

The Three Main Aspects of the Path

By
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English translation by Geshe Tenzin Losel
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Homage to the most venerable teachers.

1. Of all the Conquerors' sacred spoken word,
The meaning's very essence: it's the path
The noble Conquerors' Children do commend,
The entrance for those with the fortune to
Be eager for deliverance: of this,
As much as I am able, I will speak.
2. The fortunate who've no attachment for
The pleasures of existence and who too,
In striving with great effort so to make
The freedoms and enrichments meaningful,
Trust to the path that gives the Conquerors joy,
Lend your attention please, with lucid minds.
3. If pure renunciation's lacking, then
No way to pacify the questing for
The ocean of existence' pleasure-fruits.
And craving for existence, that's what keeps
Embodied beings continually chained;
So then seek out renunciation first.
4. The freedoms and enrichments—hard to find;
Life has no time to spare: mind thus imbued,
Attraction to this life will be reversed.
Think constantly how karma never fails
And on samsara's sufferings and then
Attraction to the next will be reversed.
5. If when you have familiarized this way,
No admiration for the glories of
Samsara even for a moment comes
And if both day and night the mind intent

On liberation manifests, why then
Renunciation has been brought about.

6. Yet if renunciation's not sustained
By pure mind generation, it will not
Become a cause of the most marvellous
Delights of unsurpassed enlightenment.
So then the sensible will generate
The mind supreme set on enlightenment.
7. Four raging river torrents sweeping on;¹
Tight bonds of karma binding, hard to break;
Constrained all round within the confines of
The iron cage of grasping at a self;
Enveloped altogether by the dark,
The comprehensive gloom, of ignorance,
8. Within existence limitless, being born,
And in those births, unbroken in their flow,
The torments of the threefold sufferings:
Revolving in the mind the way it is
For mother beings who've come to such a state,
Give rise to that most excellent of minds.
9. If lacking wisdom knowing how things are,
Despite renunciation and the mind
Set on enlightenment being well aroused,
No way to cut existence at the root;
In that case, therefore, strive to realize
The means, dependent relativity.
10. Whoever see as never fallible
Causality of all phenomena,
Those that are of samsara or beyond;
For whom besides, all focal reference points
Have dropped away, those ones have entered on
The path which fills the Buddhas with delight.
11. The understanding of appearances,
Of relativity infallible,
The understanding too of emptiness,
Within which there is nothing to assert—

While ever these two seem to be distinct,
The Buddha's thought is still not realized.

12. When they are free of alternation and
As one in concert, if from seeing just
That relativity's infallible,
There is assurance altogether that
All ways of taking objects have been stopped,
The view has then been fully analyzed.
13. And furthermore, appearances exclude
Th' extreme of being, while emptiness excludes
Th' extreme of non-being² and, if it is known
How emptiness becomes apparent in
The process of causality, the views
Adhering to extremes won't captivate.
14. When in this fashion you have understood
Exactly as they are the key points of
The principal three aspects of the path,
Resort to solitude and generate
The force of joyous effort. With all speed,
Make good your long-held aspiration, child.

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¹ In terms of true origins: *'khor ba'i chu bo bzhi*, desire, existence [*srid pa*], views, ignorance: I.e, desire realm afflictions, afflictions of the two higher realms [form and formless realms], afflicted views [of all realms], afflicted ignorance [of all realms]. One could theoretically avoid overlap here by restricting desire to the desire realm afflictions other than views and ignorance and by restricting existence to the higher realm afflictions other than views and ignorance. The dictionaries are not clear on this point. In terms of true sufferings: birth, ageing, sickness, death.

² From his translation of these verses, Jeffrey Hopkins' gloss on the way Tsongkhapa sees the two extremes are excluded here:

The extreme of [inherent] existence is excluded by [knowledge of the nature of] appearances [existing only as nominal designations], The extreme of [total] non-existence is excluded by [knowledge of the nature of] emptiness [as the absence of inherent existence and not the absence of nominal existence].

However, in his *Medium-length Exposition of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* Tsongkhapa says:

You are released from all extremes of existence through the absence of inherent existence and you are released from all extremes of non-existence through being able to posit, with respect to that, causes and effects that do not inherently exist. Translation by Jeffrey Hopkins, p. 94, *Tsongkhapa's Final Exposition of Wisdom*.