



Bow Down to Holy Lamas – Paying Homage in Buddhist Texts

Background

Buddhist texts usually have an opening line where the author pays homage to a certain quality or attribute on the Buddhist path. You will encounter these opening lines quite frequently, so it's good to know what they look like. By knowing what is the homage object you could even classify the literature into certain sections. For example, if the author pays homage to Manjushri, the text is dealing with the wisdom aspect of the Buddhist path.

Root Text:

Je Tsongkhapa's condensed lamrim text, *lam tso nam sum*, ལམ་ཅན་རྣམ་གསུམ།, the Three Principal Paths, starts with the following line:

།རྗེ་བཙུན་སྤྲུམ་རྣམས་ལ་ཕུག་འཚེལ་ལོ།

je tzun lama nam la chak tsel lo

I bow to all the high and holy lamas.

The lamrim texts define the basis for the spiritual path the reliance on a spiritual teacher.

Explanation:

As this is verse, the start and end has a sha (།).

།རྗེ་བཙུན། *je tzun* has many translations, lord, venerable, reverend. This is applied to great saints and lamas, or applied to very revered teachers. You encounter this term today as well.

The female form of this is །རྗེ་བཙུན་མ། *je tzun ma*, as there are indeed female lamas! As usually the ending །མ། *ma* here indicates a female quality.

སྤྲུམ། *lama* is the word for spiritual teacher, from the Sanskrit word *guru* where *guru* means a 'heavy one' – spiritually, or a teacher of weight or substance.

རྣམས། *nam* is a good word to learn – you will see this one a lot. It usually means a plural of the preceding word, so the obvious first translation of །སྤྲུམ་རྣམས། would be spiritual teachers (plural). However in this context it means all the spiritual teachers.

The other plural word for many is དགེ། *dak*. These two plural endings are used in various contexts, sometimes one is preferred to the other, but there's no definite rule. Sometimes you even need to figure out from the context that it's a plural noun. The key to know is that this indicator usually comes after the noun itself.

Also, Sanskrit has singular, plural and a **dual** indicator. When the Tibetans translated this dual attribute (that's two parts), they used དགེ། *dak*.

ལ། *la* is a very common particle. In this case it's translated as to. To understand what we are doing **to** something, we need to translate the words before and after the particle, as the particle binds the left and the right sides together.

ཕྱག་འཚོལ། *chak tsel* means to bow down, prostrate. The actual meaning behind this translation, the real essence, is that you bow down for a quality or attribute that the other part is giving you, so you really want to bow down and request this thing. ཕྱག་། *chak* is another word for hand, འཚོལ། *tsel* means to request or ask for something.

ལོ། *lo* is the ending part of the verb ཕྱག་འཚོལ། or ཕྱག་འཚོལ་ལོ། *chak-tsel-lo*.

This indicates the ending of a normal sentence (in verses this last particle is sometimes omitted in order to have the same amount of syllables for chanting or memorization purposes). If a word ends with a consonant then the final word has the last consonant plus the –o as in ... ལ་ལོ། . If the last letter is a vowel, then the ending particle is a lonely –o as in ... ལ་བུ་ལོ། *ta bu'o*, it is like....
