

GREAT MIDDLE WAY

EMPTINESS ENDOWED WITH ALL THE SUPREME QUALITIES

**BUDDHA NATURE FROM SHAKYAMUNI
TO THE SHENTONG TRADITIONS OF TIBET**



SOURCE BOOK

For internal use only
Exclusively for the Rime Shedra NYC Core Texts Program
A program of Shambhala Meditation Center of New York
First Edition – 2013

Great Middle Way
Emptiness Endowed with all the Supreme Qualities
Buddha Nature from Shakyamuni to the Shentong Traditions of Tibet
Ten Weeks from April 16 to June 25, 2013 (skipping April 23)

Syllabus

- I) **Class One: The Sutra Sources on Buddha Nature by Dr. Karl Brunnholzl**
- II) **Class Two: Indian Sutras and Shastras**
- A) **In Class Reading:**
- 1) The Book of Ones: Luminous, from *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, Trs. Bhikkhu Bodhi , excerpt on page 97
 - 2) The Tathagatagarbhasutra, Trs. William Grosnick, from *Buddhism in Practice*, Ed. by Donald S. Lopez, 12 pages
 - 3) The Dialogue with Queen Srimaladevi, *A Treasury of Mahayana Sutras*, Trs. by The Buddhist Association of the Unites States, excerpt on pp. 377-381
- III) **Class Three: The Indian Shastras**
- A) **Requested Reading:**
- 1) *In Praise of Dharmadhatu*, by Nagarjuna, Trs. Karl Brunnholzl, pp. 117-129
 - 2) *Matreya's Uttaratantra Shastra A Treatise on Buddha Nature*, Trs. Loden Sherab:
 - (a) *Homage and The Buddha*, pp. 21-23 (odd pages only)
 - (b) *Buddha Essence*, pp. 29-69 (odd pages only)
- IV) **Class Four: Definitive versus Provisional Teachings; Tsongkhapa**
- A) **Requested Reading:**
- 1) *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, Robert Thurman, excerpt on pp. 25-34
 - 2) The Provisional and Definitive Meaning of the Transmitted Precepts, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, by Dudjom Rinpoche, Trs. Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein, pp. 187-190
 - 3) Avoidance of Contradiction with the Elucidation of Intention, *Tsongkhapa's Speech of Gold in the Essence of True Eloquence*, by Robert Thurman, pp. 345-355
- V) **Class Five: Longchenpa on Buddha Nature**
- A) **Requested Reading:**
- 1) The Spiritual Potential, *The Precious Treasury of Philosophical Systems*, by Longchen Rabjam, Trs. Richard Barron, pp. 149-174

VI) Class Six: Dolpopa's Shentong Madhyamaka

A) Requested Reading:

- 1) The Doctrine of the Buddha from Dolpo, *The Buddha from Dolpo - A Study of the Life and Thought of Dolpopa*, by Cyrus Stearns, pp. 79-98
- 2) A General Commentary on the Doctrine, by Dolpopa, Trs. Cyrus Stearns, *The Buddha from Dolpo - A Study of the Life and Thought of Dolpopa*, pp. 113-21

B) Additional Sources:

- 1) A Historical Survey of the Shentong Tradition in Tibet, *The Buddha from Dolpo - A Study of the Life and Thought of Dolpopa*, by Cyrus Stearns, pp. 41-55

VII) Class Seven: Shakya Chogden's Synthesis

A) Requested Reading:

- 1) *Visions of Unity - The Golden Pandita Shakya Chokden's New Interpretation of Yogacara and Madhyamaka*, by Yaroslavl Komarovski:
 - (a) Other Emptiness, pp. 127-136
 - (b) Primordial Mind and the Question of Existence, pp. 213-220
- 2) Drop of Nectar of Definitive Meaning, *Three Texts on Madhyamaka*, Shakya Chokden, Trs. Yaroslavl Komarovski, pp. 38-41

B) Additional Sources:

- 1) A Historical Survey of the Shentong Tradition in Tibet: The Zhentong Tradition after Dolpopa, *The Buddha from Dolpo - A Study of the Life and Thought of Dolpopa*, Cyrus Stearns, pp. 55-77

VIII) Class Eight: Karmapa Rangjung Dorje on Buddha Nature; Provisional vs. Definitive Teachings Revisited

A) Requested Reading:

- 1) The Treatise on Pointing out the Tathagata Essence, by Rangjung Dorje, the Third Karmapa, Trs. By Karl Brunnholzl, in *Luminous Heart*, pp. 353-360
- 2) Karma Trinlepa's Explanation of the Sugata Heart, Trs. By Karl Brunnholzl, in *Luminous Heart*, pp. 313-323
- 3) *Neyartha and Nitārtha in Tibet*, by Kennard Lipman, pages 87-91

IX) Class Nine: Kongtrul's Shentong Madhyamaka

A) Requested Reading:

- 1) Shengtong Madhyamaka, *The Treasury of Knowledge: Frameworks of Buddhist Philosophy*, by Jamgon Kongtrul, Trs. Elizabeth Callahan, pp. 249-268

B) Additional Sources:

- 1) Rangtong and Shentong Madhyamaka, *The Rime Philosophy of Jamgon Kongtrul the Great*, by Ringu Tulku, excerpts on pages 214-230

X) Class Ten: Mipham's Synthesis

A) Requested Reading:

- 1) *Jamgon Mipham: His Life and Teachings*, by Douglas Duckworth
 - (a) Self- and Other-Emptiness, pp. 116-117
 - (b) Buddha Nature, pp. 119-122
 - (c) Unity and Buddha Nature, pp. 143-145
 - (d) Unconditioned Buddha Nature, pp. 163-167
- 2) Three Mistakes Regarding Buddha-Nature, *Opening the Wisdom Door of the Rangtong and Shentong Views*, Palden Sherab & Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoches, pp. 97-103

B) Additional Sources:

- 1) Explaining the Mode of Reality of Pure Appearance, *Distinguishing the Views and Philosophies*, by Botrul, Trs. Douglass Duckworth, pp. 199-213

XI) Class Eleven: Dudjom's Great Madhyamaka; Conclusion

A) Requested Reading:

- 1) *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, Trs. Dudjom Rinpoche:
 - (a) The Greater Vehicle: Great Madhyamaka, pp. 169-177
 - (b) The Superiority of Great Madhyamaka to Mind Only, pp. 178-186
- 2) Is There Such a Thing as Shentong Madhyamaka, *The Center of the Sunlit Sky*, Karl Brunnholzl, pp. 445-457

B) Additional Sources:

- 1) *The Center of the Sunlit Sky*, Karl Brunnholzl:
 - (a) The Treatment of Yogacara and the Rangton-Shentong Controversy in Tibet, pp. 500-515

THE TEACHINGS OF THE BUDDHA

The
Numerical
Discourses
of the
Buddha



A Translation of the
Aṅguttara Nikāya



by
Bhikkhu Bodhi



WISDOM PUBLICATIONS • BOSTON

of both, and to realize a superhuman distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones.⁴⁴ For what reason? Because his mind is limpid."

47 (7)

"Bhikkhus, just as sandalwood is declared to be the best of trees with respect to malleability and wieldiness, so too I do not see even one other thing that, when developed and cultivated, is so malleable and wieldy as the mind. A developed and cultivated mind is malleable and wieldy." [10]

48 (8)

"Bhikkhus, I do not see even one other thing that changes so quickly as the mind.⁴⁵ It is not easy to give a simile for how quickly the mind changes."

49 (9)

"Luminous, bhikkhus, is this mind, but it is defiled by adventitious defilements."⁴⁶

50 (10)

"Luminous, bhikkhus, is this mind, and it is freed from adventitious defilements."

VI. LUMINOUS

51 (1)

"Luminous, bhikkhus, is this mind, but it is defiled by adventitious defilements. The uninstructed worldling does not understand this as it really is; therefore I say that for the uninstructed worldling there is no development of the mind."⁴⁷

52 (2)

"Luminous, bhikkhus, is this mind, and it is freed from adventitious defilements. The instructed noble disciple understands this as it really is; therefore I say that for the instructed noble disciple there is development of the mind."⁴⁸

The Tathagatagarbha Sutra
Translated by William H. Grosnick

<http://www.webspawner.com/users/bodhisattva/index.html>

*From "Buddhism in Practice," edited by Donald S. Lopez,
Princeton University Press 1995.*

Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was staying on the Vulture Peak near Rajagṛha in the lecture hall of a many-tiered pavilion built of fragrant sandalwood. He had attained buddhahood ten years previously and was accompanied by an assembly of hundreds and thousands of great monks and a throng of bodhisattvas and great beings: sixty times the number of sands in the Ganges River. All had perfected their zeal and had formerly made offerings to hundreds of thousands of myriad legions of buddhas. All could turn the irreversible wheel of the dharma. If a being were to hear their names, he would become irreversible in the highest path.

