*The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*

**Reading Assignment 1**

Lord Gampopa’s life story (pages 305 – 332)

**Background Information**

*Historical context*. JOL is considered by many to be the prototype for the *lamrim* (stages of the path) genre of literature. Prior to invention of this style of presentation, one would have had to study the *sutras* (words of the Buddha) and *shastras* (commentaries by great masters) directly. The sutras alone comprise 108 volumes and are organized chronologically for the most part, making it very difficult to develop the concept of a “path” that a practitioner might follow from end to end. This was, therefore, almost exclusively the province of scholar-monks.

*Lord Gampopa*. Significantly for us, Gampopa (1074 – 1153) wrote this text after he became enlightened so JOL is reliable as a source of spiritual guidance. He was a renowned scholar of Buddhism so it is authoritative as a statement of authentic teachings.

*How to use this text*. JOL is both a philosophy text and a meditation manual. To get the most out of it, students are encouraged to utilize the traditional formula for successfully encountering new teachings: hearing, contemplating, and meditating. By hearing, one takes in the raw information; you simply learn what the words mean, like filling an up-turned cup with tea. Contemplation is the process of testing the teachings as a goldsmith tests gold, of determining whether you believe they are true or useful and whether they accord with your experience. This is where one starts to work with the teachings in a more personal way, making sure you don’t forget them by ensuring that your mental cup does not have a hole in the bottom. Finally, meditation allows us to solidly integrate the teachings into our mindstream, tying the ideals that we adopted to our daily actions. It is important to avoid tainting the teachings with impure conceptions – to embrace the pure, holy Dharma, to make it our own -- without perverting the Dharma to our own ends.

**Discussion Questions**

Why study this particular text? How does this study fit into your spiritual life?

Gampopa said, "In the future, those who think, 'Alas, I haven't met him' should simply study and practice the texts that I composed: *The Precious Jewel Rosary of the Supreme Path,* *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation — the Wish-Fulfilling Gem of the Noble Teachings*, and others. There is no particle of difference; it is the same as meeting me. Those who are having a hard time understanding and practicing the Dharma, think of me and supplicate with devotion. The blessings will arise naturally.” Does having confidence in a teacher affect what we learn? Did learning a little about Gampopa’s life change what you thought about the text?

**Supplementary Reading (life stories of Gampopa)**

*The Great Kagyu Masters* (Gampopa chapter)by Khenpo Konchog Gyaltsen

*The Life of Gampopa* by Jampa MacKenzie Stewart