

Foreword to *Gates to Buddhist Practice* by Chagdud Tulku

During the two-week Long Chen Nying Thig cycle of empowerments, given in 1988 in Canada by His Holiness Penor Rinpoche (now head of the Nyingmapa), I kept wondering if this extraordinary and unsurpassed fund of liberating knowledge would ever make a clean and complete transition to the West: it was hard to imagine. Hard to imagine many Tibetan teachers trusting Westerners enough to give away the whole show; hard to imagine many Westerners serious enough to contemplate it all; hard to imagine many routes whereby the cultural dross of Tibetan surface structures could be to some significant degree stripped away to reveal a cross-cultural Dharma that could translate to the social structures of a modernized West.

I had the same constant and nagging concern in my years of practicing Zen: so much truth and Dharma catastrophically mixed in with so much agrarian, patriarchal, militaristic, feudalistic, caste-bound nonsense: a pure Dharma wrapped in the surface structures (and morals and ethics) of an era that is now two full technological epochs behind the times.

It is still a burning concern for all of us interested in Eastern Dharma, I'm sure: what is Dharma, and what is outmoded, specific-culture-bound dross, once useful but now inappropriate? And what shall we all do about this? What shall we take, and what shall we jettison? And who shall decide?

In this difficult process we can err in two directions, I think. On the one hand, we can swallow the whole package presented by our Eastern teachers, and thus at least assure ourselves of getting the Dharma somewhere in the mixed gruel. And, in the process, insure that the Dharma

will never take serious hold in the West: it cannot adapt and flourish in an environment whose terms it does not speak.

And on the other hand, we run the risk of tossing the baby with the bathwater: The Dharma is tossed with the cultural dross, and all sing songs of "democratizing" the Dharma. Satori is not needed; rigpa is whatever your contracted ego happens to be doing at the moment; the "enlightened mind is the ordinary mind" comes to mean, not primordial awareness prior to grasping, but whatever grasping I want to indulge in. "Emptiness is Form, Form Emptiness" comes to mean, not the utterly free and self-liberating nature of all Form as it arises, but the clinging to any particular form I happen to desire. And likewise: All are equally bodhi-minded, teachers are a pain, the path is unnecessary, the recognition of primordial nature is a quaint oddity: the egoliterians run riot over recognition, and all congratulate themselves on the smiley-face buttons they put on the Original Face of the Dharma.

In the midst of these incredibly difficult circumstances, where we are all struggling as best we can with these demanding decisions, a certain kindness is required, I think, as various solutions, various paths, various combinations are tried, experimented with, floated and tested--and rejected. How will this translation proceed?

Of the many promising paths, I would like to call attention to that being pioneered by Chagdud Tulku, Rinpoche, who has been teaching quietly, effectively, patiently in this country for a decade and a half. Much of Rinpoche's teaching is unregenerately Tibetan, and he is the first to admit this. This is how I was taught the Dharma, he tells us, and this I how I will teach it to you, at which point you can begin the Western translation.

But in the process, Rinpoche has already begun several ground-breaking translations (and "Westernizations") himself, and in very deep fashion. He took the largely unprecedented step of

fully ordaining a Western woman as a lama, and his top students are anything but an old boys club. Long before Dzogchen became something of a fad, Chagdud was one of the first (and still one of the very few) to give the complete and unabridged Dzogchen teachings to Westerners (which he especially concentrates into Winter retreats, a period of about two months each year where students receive intense Great Perfection teachings, sometimes 5 and 6 hours daily, along with extensive practice, covering trekchod, togyal, and the little-known rushan practices; having participated in these retreats, I can testify to their rigorous and thorough nature). His door is literally open to students 24-hours a day, dispensing with the problematic hierarchical access as much as is pragmatically possible. And--no small feat--scandals (of money, food, sex, power) seem to be alien to this community.

I am certainly not saying this is the only way, or even the best way, but it is one of the ways that is quietly, slowly, effectively, gently working, and, I think, deserves a deep bow of appreciation. So it is particularly auspicious that Rinpoche has begun "The Living Dharma Series: The Oral Teachings of Chagdud Tulku," of which *Gates to Buddhist Practice* is the first major publication.

As such, it is introductory in every sense, meant for students who are thinking about entering the Path and for those just beginning the Path--but also of benefit to any students, no matter how developed, for the sheer simplicity and beauty of a brief, succinct overview of the various phases of Dharma, all set ultimately in Rinpoche's profound grasp of the Great Perfection.

Here is a typical summary Rinpoche gives of the three basic levels of Deity Yoga, simple and right to the point:

Because we are bound by obscurations and don't realize our nature as that of the deity, we practice this recognition by creating the visualization and reciting the mantra of the deity, making offerings and prayers. In this way we receive the blessings of those who have accomplished realization of enlightenment. This is outer deity practice.

In the category of inner deity practice, we visualize within our own body as the deity the subtle, pure central channel, within which moves the wisdom wind, or subtle energy, and which contains the even more subtle wisdom spheres called bindus or t'highles. This is the inner deity. By visualizing this mandala, working with the movement of the subtle winds, and reciting mantra, we reveal our own nature as the deity and absolute bodhicitta beyond extremes, unchanging great bliss which resides in the heart.

In secret deity practice we recognize that all of samsara and nirvana has always been equal within basic space beyond extremes, that there is nothing that can be made better or worse, that our mind's pure nature has always been unborn, spontaneous wisdom. With this understanding we have no need to place our hopes on an outer deity, nor is it necessary to exert effort. Through the most profound Great Perfection, we effortlessly, spontaneously attain liberation simply by abiding in recognition of the absolute nature within which everything is contained, from which all phenomena arise inseparably, like the ocean and the waves, or the sun and its rays.

The book itself is divided into five sections: Discovering the path to freedom; The four thoughts that turn the mind; Refuge and bodhicitta; Introduction to Vajrayana; and On the Vajrayana path. As an introduction, it is a wonderfully clear and straightforward presentation. And for more advanced students, it is also an introduction to the books that are to follow. All Dharma practitioners, I think, can look forward to these succeeding volumes. They are all

enormous helps in our continuing work to separate that which is Dharma, and needs fierce protection, and that which is cultural dross, and needs to be gently, gratefully, gracefully let go.

In all the commotion over gurus and devotees, masters and students, knowers and seekers, one thing stands out in the nature of the authentic teacher: they are simply good and decent people—good men, good women, who have seen more than we have seen, perhaps know more than we know, perhaps love more than we love, at least as we begin this journey together. But lo, the awareness transfers, the knowledge is shared, the primordial consciousness flashes forth, and minds and hearts join in this process of transmission that is the living faith and radiant glory of the Divine wherever it appears. And in that shining empty radiance, which blesses and baptizes all that it touches, and all that it sees, and all that it knows, we too become decent people: good men and good women, who pass on what has been seen, share what has been shared, love what has been loved, and awaken others to what has been awakened in us: and the Dharma flourishes, miraculously.