Their names were Bodhisattva Dharma-Wisdom, Bodhisattva Lion-Wisdom, Bodhisattva Adamantine Wisdom (Vajra-mati), Bodhisattva Harmonious Wisdom, bodhisattva Wonderful Wisdom, Bodhisattva Moonlight, Bodhisattva Jeweled Moon, Bodhisattva Full Moon, Bodhisattva Courageous, Bodhisattva Measureless Courage, Bodhisattva Transcending the Triple World, Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, Bodhisattva Mahasthamaprapta, Bodhisattva Fragrant Elephant, Bodhisattva Fine Fragrance, Bodhisattva Finest Fragrance, Bodhisattva Main Treasury, Bodhisattva Sun Treasury, Bodhisattva Display of the Standard, Bodhisattva Display of the Great Standard, Bodhisattva Stainless Standard, Bodhisattva Boundless Light, Bodhisattva Bestower of Light, Bodhisattva Stainless Light, Bodhisattva King of Joy, Bodhisattva Eternal Joy, Bodhisattva Jeweled Hand, Bodhisattva Treasury of Space, Bodhisattva King of Light and Virtue, Bodhisattva Self-Abiding King of Dharmas, Bodhisattva Dharani, Bodhisattva Destroying All Ills, Bodhisattva Relieving All the Ills of Sentient Beings, Bodhisattva Joyous Thoughts, Bodhisattva Satisfied Will, Bodhisattva Eternally Satisfied, Bodhisattva Shining on All, Bodhisattva Moon Brightness, Bodhisattva Jewel Wisdom, Bodhisattva Transforming into a Woman's Body, Bodhisattva Great Thunderclap, Bodhisattva Spiritual Guide, Bodhisattva Not Groundless Views, Bodhisattva Freedom in All Dharmas, Bodhisattva Maitreya, and Bodhisattva Manjushri. There were also present bodhisattvas and great beings just like them from countless Buddha lands, whose number equalled sixty times the number of sands in the Ganges River. Together with an uncountable number of gods, nagas, yakṣas, gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas, kinnaras, and mahoragas [all divine and quasi-divine beings], they all gathered to pay their respects and make offerings.

At that time, the Buddha sat up straight in meditation in the sandalwood pavilion and, with his supernatural powers, put on a miraculous display. There appeared in the sky a countless number of thousand-petaled lotus flowers as large as chariot wheels, filled with colors and fragrances that one could not begin to enumerate. In the center of each flower was a conjured image of a Buddha. The flowers rose and covered the heavens like a jewelled banner, each flower giving forth countless rays of light. The petals all simultaneously unfolded their splendor and then, through the Buddha's miraculous powers, all withered in an instant. Within the flowers all the Buddha images sat cross-legged in the lotus position, and each issued forth countless hundreds of thousands of rays of light. The adornment of the spot at

the time was so extraordinary that the whole assembly rejoiced and danced ecstatically. In fact, it was so very strange and extraordinary that all began to wonder why all the countless wonderful flowers should suddenly be destroyed. As they withered and darkened, the smell they gave off was foul and loathsome.

But at that point the World-honored One realized why the bodhisattvas were perplexed, so he addressed Vajramati ("Adamantine Wisdom"), saying, "O good son. If there is anything in the Buddha's teaching that perplexes you, feel free to ask about it." Bodhisattva Vajramati knew that everyone in the whole assembly was perplexed, and so addressed the Buddha, saying, "O World-honored One, why are there conjured Buddha images in all of the innumerable flowers? And for what reason did they ascend into the heavens and cover the world? And why did the Buddha images each issue forth countless hundreds of thousands of rays of light?" Everyone in the assembly looked on and then joined his hands together in respect. At that point, Bodhisattva Vajramati spoke in verses, saying:

"Never ever have I witnessed
A miraculous display like today's.
To see hundreds of thousands and millions of buddhas
Seated in the calyxes of lotus flowers,
Each emitting countless streams of light,
Filling all the fields,
Scattering the dirt of false teachers,
Adorning all the worlds!
The lotuses suddenly wilted;
There was not one which was not disgusting.
Now tell us,
Why did you display this conjured vision?
We see buddhas more numerous than
The sands of the Ganges,

At that time the World-honored One spoke to Vajramati and the other bodhisattvas, saying, "Good sons, there is a great vaipulya-sutra called the 'Tathagatagarbha'. It was because I wanted to expound it to you that I showed you these signs. You should all listen attentively and ponder it well." All said, "Excellent. We very much wish to hear it."

The Buddha said, "Good sons, there is a comparison that can be drawn between the countless flowers conjured up by the Buddha that suddenly withered and the innumerable conjured buddha images with their many adornments, seated in the lotus position within the flowers, who cast forth light so exceedingly rare that there was no one in the assembly who did not show reverence. In a similar fashion, good sons, when I regard all beings with my buddha eye, I see that hidden within the kleśas [negative mental traits] of greed, desire, anger, and stupidity there is seated augustly and unmovingly the tathagata's wisdom, the tathagata's vision, and the tathagata's body. Good sons, all beings, though they find themselves with all sorts of kleśas, have a tathagatagarbha that is eternally unshuffled, and that is replete with virtues no different from my own.

Moreover, good sons, it is just like a person with supernatural vision who can see the bodies of tathagatas seated in the lotus position inside the flowers, even though the petals are not yet unfurled; whereas after the wilted petals have been removed, those tathagatas are manifested for all to see. In similar fashion, the Buddha can really see the tathagatagarbhas of sentient beings. And because he wants to disclose the tathagatagarbha to them, he expounds the sutras and the Dharma, in order to destroy klesas and reveal the buddha nature. Good sons, such is the Dharma of all the buddhas. Whether or not buddhas appear in the world, the tathagatagarbhas of all beings are eternal and unchanging. It is just that they are covered by sentient beings' klesas. When the Tathagata appears in the world, he expounds the Dharma far and wide to remove their ignorance and tribulation and to purify their universal wisdom. Good sons, if there is a bodhisattva who has faith in this teaching and who practices it single-mindedly, he will attain liberation and true, universal enlightenment, and for the sake of the world he will perform buddha deeds far and wide."

At that point, the World-honored One expressed himself in verses, saying:

"It is like the wilted flowers;
 Before their petals have opened,
 One with supernatural vision can see
 The unstained body of the Tathagata.
 After the wilted flowers are removed,
 One sees, without obstacle, the Teacher,
 Who, in order to sever klesas,
 Triumphantly appears in the world.
 The Buddha sees that all kinds of beings
 Universally possess the tathagatagarbha.
 It is covered by countless klesas.
 So I, on behalf of all beings,
 Everywhere expound the true Dharma.
 In order to help them remove their klesas
 And quickly reach the Buddha way.
 I see with my Buddha eye
 That in the bodies of all beings
 There lies concealed the buddhagarbha,
 So I expound the Dharma in order to reveal it.

"Or good sons, it is like pure honey in a cave or a tree, surrounded and protected by a countless swarm of bees. It may happen that a person comes along who knows some clever techniques. He first gets rid of the bees and takes the honey, and then does as he will with it, eating it or giving it away far and wide. Similarly, good sons, all sentient beings have the tathagatagarbha. It is like pure honey in a cave or tree, but it is covered by klesas, which, like a swarm of bees, keep one from getting to it. With my Buddha eye I see it clearly, and with appropriate skilful techniques I expound the Dharma, in order to destroy klesas and reveal the Buddha vision. And everywhere I perform Buddha deeds for the benefit of the world."

Thereupon the World-honored One expressed himself in verses, saying:

"It is just like what happens when the honey in a cave or tree,
 Though surrounded by countless bees,
 Is taken by someone who knows a clever technique
 To first get rid of the swarm.
 The tathagatagarbha of sentient beings
 Is like the honey in a cave or tree.
 The entanglement of ignorance and tribulation
 Is like the swarm of bees
 That keep one from getting to it.
 For the sake of all beings,
 I expound the true Dharma with skilful means,
 Removing the bees of klesas,
 Revealing the tathagatagarbha.
 Endowed with eloquence that knows no obstacle,
 I preach the Dharma of sweet dew,
 Compassionately relieving sentient beings,
 Everywhere helping them to true enlightenment.

