts. The first one is the *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*. And the second one is the *Middle-Length Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*. The third one is the *Concise Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*. The *Concise Treatise* is the writing in the poem called “A Song of Experience”. Actually, the content of all these three books is the same. The first one is detailed, the second one is not as detailed, and the last one is very brief.

The Third Dalai Lama’s book is a commentary on the short one—the *Concise Treatise*. This teaching of the Dalai Lama is transmitted from Lama Tsongkhapa, who wrote the three different kinds of Lamrim. This is actually passed down from Atisha. If I explain it this way, Buddha Shakyamuni taught 84,000 heaps—84,000 kinds of teachings—from the Sutra side and Tantra side. All these teachings have two lineages. One is the Wisdom Lineage (a.k.a. the Lineage of the Profound View); the other is the Method Lineage (a.k.a. the Extensive Deeds Lineage, or Vast Activated Lineage). The Wisdom Lineage was passed from Buddha Shakyamuni to Manjushri, and then Manjushri to Nagarjuna, and Nagarjuna to his chief disciple (Chandrakirti), and then on down to Atisha. The Method Lineage was passed from Buddha Shakyamuni to Maitreya Buddha, and then from Asanga down to Atisha. Another lineage is what I call in English the Practice Blessing Lineage (a.k.a. the Blessing Experience Lineage). This comes from Vajradhara to Tilopa, to Naropa, to Drombipa—one-by-one from these Indian masters to Atisha.

These three teaching lineages came from Buddha Shakyamuni to Atisha. Then Atisha unified these three as one, and he taught the *Lamp for the Path*. *The Lamp for the Path* passed through Dromtoenpa, the chief disciple of Atisha, and Dromtoenpa split or divided the three lineages into the scriptural tradition (*Classical Lineage*), the oral tradition (*Instruction Lineage*), and the Lamrim (*Lamrim Lineage*) for his three different disciples (Potowa, Chaen Ngawa, and Goenpawa). This is the Kadampa tradition.

All these lineages and transmissions were received by Lama Tsongkhapa. Lama Tsongkhapa unified all these in writing his three different Lamrim texts, and since then there have been eighty different Lamrim teachings or books according to the Gelug tradition.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama—maybe seven or ten years ago (2012–2015)—first came to Gaden Monastery and taught there for one year, the second year at Drepung Monastery, the third year at Sera Monastery, then the fourth year at Tashi Lhunpo Monastery, and completed all these Lamrim teachings at these four monasteries in South India. Actually, before this we used to teach eight Lamrim commentaries from different texts, but His Holiness the Dalai Lama added another ten to these eight, and it became eighteen Lamrim text commentaries, with oral and experiential transmissions. So this is one of them.

Lama Tsongkhapa had both the Wisdom Lineage and the Method Lineage, as well as the Blessing Experience Lineage. All were unified by Atisha when he wrote *The Lamp for the Path*, and these were passed down, one by one from teacher to teacher, to Lama Tsongkhapa. Lama Tsongkhapa held all these lineages. And then he passed these down to his chief disciples, one by one, until they were received by His Holiness the Third Dalai Lama. From the Third Dalai Lama it was passed down to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.

When we ask whether this Lamrim is authentic or not, this is 100% authentic because this can be traced back to Lama Tsongkhapa and to Atisha, and then to Nagarjuna and Asanga, Maitreya Buddha and Manjushri, and back to the Buddha. So this is an unbroken lineage of the Buddha himself. So we can say this is authentic, as well as being the essence of all the Buddha’s teachings, because these teachings talk about the path of the small, middle, and great or higher capacity. There isn’t any path which is not included in these three paths. All of the Buddhist paths are condensed into these paths of low capacity, middle capacity, and higher capacity. All the essence of the Buddha’s teaching is condensed into *The Essence of Superfine Gold*, the Third Dalai Lama’s teaching. So Chapter one is talking about this kind of thing.

## 2. The Four Greatnesses of the Lamrim Instructions

In Lama Tsongkhapa's *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, and in the Third Dalai Lama's *The Essence of Superfine Gold*, there are four types of greatness. The first one—if you learn the Lamrim and you understand the four greatnesses of the Lamrim teaching—is *the greatness of enabling one to know that all the teachings of the Buddha are free of contradiction*. If you learn the Lamrim you understand this. All the teachings of the Buddha are free of contradiction. Actually, Buddha taught many kinds of teachings—Hinayana teachings, Mahayana teachings. Sometimes for disciples of lower capacity, the Buddha said the *Atman* exists (*Atman* is the Sanskrit word for the self-existent essence of the individual as distinct from the ego, mind, and body). For some, he taught selflessness. Sometimes he taught there is a self, as if the self is independent.

