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The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment by Tsong-kha-pa, Volume One. Translated by the Lamrim Chenmo Translation Committee.

Joshua W. C. Cutler, Editor-in-Chief; Guy Newland, Editor. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2000, 434 pages, ISBN: 1-55939-152-9 (cloth), \$29.95.

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The "stages of the path" (*lam rim*) text is one of the most important genres in Tibetan Buddhist literature. A *lam rim* attempts to speak about every topic necessary for the practice of Buddhism, summarized as the three principal aspects of the path: turning away from worldly aims, generating compassion, and attaining wisdom. It does so, following the lead of Atīśa's (982-1054) *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment (Bodhipathapradīpa)*, in terms of practices appropriate for persons at three different levels of motivations: those who practice in order to avoid bad rebirths; those who practice in order to liberate themselves from suffering; and those who altruistically seek enlightenment in order to liberate others. All persons, whatever their motivation, need all three principal aspects of the path, but the idea is that the topics are ordered such that one's fundamental motivation can improve as one goes along.

Tsong-kha-pa's *Great Treatise* is universally acknowledged to be the *summa* of the genre

and the basis for virtually all subsequent productions. Although it looks back to Atīśa's *Lamp for the Path*, it far surpasses the latter in its breadth of analysis and its marshaling of Indian sources. Tsong-kha-pa has been compared to Martin Luther for his reform of the practice of tantric Buddhism in Tibet and reestablishment of monastic discipline, but he might also be compared to Thomas Aquinas for his impressive scholarship and its continued influence within his tradition. Tsong-kha-pa makes many original contributions in the *Great Treatise*, and his writing about insight (*lhag mthong, vipaśyanā*) is, as David Ruegg notes in his meticulous introduction, his most remarkable, and sometimes excerpted as an independent work.

The *Great Treatise* is immense, and only portions of it have been translated in the past. It will be published in three volumes. The material in this first volume has not previously been translated into English and is concerned with topics that would lead to renunciation—a decisive turning away from worldly attainments—such as the opportunity of human existence, death, future lives, the Three Jewels, karma, ethics, suffering, and the twelve links of dependent-arising. These are the considerations that a person of "low capacity," one who practices for the sake of avoiding suffering, needs to hear. Tsong-kha-pa carefully and exhaustively analyzes each of these topics in turn. Along the way, he carefully distinguishes the positions of different "schools" of Indian Buddhism, a hallmark of his scholarship that has been perpetuated by the religious order, the *dGe lugs pa*, which he founded.

The project is another consequence of Geshe Ngawang Wangyal's continuing influence on the transmission of Tibetan Buddhism to the West. Geshe Wangyal, a Kalmyk Mongolian who overcame great difficulties to study at Drepung monastery near Lhasa in the 1930s and 1940s, was the first *lama* to make an impact in America. He founded the Lamaist Buddhist Monastery of America in New Jersey in 1958, which became a training center for Tibetan scholars and Western students and is now known as the Tibetan Buddhist Learning Center (Labsum Shedrub Ling). Before his death in 1983, he trained many American students and sponsored many translation projects. His long-time disciple, Joshua W. C. Cutler, coordinated the building of a team of translators that became the Lam Rim Chenmo Committee. (A caveat: I am one of the members of this committee, although I have not participated in the editorial decisions and my contributions are not included in this volume.) Nearly all of them earned their Ph.D. degrees in the 1980s working with scholars at Virginia and Wisconsin who had been Geshe Wangyal's students or associates. Some of them have

written lengthy monographs on the topics that they were asked to translate in the *Great Treatise*. Cutler serves as the editor-in-chief of the project and was assisted by Guy Newland (Central Michigan), his wife Diana Cutler (who shares with him the duties of directing the Tibetan Buddhist Learning Center), and several monks who lived at the TBLC.

The editors faced a number of unique problems. Although conferences were held in advance of the work to come to agreement on translation terms, it must not have been easy to blend the styles of fourteen translators. It has, however, been done seamlessly in this volume. Although most of the translators worked with eminent Tibetan scholars of Tsong-kha-pa's *dGe lugs pa* order, the editors rechecked difficult passages with other distinguished scholars and used other written commentaries. Several Tibetan editions of the *Great Treatise* were compared for differences, which turned out to be inconsequential. The notes reflect a tremendous effort by Cutler and the monks of TBLC to find the original sources of all works cited by Tsong-kha-pa. On the other hand, they contain few explanations of difficult concepts. The reader who wants, or needs, further explication will have to look elsewhere, such as the massive *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* (Wisdom 1991, 978 pages), Pabonka Rinpoche's 1921 lectures on *Iam rim* based principally on the *Great Treatise*.

The text has been organized into twenty-four chapters, each of which begins with Tsong-kha-pa's original and extensive outline (a necessary feature of Tibetan texts, which until recently have not had chapter breaks, a table of contents with page references, and so forth). The entire outline is reproduced in an appendix, which allows one to see exactly how different parts are related and how the text flows. For Tibetanists, the page numbers of the Tibetan text have been placed in brackets within the translation. For a wider audience, virtually all technical terms have been translated (but listed in an extensive English-Tibetan glossary) as have the titles of books cited by Tsong-kha-pa. The index is a bit disappointing. It is easy enough to find texts or persons (and texts can be looked up either through English translation or original language), but not topics, which after all may be treated in more places than what may be ascertained from examining the outline.

Robert A. F. Thurman wrote the foreword and, with his typical enthusiasm, characterizes the *Great Treatise* as "one of the greatest religious or secular works in the library of our human heritage." In the case of the *Great Treatise*, the ebullience seems justified.