"Or, good sons, it is like a kernel of wheat that has not yet had its husk removed. Someone who is impoverished might foolishly disdain it, and consider it to be something that should be discarded. But when it is cleaned, the kernel can always be used. In like fashion, good sons, when I observe sentient beings with my Buddha eye, I see that the husk of klesas covers their limitless Tathagata vision. So with appropriate skilful means I expound the Dharma, to enable them to remove those klesas, purify their universal wisdom, and to attain in all worlds the highest true enlightenment." Thereupon, the World-honored One expressed this in verses, saying:

"It is just like what happens when all the kernels,
 The husks of which have not yet been washed away,
 Are disdained by someone who is impoverished,
 And said to be something to be discarded.
 But although the outside seems like something useless,
 The inside is genuine and not to be destroyed.
 After the husks are removed,
 It becomes food fit for a king.
 I see that all kinds of beings
 Have a buddhagarbha hidden by klesas.
 I preach the removal of those things
 To enable them to attain universal wisdom.
 Just as I have a Tathagata nature,
 So do all beings.
 When they develop it and purify it,
 They quickly attain the highest path.

"Or, good sons, it is like the genuine gold that has fallen into a pit of waste and been submerged and not seen for years. The pure gold does not decay, yet no one knows that it is there. But suppose there came along someone with supernatural vision, who told people,

“Within the impure waste there is a genuine gold trinket. You should get it out and do with it as you please.” Similarly, good sons, the impure waste is your innumerable klesas. The genuine gold trinket is your tathagatarabha. For this reason, the Tathagata widely expounds the Dharma to enable all beings to destroy their klesas, attain true enlightenment, and perform Buddha deeds.”

At that time the World-honored One expressed himself in verses, saying:

“It is just like what happens when gold is submerged
In impure waste, where no one can see it.
But someone with supernatural vision sees it
And tells people about it, saying
“If you get it out and wash it clean,
You may do with it as you will.”
Which causes their relatives and family all to rejoice.
The Well-departed One’s vision is like this.
He sees that for all kinds of beings,
The Tathagata nature is not destroyed,
Though it is submerged in the muddy silt of klesas.
So he appropriately expounds the Dharma
And enables them to manage all things,
So that the klesas covering the Buddha nature
Are quickly removed and beings are purified.”

“Or, good sons, it is like a store of treasure hidden beneath an impoverished household. The treasure cannot speak and say that it is there, since it isn’t conscious of itself and doesn’t have a voice. So no one can discover this treasure store. It is just the same with sentient beings. But there is nothing that the power of the Tathagata’s vision is afraid of. The treasure store of the great Dharma is within sentient beings’ bodies. It does not hear and it is not aware of the additions and delusions of the five desires. The wheel of samsara turns and beings are subjected to countless sufferings. Therefore buddhas appear in the world and reveal to them the Dharma store of the tathagata in their bodies. And they believe in it and accept it and purify their universal wisdom. Everywhere on behalf of beings he reveals the tathagatarabha. He employs an eloquence which knows no obstacle on behalf of the Buddhist faithful. In this way, good sons, with my buddha eye I see that all beings possess the tathagatarabha. And so on behalf of bodhisattvas I expound this Dharma.” At that point, the Tathagata expressed himself in verses, saying:

“It is like a store of treasure
Inside the house of an impoverished man.
The owner is not aware of it,
Nor can the treasure speak.
For a very long time it is buried in darkness,
As there is no one who can tell of its presence.
When you have treasure but do not know of it,
This causes poverty and suffering.
When the buddha eye observes sentient beings,

It sees that, although they transmigrate
Through the five realms of reincarnation,
There is a great treasure in their bodies
That is eternal and unchanging.
When he sees this, the Buddha
Teaches on behalf of all beings,
Enabling them to attain the treasure-store of wisdom,
And the great wealth of widely caring for one another.
If you believe what I have taught you
About all having a treasure store,
And practice it faithfully and ardently,
Employing skillful means,
You will quickly attain the highest path.

“Or, good sons, it is like the pit inside a mango [“amra”] fruit which does not decay. When you plant it in the ground, it grows into the largest and most regal of trees. In the same manner, good sons, when I look at sentient beings with my Buddha vision, I see that the tathagatarabha is surrounded by a husk of ignorance, just as the seeds of a fruit are only found at its core. Good sons, that tathagatarabha is cold and unripe. It is the profound quiescence of nirvana that is brought about by great wisdom. It is called the truly enlightened one, the Tathagata, the arhat, and so on. Good sons, after the Tathagata has observed sentient beings, he reveals this message in order to purify the wisdom of bodhisattvas and great beings.”

At that point, the World-honored One expressed himself in verses, saying:

“It is just like the pit of a mango fruit
Which does not decay.
Plant it in the earth
And inevitably a great tree grows.
The Tathagata’s faultless vision
Sees that the tathagatarabha
Within the bodies of sentient beings
Is just like the seed within a flower or fruit.
Though ignorance covers the buddhagarbha,
You ought to have faith and realize
That you are possessed of samadhi wisdom,
None of which can be destroyed.
For this reason I expound the Dharma
And reveal the tathagatarabha,
That you may quickly attain the highest path,
Just as a fruit grows into the most regal of trees.

“Or, good sons, it is like a man with a statue of pure gold, who was to travel through the narrow roads of another country and feared that he might be victimized and robbed. So he wrapped the statue in worn-out rags so that no one would know that he had it. On the way the man suddenly died, and the golden statue was discarded in an open field. Travelers trampled

it and it became totally filthy. But a person with supernatural vision saw that within the worn-out rags there was a pure gold statue, so he unwrapped it and all paid homage to it. Similarly, good sons, I see the different sentient beings with their many klesas, transmigrating through the long night of endless samsara, and I perceive that within their bodies is the wondrous garbha of the Tathagata. They are august and pure and no different from myself. For this reason the Buddha expounds the Dharma for sentient beings, that they might sever those klesas and purify their Tathagata wisdom. I turn the wheel of the Dharma again and again in order to convert all worlds.”

At that point, the World-honored One expressed himself in verses, saying:

“It is like a traveller to another country
 Carrying a golden statue,
 Who wraps it in dirty, worn-out rags
 And discards it in an unused field.
 One with supernatural vision sees it
 And tells other people about it.
 They remove the dirty rags and reveal the statue
 And all rejoice greatly.
 My supernatural vision is like this.
 I see that beings of all sorts
 Are entangled in klesas and evil actions
 And are plagued with all the sufferings of samsara.
 Yet I also see that within
 The dust of ignorance of all beings,
 The Tathagata nature sits motionless,
 Great and indestructible.
 After I have seen this,
 I explain to bodhisattvas that
 Klesas and evil actions
 Cover the most victorious body.
 You should endeavor to sever them,
 And manifest the Tathagata wisdom.
 It is the refuge of all –
 Gods, men, nagas, and spirits.

“Or, good sons, it is like a woman who is impoverished, vile, ugly, and hated by others, who bears a noble son in her womb. He will become a sage king, a ruler of all the four directions. But she does not know his future history, and constantly thinks of him as a base-born, impoverished child. In like fashion, good sons, the Tathagata sees that all sentient beings are carried around by the wheel of samsara, receiving suffering and poison, but their bodies possess the tathagata’s treasure store. Just like that woman, they do not realize this. This is why the Tathagata everywhere expounds the Dharma, saying, ‘Good sons, do not consider yourselves inferior or base. You all personally possess the Buddha nature.’ If you exert yourselves and destroy your past evils, then you will receive the title of bodhisattvas or world-honored ones, and convert and save countless sentient beings.

At that point, the World-honored One expressed himself in verses, saying:

“It is like an impoverished woman
 Whose appearance is common and vile,
 But who bears a son of noble degree
 Who will become a universal monarch.
 Replete with seven treasures and all virtues,
 He will possess as king the four quarters of the earth.
 But she is incapable of knowing this
 And conceives only thoughts of inferiority.
 I see that all beings
 Are like infants in distress.
 Within their bodies is the tathagatagarbha,
 But they do not realize it.
 So I tell bodhisattvas,
 ‘Be careful not to consider yourselves inferior.
 Your bodies are tathagatagarbhas;
 They always contain
 The light of the world’s salvation.’
 If you exert yourselves
 And do not spend a lot of time
 Sitting in the meditation hall,
 You will attain the path of very highest realization
 And save limitless beings.”