The Lamrim teaching says there's no contradiction. Buddha is like a medical doctor and his teaching is like the medicine. If there is a person whose problem is a headache, he gives the medicine for a headache. If there is a person who has a problem with fever, similarly he gives the medicine for fever. The Buddha taught according to the follower's mental disposition. So all the teachings are for sentient beings, and all the teachings are meant to directly or indirectly lead to full enlightenment.

So if there are some teachings that explicitly seem to be contradictory, there is no contradiction. All are free of contradiction within the context of all the teachings. This is the greatness of enabling one to know that all the Lamrim teachings are free of contradiction, because Buddha taught according to his followers' mental dispositions. All the teachings were meant to tame the minds of all his followers and bring them to the state of Buddhahood, directly or indirectly. So all the teachings are free of contradiction.

The second one is *the greatness of enabling one to understand all scriptures are instruction for practice*. Some people say when you study the Heart Sutra or other very tough philosophical topics, this is just study for the intelligent, proving your intelligence. When you practice, you just take a very small book and refer to that. But a thick book, like many of the Buddha's own teachings translated into Tibetan (there are more than one hundred volumes) and the Indian masters' commentaries that are translated into Tibetan (more than two hundred)—all these are instructions for practice. There are no instructions for practice other than these. The Lamrim teachings say even a single word of the Buddha, or a bodhisattva like Nagarjuna or Asanga, is instruction. This is real instruction, authentic instruction. There's no instruction other than this. If you think, when you study philosophy you learn from one book, and when you practice you learn from another small book, this is totally wrong. Through the Lamrim teaching you can understand that all the Buddha's teachings, all the scriptures—even a single word, are instructions for practice. If you learn the Lamrim and have this kind of understanding, this kind of information, whatever you learn or study is carried into your practice. Learning and practicing are not separate. This is the second greatness of the Lamrim.

The third greatness of the Lamrim is *the greatness of enabling one to easily grasp the intent of the Buddha*. Through studying the Lamrim you can easily find the intent of the Buddha. Each and every word of the Buddha is meant to tame the mind of sentient beings, meant to bring sentient beings to full enlightenment. Through studying the Lamrim you can understand this.

The fourth greatness is *the greatness of enabling one to refrain automatically from great wrongdoing*. If you don't understand the Lamrim, some will say "This is a Mahayana teaching—if you are a practitioner of the Mahayana, you forsake the Hinayana teaching. If you are a follower of the Hinayana teaching, you forsake the Mahayana teaching." Within Tibetan Buddhism there are four different sects (Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya, Gelug). If you say, "I am Gelug, I forsake the Kagyu," this is totally wrong. If you study Lamrim, you can understand; you can refrain automatically from this kind of wrongdoing.

So these are the four greatnesses of the Lamrim. If you study the Lamrim you can understand these four. This is very important. Then we can create a harmonious atmosphere among all the schools. Not only within the Buddhist society, but Theravada, Mahayana, Hinayana—all of us can stay friendly and close without being against each other. Not only that, we can extend an atmosphere of harmony with those of other religions, like Christians and Muslims. They practice their religions according to their

mental dispositions. Buddha never taught, “You must follow the Mahayana teaching.” Buddha taught the Hinayana teaching as well. Buddha never taught, “You must study emptiness, this is very important—this is the actual path to cut the root of suffering.” Buddha never taught that, because he understands the mental dispositions of all sentient beings. So he taught 84,000 heaps of teachings according to sentient beings’ mental dispositions. This is the second of the greatnesses of the instruction of the Lamrim—it is taught like that. So if you don’t understand each and every word, you keep in mind if you study the Lamrim well, you will get this kind of benefit. This completes the second chapter.

### **3. How to Listen to and Explain the Teachings**

#### *The Benefits of Listening to and Explaining the Teaching*

Geshe Nima (GN) then read directly from the text of *The Essence of Superfine Gold (TESG)*

*TESG*: “With respect to this instruction, possessing the four greatnesses unifying the essence of all the scriptures of the Buddha, one should consider the benefits of teaching and explaining correctly even a part of it, let alone the entire stages of the path of the beings of three capacities. By developing reverence for the Teacher (the Buddha) and Dharma, if one correctly teaches it to suitable vessels with pure motivation and conduct then it is certain that great benefit will accrue from explaining the sacred Dharma.”

GN: This paragraph states that when the teacher teaches the student, he keeps a very pure motivation, and through teaching with a pure motivation, that teaching must benefit the student.

*TESG*: “And if one correctly listens to it by abandoning the three faults of a vessel, and applying the six attitudes, then it is also certain that great benefit will accrue from listening to the sacred Dharma. Therefore, it is logical to strive to explain and listen to the instruction correctly...”