“Or, good sons, it is like a master foundryman casting a statue of pure gold. After casting is complete, it is inverted and placed on the ground. Although the outside is scorched and blackened, the inside is unchanged. When it is opened and the statue taken out, the golden color is radiant and dazzling. Similarly, good sons, when the Tathagata observes all sentient beings, he sees that the buddhagarbha is inside their bodies replete with all its many virtues. After seeing this, he reveals far and wide that all beings will obtain relief. He removes klesas with his adamantine wisdom, and reveals the Buddha body like a person uncovering a golden statue.”

At that point, the World-honored One expressed himself in verses, saying:

“It is like a great foundry
 With countless golden statues.
 Foolish people look at the outside
 And see only the darkened earthen molds.
 The master foundryman estimates that they have cooled,
 And opens them to extract their contents.
 All impurity is removed
 And the features clearly revealed.
 With my Buddha vision
 I see that all sentient beings are like this.
 Within the mud shell of passions,

All have the Tathagata-nature.
 By means of adamantine wisdom,
 We break the mold of the klesas
 And reveal the tathagatagarbha,
 Like pure, shining gold.
 Just as I have seen this
 And so instructed all the bodhisattvas,
 So should you accept it,
 And convert in turn all other beings.”

At that point, the World-honored One spoke to Vajramati and the other bodhisattvas and great beings, saying, “Whether you are monks or laypersons, goods sons and daughters, you should accept, recite, copy, reverse, and widely expound this ‘Tathagatagarbha Sutra’ for the benefit of others. The virtues that you will derive from it are inestimable. Vajramati, if there were a bodhisattva who, for the sake of the Buddha path, worked diligently and assiduously, or who cultivated spiritual powers, or who entered all of the samadhis, or who desired to plant the roots of virtue, or who worshiped the Buddhas of the present, more numerous than the sands of the Ganges River, or who erected more seven-jeweled stupas than there are sands in the Ganges River, of a height of ten yojanas [one yojana equals about nine miles] and a depth and breadth of one yojana, or who set up in those stupas seven-jeweled couches covered with divine paintings, or who daily erected for each Buddha more seven-jeweled stupas than there are sands in the Ganges River, and who presented them to each Tathagata and sravaka in the assembly, or who did this sort of thing everywhere for all the present-day Buddhas, whose number is greater than the sands of the Ganges River, or who erected fifty times more jewelled stupas than there are sands in the Ganges River, or who presented them as an offering to fifty times more Buddhas and bodhisattvas and sravakas in the assembly than there are sands in the Ganges River, and who did this for countless hundreds and thousands and tens of thousands of eons, O Vajramati, that bodhisattva would still not be the equal of the person who finds joy and enlightenment in the ‘Tathagatagarbha Sutra’; who accepts it, recites it, copies it, or even reverses but a single one of its metaphors. O Vajramati, even though the number of good roots and virtues planted by those good sons on behalf of the Buddhas is incalculable, it does not come to a hundredth or a thousandth or any possible calculable fraction of the number of virtues attained by the good sons and daughters who revere the ‘Tathagatagarbha Sutra’.”

At that point, the World-honored One expressed himself in verses, saying:

“If there is a person seeking enlightenment
 Who listens to and accepts this sutra,
 And who copies and reverses
 Even a single verse,
 The subtle and profound garbha of the Tathagata
 Will instantly come forth, accompanied with joy.
 If you give yourself to this true teaching

Your virtues will be incalculable.
 If there is a person seeking enlightenment
 Who has attained great spiritual powers,
 And who desires to make an offering
 To the Buddhas of the ten directions
 And to the bodhisattvas and sravakas of the assembly,
 The number of which is greater
 Than the sands of the Ganges,
 A hundred million times incalculable;
 If for each of the Buddhas
 He constructed a marvellous jewelled stupa
 Ten yojanas in height
 And a breadth of forty li [one li equals about one-third of a mile],
 Within which he would bestow a seven-jeweled seat,
 With all the marvels
 Appropriate for the august Teacher,
 Covered with divine pictures and cushions,
 Each one with its own unique designs;
 If he offered to the Buddhas and the Sangha
 An incalculable number of these,
 More than the sands of the Ganges River,
 And if he offered them
 Without ceasing day or night
 For hundreds and thousands
 And tens of thousands of eons,
 The virtues he would obtain in this manner
 Could not be compared with
 The far greater virtues of
 The wise person who listens to this sutra,
 Who accepts even a single metaphor from it
 And who explains it for the benefit of others.
 Beings who take refuge in it
 Will quickly attain the highest path.
 Bodhisattvas who devote their thought
 To the profound tathagatagarbha,
 Know that all beings possess it
 And quickly attain the highest path.”

At that time the World-honored One again addressed Bodhisattva Vajramati, saying, “An incalculable time far back in the distant past, longer ago than many inconceivable countless eons, there was a buddha who was called the Eternally Light-Bestowing King, the Tathagata, the Arhat, the Truly Enlightened One, the One Possessed of Shining Actions, the One Who has Well Transcended the World, the Master Who Has Grasped the Highest, the Hero of Harmony, the Teacher of Men and Gods, the Buddha, the World-honored One, O Vajramati, why was he called the Eternally Light-Bestowing King? When that Buddha was originally practicing the bodhisattva path and descended as a spirit into his mother’s womb, he always gave off light which penetrated and illuminated in an instant even the tiniest atoms of all the

thousands of Buddha worlds in the ten directions. Any being who saw this light was filled with joy. His klesas were destroyed; he became endowed with the power of form; his wisdom was perfected; and he attained an eloquence which knew no obstacle. If a demizen of hell, a hungry ghost, an animal, King Yama, Lord of the Dead, or an asura saw this light, all of his rebirths in evil realms were cut off and he was born as a god. If any god saw this light, he attained irreversibility in the highest path and was endowed with the five supernatural powers. If anyone who had attained irreversibility saw this light, he attained unborn dharmaputience and the fifty dharanis [incantations] of virtue. Vajramati, all the lands illuminated by that light became stately and pure, like translucent porcelain, with golden cords marking out the eightfold path, luxuriant with the fragrance of various kinds of jewelled trees, flowers, and fruits. Light breezes blew gently through them, producing soft, subtle sounds that expounded freely and unrestrainedly the three jewels, the bodhisattva virtues, the power of good roots, the study of the path, meditation, and liberation. Beings who heard it all attained joy in the Dharma. Their faith was made firm and they were forever freed from the realms of evil rebirth. Vajramati, because all the beings of the ten directions were instantly enveloped in light, at six o'clock every morning and evening they joined their palms together and offered worship. Vajramati, until the time he attained buddhahood and nirvana without a remainder, the place where that bodhisattva issued forth from the womb always shone with light. And after his final nirvana the stupa in which his ashes were kept also gleamed with light.

Consequently, the inhabitants of the heavenly realms called him the Eternally Light-bestowing King. Vajramati, when the Eternally Light-bestowing King, the Tathagata, the Arhat, the Universally Enlightened One, first attained buddhahood, among his Dharma-disciples there was a bodhisattva named Boundless Light, as well as a group of two billion other bodhisattvas. The great being Bodhisattva Boundless Light turned toward the spot where the Buddha was and asked about the 'Tathagatagarbha Sutra', and the Buddha expounded it. He was in his seat for fifty long eons. And because he protected the thoughts of all the bodhisattvas, his voice reached everywhere in the ten Buddha worlds, even down to the smallest atoms, and it spread to hundreds of thousands of Buddha lands. Because of the numberless different backgrounds of the bodhisattvas, he presented hundreds of thousands of metaphors. He called it the 'Mahayana Tathagatagarbha Sutra'. All the bodhisattvas who heard him preach this sutra accepted it, recited it, and practiced it just as it had been explained. All but four of the bodhisattvas attained buddhahood. Vajramati, you must not regard them as exceptional. How could Bodhisattva Boundless Light be different from you? You are identical with him. The four bodhisattvas who had not yet attained buddhahood were Manjusri, Avalokitesvara, Mahasthamaprapta, and you, Vajramati. Vajramati, the 'Tathagatagarbha Sutra' has an abundant capacity. Anyone who hears it can attain the Buddha path."

Then the Buddha again expressed himself in verse, saying:

"Countless eons ago
A Buddha named King of Light
Always shone forth great light
And illumined innumerable lands everywhere.
Bodhisattva Boundless Light

First attained the way under that Buddha,
And requested this sutra.
The Buddha accordingly preached it.
All those who encountered it were victorious,
And all those who heard it
Attained buddhahood.
Except for four bodhisattvas,
Manjusri, Avalokitesvara,
Mahasthamaprapta, and Vajramati –
These four bodhisattvas
All formerly heard this Dharma.
Of them, Vajramati
Was the most gifted disciple.
At the time he was called Boundless Light
And had already heard this sutra.
When I originally sought the way
At the lion standard marking the Buddha place,
I too once received this sutra
And practiced it as I had heard it.
Because of these good roots,
I quickly attained the Buddha path.
Therefore all bodhisattvas
Ought to uphold and preach this sutra.
After you have heard it
And practiced just as it has been explained,
You will become Buddhas just like I am now.
If a person upholds this sutra,
He will comport himself like the World-honored One.
If a person obtains this sutra,
He will be called 'Lord of the Buddhadharmas',
And then, on behalf of the world, he will protect
What all the Buddhas proclaim.
If anyone upholds this sutra,
He will be called 'The Dharma King',
And in the eyes of the world
He will deserve to be praised
Like the World-honored One."

Then, when the World-honored One had finished expounding this sutra, Vajramati, together with the four groups of bodhisattvas, the gods, the gandharvas, the asuras, and the rest, rejoiced at what they had heard the Buddha explain, and they practiced it as they had been told.

The End of the "Tathagatagarbha Sutra"

19 勝鬘夫人會

The True Lion's Roar of Queen Śrīmālā

A Treasury of
Mahāyāna Sūtras
Selections from the Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra

大寶積經

*Translated from the Chinese by
The Buddhist Association of the United States*
Garma C. C. Chang, General Editor

Thus have I heard. Once the Buddha was dwelling in the garden of Anāthapiṇḍada, in the Jeta Grove, near Śrāvastī. At that time, King Prasenajit and Queen Mallikā of Kosala had just had an initial realization of the Dharma. They said to each other, "Our daughter, Śrīmālā, is kind, intelligent, learned, and wise. If she could see the Tathāgata, she would be quick to understand the profound Dharma and would have no doubt about it whatsoever. We should now send an eloquent messenger to her to arouse her sincere faith."¹

Immediately upon this decision, the king and queen wrote Queen Śrīmālā a letter extolling the true merits of the Tathāgata, and sent a messenger, Chandra, to deliver it to her at Ayodhyā. Queen Śrīmālā received the letter with reverence and joy. After she opened and read it, she felt how unusual its message was and spoke to the messenger in verse:

"It is said that the Tathāgata's voice
Is difficult to encounter in this world.
If this saying is true,²
I shall reward you with apparel.
If the Buddha, the World-Honored One,
Has manifested himself to benefit this world,
His compassion will certainly extend to me,
That I may see his true appearance."

As soon as she had so spoken, the Buddha appeared in the air in an inconceivable form, emitting a brilliant light. Queen Śrīmālā and her retinue gathered

The Pennsylvania State University Press
University Park and London

Sūtra 48, Taishō 310, pp. 672-678; translated into Chinese by Bodhiruci.

Why? World-Honored One, if one says that the abiding time of the Tathāgata is immeasurable, equal to the boundless future, and that the Tathāgata can benefit the world with limitless compassion and limitless vows, he is said to speak well. If one says that the Tathāgata is permanent, is an unending Dharma, and is the ultimate refuge of all sentient beings, he is also said to speak well. Therefore, the Tathāgata, the Worthy One, the Supremely Enlightened One, is an inexhaustible refuge, an ever-abiding refuge, and an ultimate refuge, for an infinite length of time stretching into the future, in a world without [any other] protection or refuge.

"The Dharma is the path of the One Vehicle. The Saṅgha is the assembly of the three vehicles. However, the Dharma and the Saṅgha are partial refuges, not ultimate refuges. Why? Although the path of the One Vehicle is taught, it is no longer mentioned after one has attained the ultimate Dharma-body. Because they have fear, those in the assembly of the three vehicles take refuge in the Tathāgata and learn and practice the Dharma; they are still in the active process of working toward supreme enlightenment themselves. Therefore, the two refuges are only limited refuges, not ultimate ones.

"When sentient beings are subdued by the Tathāgata and take refuge in the Tathāgata, their thirst is relieved by the nectar of Dharma, and they generate faith and joy; [consequently] they take refuge also in the Dharma and the Saṅgha. These two refuges are [conceived as] refuges because of sentient beings' faith generated through the quenching of their thirst by the nectar of Dharma. The Tathāgata is not such a refuge; the Tathāgata is a true refuge. Nevertheless, in terms of the ultimate truth, to take refuge in the Dharma and the Saṅgha is to take ultimate refuge in the Tathāgata. Why? The Tathāgata is not different from these two refuges; the Tathāgata is the three refuges.

"Why is the path of the One Vehicle taught? The Tathāgata, the Supreme One, is endowed with the four fearlessnesses and is able to make the true lion's roar. If the Tathāgatas, in accordance with sentient beings' needs, teach the two vehicles as skillful means, [then the two vehicles they teach] are no other than the Great Vehicle, because in the highest truth there are no two vehicles. The two vehicles both merge into the One Vehicle, and the One Vehicle is the vehicle of supreme truth.

"World-Honored One, when Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas reach the initial realization of the four noble truths, it is not with the one [supreme] knowledge that they eradicate the underlying defilements, realize the merits of complete knowledge of the four noble truths, or understand the essence of the four truths. World-Honored One, they lack the supramundane knowledge, so the four knowledges [of the four truths] come to them gradually, each conditioning the next. World-Honored One, the supramundane knowledge, like a diamond [which cuts things at one stroke], is not gradual in nature.

"World-Honored One, the Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas eradicate the underlying defilements by knowing the noble truths in many ways, but they do not possess the supreme, supramundane knowledge. Only the Tathāgata, the Worthy

One, the All-Knowing One, can break up the shells of all defilements by his inconceivable knowledge of emptiness; it is beyond the domain of the Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas.

"World-Honored One, the ultimate knowledge which shatters the shells of defilements is called the supreme, supramundane knowledge. The initial knowledge of the noble truths is not the ultimate knowledge; it is knowledge only leading to supreme enlightenment.

"World-Honored One, the true meaning of the word 'noble' does not apply to [those who follow] the two vehicles. Why? The Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas are said to be noble merely because they can attain a small part of the merits [of a Tathāgata]. World-Honored One, the [real] noble truths are not truths belonging to Śrāvakas or Pratyekabuddhas, and are not merits belonging to them. The [real] noble truths are realized only by a Tathāgata, a Worthy One, a Perfectly Enlightened One, and afterwards revealed, demonstrated, and explained to sentient beings in the world who are confined in shells of ignorance. Hence the name 'noble truths.'

"World-Honored One, the [real] noble truths are very profound, subtle, difficult to perceive, hard to understand, and not to be discriminated; they are beyond the realm of thought and speculation, and they transcend the credence of all the world. They are known only to Tathāgatas, Worthy Ones, Perfectly Enlightened Ones. Why? These truths explain the very profound Tathāgata-embryo.²² The Tathāgata-embryo belongs in the realm of the Buddha and is beyond the domain of the Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas. Since the noble truths are explained on the basis of the Tathāgata-embryo, and since the Tathāgata-embryo is profound and subtle, the noble truths are also profound and subtle, difficult to perceive, hard to understand, and not to be discriminated; they are beyond the realm of thought and speculation, and transcend the credence of all the world. They can be known only by a Tathāgata, a Worthy One, a Perfectly Enlightened One.

"If one has no doubt about the Tathāgata-embryo, which [in ordinary beings] is wrapped in an incalculable number of defilements, he will also have no doubt about the Dharma-body of the Tathāgata, which is beyond all defilement.

"World-Honored One, if one can have true faith in the Tathāgata-embryo and the Buddha's Dharma-body—the inconceivable, esoteric realm of the Buddha—he will then be able to believe in and understand well the two meanings of the noble truths.