GN: When the teacher teaches the Dharma teaching, he or she keeps a very pure motivation. And when the students are listening to the teaching they should abandon the three faults of a vessel: 1) upside down, 2) right side up but dirty inside, or 3) right side up with a hole in the bottom.

1. *Upside down*. So like a bowl, if the bowl is upside down, it means you come to the teaching and you fall asleep. Whatever the teacher teaches, you don’t hear anything. You’re like an upside down bowl. You should abandon this kind of fault.

2. *Right side up but dirty inside*. If your bowl is right side up but dirty inside, it means you come to the teaching but your motivation is impure. You are just coming to the teaching to increase your position or fame. You’re thinking, “Today I’m going to this teaching to learn this kind of thing, and tomorrow I can teach other people so I can earn money.” This is an improper motivation, an insincere motivation. Although your bowl is right side up, the inside of your bowl is dirty—you hear the teaching, but your motivation is impure.

3. *Right side up with a hole in the bottom*. This means you’re actually hearing the teaching but aren’t paying attention to it. Once you get back to your room, you cannot ascertain what the teacher was teaching. You just forget. This is like a leaky bowl—whatever you put inside it just goes out. So you should avert these three kinds of faults, understand?

Then, you rely on the six attitudes: 1) you think you are like a sick person, 2) the teachers are the medical doctors, 3) the teachings are the medicine, 4) practice is the way to cure the disease, 5) think of Buddha as an excellent being, and 6) wish that this kind of teaching endures for a long time. These are six ideas or attitudes you keep in your mind when you’re listening to the teachings.

If you’re a sick person, you’re very eager to get medicine to cure your illness which makes you suffer so much. Actually some people will say, “I am happy,” but if we think deep down, we are not happy. Once we take rebirth in a human body we are subject to suffering because we have these compositional factors, or

the suffering of the compositional factors. Once we have this body, this is the foundation of all the problems that are coming. We are real sick, so we request the Buddha's teaching. We listen to the Buddha's teaching. What is the cause of our problems? How can we be liberated from these problems?

So with this third chapter we try to understand the three faults of a vessel—or three faults of the disciple from the disciple's side, and how to abandon these three faults. And also from the disciple's side, how to rely on the six attitudes. Now we'll talk about the ten qualities of the teacher:

*TESG*: “*The Qualifications of the Spiritual Teacher*. If there are such great benefits from listening to this instruction correctly, then from what kind of person should one hear this extraordinary instruction? In general, with respect to teachers worthy of listening to the sacred teachings, various qualifications are set down in the context of Hinayana, Mahayana, Sutra and Tantra teachings.”

GN: So in the Hinayana they describe many kinds of teachers' qualities in the Vinaya teaching (rules and regulations for Buddhist monastics). Also in the Mahayana teaching, and Sutra and Tantra, there are lots of explanations about the teachers' qualities.

*TESG*: “However, the kind of spiritual teacher from whom one receives a precious instruction such as this should have the qualities mentioned in Maitreya's *Ornament of Mahayana Sutras*.

He should possess the qualities of spiritual realization that subdue his mind-stream (mental continuum) through the Three higher Trainings (training in ethics, training in concentration, training in wisdom): He should be (i) disciplined through the higher training of morality (ethics), (ii) calmed through the higher training of meditative concentration, and (iii) thoroughly pacified through the higher training of insight (wisdom). (iv) He should have qualities of abundant learning from the Three Scriptural Collections and so forth (the scriptural collection of disciplines, the scriptural collection of discourses, and the scriptural collection of knowledge).

GN: This is the fourth quality of the teacher. If the teacher doesn't understand the Three Scriptural Collections, how can he or she teach other people? And...

*TESG*: “(v) He should possess the insight that thoroughly realizes reality...”

GN: So the teacher should have a realization of understanding emptiness.

*TESG*: “(vi) He should possess more good qualities than his disciples...”

GN: The teacher is more knowledgeable than the student. If the teacher is not more knowledgeable than the student, then the teacher can't teach! (laughs)

*TESG*: “These are the six qualities developed personally by the spiritual teacher.

Then (i) he should be skilled in the methods of leading the disciples on the stages of the path and be sufficiently eloquent to touch their hearts...”

GN: These are two qualities. The first one is, the teacher is skillful in leading the disciple on the path, and along with that, the teacher is well-versed in speaking—using a different kind of, you know, language or a different kind of word which the student can grasp. This is a very good quality. Then...

*TESG*: “(ii) He should possess pure motivation of love [towards the disciples] and teach the disciples out of compassion without looking for wealth, fame and so forth.”

GN: This is one of the main points. If the teacher doesn't have love or compassion towards the student, then the teaching may not be beneficial. The motivation of the teacher must be compassionate, and what

he teaches is for the benefit of the student, not for wealth or fame, and so on.