"What are the two meanings of the noble truths? They are the active and the nonactive. The active noble truths are the four noble truths in an incomplete sense. Why? When one has to rely on others for protection, he cannot completely know suffering, eradicate all causes of suffering, realize the complete cessation of suffering, or follow in its entirety the path leading to the cessation of suffering. Therefore, he cannot know conditioned things, unconditioned things, or nirvāṇa.

"World-Honored One, the nonactive noble truths refer to the four noble truths in the complete sense. Why? Because, when one can rely on himself for

protection, he can completely know suffering, eradicate all causes of suffering, realize the complete cessation of suffering, and follow in its entirety the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

"Thus, there are in all eight noble truths mentioned; however, the Buddha teaches them only [in terms of] four noble truths. The meaning of the nonactive four noble truths is perfectly realized only by Tathāgatas, Worthy Ones, Perfectly Enlightened Ones, and is beyond the capacity of Arhats and Pratyekabuddhas. Why? Because nirvāna is not to be realized by any dharma, whether superior or inferior, whether low, middle, or high.

"What does it mean that the Tathāgatas perfectly realize the nonactive truths? The Tathāgatas, the Worthy Ones, the Supremely Enlightened Ones, completely know suffering; have eradicated all causes of suffering, which are the defilements; have realized the complete cessation of all suffering, [even that] derived from the aggregates of a mind-created body; and have followed in its entirety the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

"World-Honored One, the term 'cessation of suffering' does not imply the destruction of anything. Why? Because the cessation of suffering has no beginning, no action, no origination, and no end; it is ever-abiding, immovable, intrinsically pure, and free from the shell of defilements.²³

"World-Honored One, the Tathāgata has achieved inconceivable Dharmas more numerous than the sands of the Ganges, Dharmas which embody the wisdom of liberation and which are referred to as the Dharma-body. World-Honored One, when this Dharma-body is not apart from defilements, it is called the Tathāgata-embryo.²⁴

"World-Honored One, the Tathāgata-embryo is the Tathāgata's knowledge²⁵ of emptiness. The Tathāgata-embryo has never been seen or realized by any Śrāvaka or Pratyekabuddha. It is perceived and witnessed only by the Buddhas.

"World-Honored One, the knowledge of emptiness of the Tathāgata-embryo is of two kinds. What are the two? The first is the knowledge that *the Tathāgata-embryo is empty*: that it is apart from all defilements and apart from knowledge which does not lead to liberation. The second is the knowledge that *the Tathāgata-embryo is not empty*: that it contains inconceivable Dharmas more numerous than the sands of the Ganges, which embody the Buddhas' wisdom of liberation.

"World-Honored One, the advanced Śrāvakas can, through faith, gain access to these two knowledges of emptiness. World-Honored One, the knowledge of emptiness possessed by the Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas is connected with and revolves around the four wrong views. Therefore, no Śrāvaka or Pratyekabuddha has ever perceived or realized the complete cessation of suffering. Only the Buddha has realized it directly; he has eradicated all defilements and followed in its entirety the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

"World-Honored One, of the four noble truths, three truths are permanent, and one truth is permanent. Why? The three noble truths [of suffering, the cause of suffering, and the path leading to the cessation of suffering] belong to

the realm of conditioned dharmas. What is conditioned is impermanent, and what is impermanent is destructible. What is destructible is not true, not permanent, and not a refuge. Therefore, in the ultimate sense, the three noble truths are not true, not permanent, and not a refuge.

"World-Honored One, the noble truth of the cessation of suffering is beyond the realm of conditioned dharmas. What is beyond the realm of conditioned dharmas is ever-abiding by nature. What is ever-abiding by nature is indestructible. What is indestructible is true, permanent, and a refuge. For this reason, World-Honored One, the noble truth of the cessation of suffering is in the ultimate sense true, permanent, and a refuge.

"World-Honored One, this noble truth of the cessation of suffering is inconceivable. It is beyond the realm of all sentient beings' mind and consciousness; it is also beyond the domain of all Arhats' and Pratyekabuddhas' knowledge. Just as the myriad colors cannot be seen by a man born blind, or as the sun cannot be seen by a seven-day-old infant, so the noble truth of the cessation of suffering cannot be an object of ordinary people's mind and consciousness, nor is it in the domain of any Śrāvakas' or Pratyekabuddhas' knowledge.

"The consciousness of ordinary people refers to the two extreme views. The knowledge of Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas means their *pure* knowledge.

"Extreme views mean [the views which arise when] one clings to the five aggregates as the self and makes various discriminations. There are two extreme views. What are the two? The eternalistic view and the nihilistic view.

"World-Honored One, if one sees saṃsāra as impermanent and nirvāna as permanent, his view is neither nihilistic nor eternalistic, but is the right view.²⁶ Why? When deluded people see that bodies, sense-organs, and that which thinks and feels all perish in this life, but do not understand the continuation of existence, then, being blind and without the eye of wisdom, they conceive a nihilistic view. When they see the continuity of the mind but fail to see the aspect of its momentary perishing, then being ignorant of the [true] state of consciousness, they conceive an eternalistic view.²⁷

"World-Honored One, the before-mentioned truth is beyond all discrimination and beyond inferior understanding. Because fools have delusive thoughts and cling to misconceived ideas, they believe either nihilism or eternalism.

"World-Honored One, concerning the five aggregates, deluded sentient beings consider the impermanent to be permanent, suffering to be joy, nonself to be self, and the impure to be pure. The Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas, with all their pure wisdom, never glimpse the Buddha's Dharma-body or the state of the Tathāgata.

"If a sentient being, out of faith in the Tathāgata, regards the Tathāgata as permanent, joyous, pure, and possessing a self, he does not see [the Tathāgata] wrongly; he sees him correctly. Why? Because the Dharma-body of the Tathāgata is the perfection²⁸ of permanence, the perfection of joy, the perfection of self, and the perfection of purity. Those sentient beings who assume such a view are said to

have the right view. Those who assume the right view are called the true sons of the Buddha, born from the Buddha's mouth, born from the true Dharma, born from the Dharma miraculously,²⁹ and heirs to the Buddha-Dharma.

"World-Honored One, the so-called pure knowledge is the perfection of knowledge of all Arhats and Pratyekabuddhas. Even this pure knowledge, pure as it is said to be, cannot embrace the realm of the noble truth of the cessation of suffering, let alone the knowledge of [those who practice] the four reliances. Why, then, does the World-Honored One teach the four reliances? In order that the novices of the three vehicles may not be ignorant of the Dharma and may eventually realize its meaning.

"World-Honored One, these four reliances are mundane dharmas. World-Honored One, there is one reliance which is the highest of all reliances, which is the supramundane, supreme, and ultimate reliance—namely, [nirvāṇa,] the noble truth of the cessation of suffering.³⁰

"World-Honored One, the cycle of birth and death [saṃsāra] is based on the Tathāgata-embryo. Because of the Tathāgata-embryo, the beginning [of saṃsāra] cannot be known. World-Honored One, if one says that because there is the Tathāgata-embryo there is saṃsāra, he speaks well.

"World-Honored One, the cycle of birth and death means the cessation of the sense faculties and the immediate arising of new sense faculties. World-Honored One, the two dharmas, birth and death, are the Tathāgata-embryo itself; they are called birth and death from the conventional viewpoint. World-Honored One, death means the cessation of sense faculties, and birth means the arising of sense faculties. The Tathāgata-embryo, however, neither arises nor ceases to be, neither emerges nor vanishes; it is beyond the realm of conditioned [dharmas].

"World-Honored One, the Tathāgata-embryo is permanent and indestructible. Therefore, World-Honored One, the Tathāgata-embryo is the base, the support, and the foundation of the wisdom of liberation. It is also the base, the support, and the foundation of all conditioned dharmas.

"World-Honored One, if there were no Tathāgata-embryo, there would be no abhorrence of suffering and no longing for nirvāṇa.³¹ Why? The seven dharmas—the six consciousnesses and their objects—are momentary and nonabiding, and therefore cannot retain the experience of suffering. Hence, they are unable to abhor suffering or aspire to nirvāṇa. The Tathāgata-embryo has no beginning, neither arises nor ceases, and can retain the experience of suffering. It is the cause of [sentient beings'] renunciation of suffering and aspiration for nirvāṇa.

"World-Honored One, the Tathāgata-embryo is not a self, a personal identity, a being, or a life. The Tathāgata-embryo is not in the domain of sentient beings who believe in a real self, whose thinking is confused, or who cling to the view of emptiness.

"World-Honored One, the Tathāgata-embryo is the store of the dharma-dhātu, the store of the Dharma-body, the store of the supramundane, and the store of intrinsic purity.

"This intrinsically pure Tathāgata-embryo, as I understand it, is always the

inconceivable state of the Tathāgata even if contaminated by defilements, the adventitious dust. Why? World-Honored One, the mind, whether virtuous or non-virtuous, changes from moment to moment, and it cannot be contaminated by defilements, the adventitious dust. Why? Defilements are not in contact with the mind; the mind is not in contact with defilements. How can anything that is not in contact with the mind contaminate the mind? Yet, World-Honored One, because there are defilements there is a defiled mind. It is extremely difficult to know and understand contamination by defilements. Only the Buddha, the World-Honored One, who is the eye, the wisdom, the root of the Dharma, the guide, and the foundation of the true Dharma, can know and see it as it is."

Then the Buddha praised Queen Śrīmālā, saying, "Splendid, splendid! Just as you say, it is difficult to know and understand how the intrinsically pure mind can be contaminated by defilements.

"Śrīmālā, there are two things difficult to understand. What are the two? First, the intrinsically pure mind; second, the contamination of this mind by defilements. Only you and those Bodhisattvas who have already accomplished the great Dharma can accept these two things upon hearing of them. The Śrāvakas can understand them only through faith.

"Śrīmālā, if my disciples strengthen their faith and comply with the Dharma-wisdom, then they will reach the utmost [understanding] of this Dharma. Compliance with the Dharma-wisdom means: contemplation of the sense-organs, the consciousnesses, and their objects; contemplation of karmas and their results; contemplation of the dormant defilements of the Arhats; contemplation of the joy of a liberated mind and the bliss of meditation; and contemplation of the noble, miraculous powers of the Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas. By accomplishing these five skillful contemplations, my present and future Śrāvaka followers will, because of their strengthened faith and their compliance with the Dharma-wisdom, be able to understand the intrinsically pure mind and how it becomes contaminated by defilements. They will reach the utmost [understanding] of this Dharma]. Śrīmālā, the utmost [understanding] is the cause of the Mahāyāna.

"Now you should know that he who has faith in the Tathāgata does not slander the profound Dharma."

Then Queen Śrīmālā said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, there are still other doctrines that will be of great benefit. By the awesome, divine power of the Buddha I will explain them."

The Buddha said, "Excellent! Now speak all you wish."

Queen Śrīmālā said, "There are three kinds of good men and women who can, with regard to the profound Dharma, avoid harming themselves, generate numerous merits, and enter the path of the Mahāyāna. What are the three? They are: the good men and women who have by themselves attained the wisdom of the profound Dharma; those who succeed in complying with the Dharma-wisdom; and those who cannot understand the profound Dharma but fully rely on the Tathāgata, saying, 'This is only known to the Buddha; it is not in my domain.'

"Aside from these three kinds of good men and women, other sentient

*Translation: In Praise of Dharmadhātu*³⁰¹

*I pay homage to Youthful Mañjuśrī.*³⁰²

I bow to you, the dharmadhātu,
Who resides in every sentient being.
But if they aren't aware of you,
They circle through this triple being. [1]

Due to just that being purified
What is such circling's cause,
This very purity is then nirvāna.
Likewise, dharmakaya is just this. [2]

While it's blended with the milk,
Butter's essence appears not.
Likewise, in the afflictions' mix,
Dharmadhātu is not seen. [3]

Once you've cleansed it from the milk,
Butter's essence is without a stain.
Just so, with the afflictions purified,
The dharmadhātu lacks all stain. [4]

Just as a lamp that's sitting in a vase
Does not illuminate at all,
While dwelling in the vase of the afflictions,
The dharmadhātu is not seen. [5]

From whichever of its sides
You punch some holes into this vase,
From just these various places then,
Its light rays will beam forth. [6]

Once the vajra of samādhi
Has completely smashed this vase,
To the very limits of all space,
It will shine just everywhere.³⁰³ [7]

IN PRAISE OF DHARMADHĀTU

Nāgārjuna and
the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje

Translated and introduced by Karl Brunnhölzl

SNOW LION PUBLICATIONS
ITHACA, NEW YORK ♦ BOULDER, COLORADO

Unarisen is the dharmadhātu,
And never cease it will.
At all times without afflictions,
Stainless through beginning, middle, end. [8]

A blue beryl, that precious gem,
Is luminous at any time,
But if confined within its ore,
Its shimmer does not gleam. [9]

Just so, the dharmadhātu free of stain,
While it's obscured by the afflictions,
In saṃsāra doesn't shine its light,
But in nirvāṇa, it will beam.³⁰⁴ [10]

If this element exists, through our work,
We will see the purest of all gold.
Without this element, despite our toil,
Nothing but misery we will produce. [11]

Just as grains, when covered by their husks,
Are not considered rice that can be eaten,
While being shrouded in afflictions,
It is not named "buddhahood." [12]

Just as rice itself appears
When it is free from all its husks,
The dharmakāya clearly manifests,
Once it is free from the afflictions.³⁰⁵ [13]

"Banana trees don't have a pith" —
That's used as an example in the world,
But their fruits—their very pith—
In all their sweetness we do eat. [14]

Just so, when saṃsāra without pith
Is released from the afflictions' peel,
Its fruition, buddhahood³⁰⁶ itself,
Turns into nectar for all beings. [15]

Likewise, from all seeds there are,
Fruits are born that match their cause.
By which person could it then be proved
That there is a fruit without a seed? [16]

This basic element, which is the seed,
Is held to be the basis of all dharmas.
Through its purification step by step,
The state of buddhahood we will attain.³⁰⁷ [17]

Spotless are the sun and moon,
But obscured by fivefold stains:
These are clouds and smoke and mist,³⁰⁸
Rahu's face³⁰⁹ and dust as well. [18]

Similarly, mind so luminous
Is obscured by fivefold stains.
They're desire, malice, laziness,
Agitation and doubt too.³¹⁰ [19]

A garment that was purged by fire
May be soiled by various stains.
When it's put into a blaze again,
The stains are burned, the garment not. [20]

Likewise, mind that is so luminous
Is soiled by stains of craving and so forth.
The afflictions³¹¹ burn in wisdom's fire,
But its luminosity does not. [21]

The sūtras that teach emptiness,
However many spoken by the victors,
They all remove afflictions,
But never ruin this dhātu. [22]

Water dwelling deep within the earth
Remains untainted through and through.
Just so, wisdom in afflictions
Stays without a single stain. [23]

Since dharmadhātu's not a self,
Neither woman nor a man,
Free from all that could be grasped,
How could it be labeled "self"? [24]

In all the dharma that's without desire,
You see neither women nor a man.
"Men" and "women" are just taught
For guiding those plagued³¹² by desire. [25]

"Impermanence," "suffering," and "empty,"
These three, they purify the mind.
The dharma purifying mind the best
Is the lack of any nature. [26]

In a pregnant woman's womb,
A child exists but is not seen.
Just so, dharmadhātu is not seen,
When it's covered by afflictions.³¹³ [27]

Through conceptions of a self and mine,
Discriminations of names, and reasons,
The four conceptions will arise,
Based on the elements and their outcome.³¹⁴ [28]

Even the Buddhas' aspiration prayers
Lack appearance and characteristics.
Immersed in their very own awareness,³¹⁵
Buddhas have the nature of permanence. [29]

Any horns there on a rabbit's head
Are just imagined and do not exist.
Just so, all phenomena as well
Are just imagined and do not exist. [30]

Also the horns of an ox do not exist³¹⁶
As having the nature of particles.
Just as before, so it is after—
What's to be imagined there? [31]

Since [things] dependently originate
And in dependence too will cease,
If not even one [of them] exists,
How can fools imagine them? [32]

How the dharmas of the Sugata
Are established as the very middle³¹⁷
Is through the ox- and rabbit-horn examples. [33]

The forms of sun, moon, and the stars
Are seen as reflections upon water
Within a container that is pure—
Just so, the characteristics are complete. [34]

Virtuous throughout beginning, middle, end,
Undeceiving and so steady,
What's like that is just the lack of self—
So how can you conceive it as a self and mine? [35]

About water at the time of spring,
What we say is that it's "warm."
Of the very same [thing], when it's chilly,
We just say that it is "cold." [36]

Covered by the web of the afflictions,
It is called a "sentient being."
Once it's free from the afflictions,
It should be expressed as "Buddha." [37]