TESG: “(iii) He should possess joyous effort in teaching and so forth for the welfare of others.”

GN: So the teacher also must have joyous effort to teach. If he’s always tired, or looks very bored, then the teaching may not be good.

TESG: “(iv) He should endure hardships in teaching and should not lose patience over the wrong practices of his disciples...”

GN: That means the teacher must be patient or tolerant when giving the teaching. The student may have some problem when the meaning of the teaching is explained—sometimes it’s complicated and creates some confusion, or whatever. If something happens like this, the teacher can be patient with this kind of problem. He should only show the motivation of extending compassion and love toward his student or disciple, or helping him or her, or this kind of attitude or quality.

TESG: “...These are the four altruistic qualities of the teacher in taking care of others...”

GN: In total there are ten qualities of the teacher.

TESG: “...Thus, by seeking a spiritual teacher with these ten qualifications, you should receive instructions and teachings on Mahayana.”

GN: Then, the *Ten Qualifications of the Disciple*:

TESG: “In general, a disciple who listens to the teachings should (i) be impartial...”

GN: Impartial means, for example, whenever we’re talking about the Lamrim or other teachings or instructions, one uses the *four reliances*: 1) you rely on the teaching, not on the person; 2) you rely on the meaning, not on the words; 3) you rely on the definite meaning, not on the indefinite meaning; 4) you rely on wisdom, not the ordinary mind. These *four reliances* are very important when we’re talking about these kinds of things. For example, if a student is not impartial, and the teacher is a family member or relative, or this kind of thing, then the student will attend the teaching. If the teacher is not close to the student, the student won’t attend the teaching—like that. The student has a very partial or biased attitude. So whether or not the teacher is from your country, or a member of your family or relative group, if he or she teaches correctly you must follow him or her. From the student’s side, you should rely on the teaching and not rely on the person teaching. This shows the student should be...

TESG: “(i) impartial, (ii) have the intelligence to distinguish between the correct and incorrect paths, and (iii) be interested in pursuing the correct path. On top of these three, (iv) he should have respect for the teaching and the teacher.”

GN: The student must have some kind of intelligence or wisdom which makes the distinction between good and bad, and bad from good. Otherwise, if the teacher presents a negative path, the student may follow it. This is very important. The student should have great interest in pursuing the correct path. The fourth qualification of the student is he or she must have respect for the teaching and respect for the teachers.

TESG: “In particular, a qualified disciple who is suitable to be led along a path such as this should possess these four qualifications; He should (i) have a great interest in the Dharma, (ii) be attentive while listening to the Dharma, (iii) have great faith in and respect for the Dharma and the teacher and,

(iv) reject faulty explanations and retain good explanations. (v) As a conducive condition for the fourth qualification he should have discrimination, and (vi) to eliminate unfavorable conditions he should be without prejudice. Thus, one should possess these six qualifications to listen to this teaching.”

*TESG*: “Therefore, if you wish to become a qualified teacher of this path you should strive to acquire the above qualities of a spiritual teacher. When listening to the teaching on this path you should train yourself to cultivate the qualifications of a disciple.”

GN: So in this third chapter if we just summarize: we try to understand the three faults of a vessel or disciple, the six attitudes of the disciple, the ten qualities of the teacher, the four general qualifications and the six particular qualifications of the student. This is all for today. Do you have any questions?

Q: Is it possible to have incorrect bias in regard to the topic itself? Not just bias related to the teacher, but can you have bias related to the topic?

GN: From the student’s side, you should be very honest. Bias is dishonest, or not honest. Is this your question?

Q: My question is about whether or not it is a fault to prefer one topic over another topic. Is it a fault of the student if they like one topic more than another topic? For example, say I’m interested in emptiness but I’m not interested in compassion. Can the student have a faulty bias with regard to the topic?

GN: Maybe, maybe. When we are teaching this kind of thing, it’s purpose is for attaining full enlightenment or liberation. If you choose only one side of the path and you don’t like the other side, it is impossible for you to achieve your goal. So from your side, this is wrong. The main goal of studying the Lamrim—the ultimate object of studying Lamrim—is to become a Buddha or to achieve full enlightenment. This is our final goal. If you are a person of great capacity, your objective is to attain enlightenment. If you are a person of middle capacity, your objective is to achieve liberation. If you are a person of low capacity, your objective is to take a higher rebirth in your next life. The three people have three different ambitions or goals. So I’m asking you: are you in any of these three categories? Like that. If you are not in any of these three categories, then you can choose, “I’ll learn about emptiness,” or “I’ll learn about compassion.” You use this kind of teaching only for this life. Like that. Okay? Good question, good question.