In dependence upon eye and form,
Appearances without a stain occur.
From being unborn and unceasing,
The dharmadhātu will be known. [38]

In dependence upon sound and ear,
Pure consciousness [comes forth],
All three dharmadhātu without signs.
Linked with thought, this will be hearing. [39]

Smelling in dependence upon nose and smell
 Is an example for the lack of form.
 Likewise, it's the nose's consciousness
 That conceptualizes dharmadhātu. [40]

The nature of the tongue is emptiness,
 And the dhātu of the taste is void —
 Being³¹⁸ of the dharmadhātu's nature,
 Consciousness is nonabiding. [41]

From the nature of a body pure
 And the characteristics of the tangible conditions,
 What is free from such conditions
 Is to be expressed as "dharmadhātu." [42]

Once conception and its concepts are relinquished
 With regard to phenomena whose principal is mind,
 It's the very lack of nature of phenomena
 That you should cultivate as dharmadhātu. [43]

What you see and hear and smell,
 What you taste and touch, phenomena as well—
 Once yogins realize them in this way,
 The characteristics are complete. [44]

Eyes and ears and also nose,
 Tongue and body and the mind as well—
 The six āyatanas fully pure.
 This is true reality's own mark. [45]

Mind as such is seen as two:
 Worldly and beyond the world.
 Clinging [to it] as a self, it is saṃsāra—
 In your very own awareness, true reality. [46]

Since desire is extinguished, it is nirvāṇa.
 Hatred and ignorance are extinguished [too].
 Since these have ceased, it's buddhahood itself,
 The very refuge for all beings. [47]

Due to realization and its lack,
 All is in this very body.
 Through our own conceptions, we are bound,
 But when knowing our nature, we are free. [48]

Enlightenment is neither far nor near,
 And neither does it come nor go.
 It's whether it is seen or not
 Right in the midst of our afflictions. [49]

By dwelling in the lamp of prañā,
 It turns into peace supreme.
 So the collection of the sūtras says:
 "By exploring³¹⁹ your self, you should rest!" [50]

Children blessed by tenfold powers' force,
 [See them] like the crescent of the moon,
 But those beings with afflictions
 Do not see Tathāgatas at all. [51]

Just as ghosts with thirst and hunger
 See the ocean to be dry,
 Those obscured by ignorance
 Think that Buddhas don't exist. [52]

What's the Bhagavat supposed to do
 For inferiors and those whose merit's low?
 It's just like the supreme of jewels
 Put in the hand of one who's blind. [53]

But for beings who acquired merit,
 The Buddha dwells before their eyes,
 With the thirty-two marks shining bright
 In their luminous and glorious light. [54]

Though the protector's rūpakāya
 May remain for many eons,
 For guiding those in need of guidance,
 It is just this dhātu that is different. [55]

Ascertaining the object of the mind,
Consciousness will engage in it.
Once your very own awareness becomes pure,
You will dwell right in the bhūmis' nature. [56]

The great and mighty ones' supreme abode,
Akaniṣṭha that's so beautiful,
And consciousness, all three of them,
Fuse into a single one, I say. [57]

As for knowing all among the childish,
The diversity among the noble,
And the great and mighty, infinite in time—
What's the cause of time in eons? [58]

For sustaining the duration,
During eons truly infinite,
Of [all] beings' outer realms
And for creatures' life-force to remain,
This is what's the inexhaustive cause. [59]

In that whose fruition's inexhaustible,
Through the special trait of nonappearance,
Engage in full for prajñā's sake. [60]

Don't think enlightenment is far away,
And don't conceive it as close by.
With the sixfold objects not appearing,
It's awareness of reality just as it is. [61]

Just as from a mix of milk and water
That is present in a vessel,
Geese just sip the milk but not the water,
Which remains just as it is.³²⁰ [62]

Just so, being covered by afflictions,
Wisdom dwells within this body, one [with them].
But yogins just extract the wisdom
And leave the ignorance behind. [63]

As long as we still cling to "self" and "mine,"
We will conceive of outer [things] through this.
But once we see the double lack of self,
The seeds of our existence find their end. [64]

Since it is the ground for buddhahood, nirvāṇa,
Purity, permanence, and virtue too,
And because the childish think of two,
In the yoga of their nonduality, please rest. [65]

Generosity's multiple hardships,
Ethics gathering beings' good,
And patience benefitting beings—
Through these three, the dhātu blooms. [66]

Enthusiastic vigor for all dharmas,
Mind that enters meditative poise,
Prajñā as your permanent resort—
These too make enlightenment unfold. [67]

Prajñā that is joined with means,
Aspiration prayers very pure,
A firm stand³²¹ in power, wisdom too—
These four dharmas make the dhātu flourish. [68]

"To bodhicitta, I pay no homage" —
Saying such is evil speech.
Where there are no bodhisattvas,
There will be no dharmakāya. [69]

Some dislike the seeds of sugar cane
But still wish to relish sugar.
Without seeds of sugar cane,
There will be no sugar. [70]

When these seeds of sugar cane
Are well guarded, fostered, and refined,
Molassis, sugar, candy too
Will then come forth from them. [71]

With bodhicitta, it is just the same:
When it's guarded, fostered, and refined,
Arhats, conditioned realizers, Buddhas too
Will then arise and spring from it. [72]

Just as farmers guarding
Seeds of rice and others,
Thus, the leaders guard all those
Who're aspiring to the supreme yāna. [73]

Just as, on the fourteenth day of waning,
Just a little bit of moon is seen,
Those aspiring to the supreme yāna
Will see a tiny bit of buddhakāya. [74]

Just as when the waxing moon
Is seen more in every moment,
Those who've entered on the bhūmis,
See its increase³²² step by step. [75]

On the fifteenth day of waxing,
Eventually, the moon is full.
Just so, when the bhūmis' end is reached,
The dharmakāya's full and clear. [76]

Having generated this mind truly
Through continuous firm aspiration
For the Buddha, dharma, and the saṅgha,
Irreversibility shows time and again. [77]

Through the ground of darkness³²³ all relinquished
And the ground of brightness³²⁴ firmly seized,
It is ascertained right at this point.
Therefore, it is designated "Joy." [78]

What's been tainted through all times
By the stains of passion and so forth
And is pure [now], without stains,
That is called "The Stainless One." [79]

Once the afflictions' web pulls back,
Stainless prajñā brightly shines.
This dispels all boundless darkness,
And thus is The Illuminating. [80]

It always gleams with light so pure
And is engulfed by wisdom's shine,
With [all] bustle being fully dropped.
Hence, this bhūmi's held to be The Radiant. [81]

It triumphs in science, sports, and arts and crafts,
The full variety of samādhi's range,
And over afflictions very hard to master.
Thus, it is considered Difficult to Master. [82]

The three kinds of enlightenment,
The gathering of all that's excellent,
Arising, ceasing too exhausted³²⁵—
This bhūmi's held to be The Facing. [83]

Since it's ever playing with a web of light
That's configured in a circle
And has crossed saṃsāra's swampy pond,
This is labeled "Gone Afar." [84]

Being cared for by the Buddhas,
Having entered into wisdom's ocean,
Being without effort and spontaneous—
By the hordes of māras, it's Immovable. [85]

Since those yogins have completed
Their discourses teaching dharma
In all awarenesses discriminating perfectly,
This bhūmi is considered Excellent Insight. [86]

The kāya with this wisdom's nature,
Which is stainless, equal to the sky,
Holds [the dharma] of the Buddhas.
From it, the "Cloud of Dharma" forms. [87]

The abode of buddhadharmas
Fully bears the fruit of practice.
This fundamental change of state
Is called the “dharmakāya.” [88]

Free from latent tendencies, you’re inconceivable.
Saṃsāra’s latent tendencies, they can be conceived.
You’re completely inconceivable—
Through what could you be realized? [89]

Beyond the entire sphere of speech,
Outside the range of any senses,
To be realized by mental knowing—
I bow to and praise whatever’s suitable. [90]

In this manner of gradual engagement,
The highly renowned children of the Buddhas,
Through the wisdom of the cloud of dharma,
See phenomena’s empty nature.³²⁶ [91]

Once their minds are cleansed completely,
They have gone beyond saṃsāra’s depths.
They rest calmly on a throne,
Whose nature is a giant lotus. [92]

Everywhere they are surrounded
By lotuses that number billions,
In their many jeweled petals’ light,
And with anthers of enthralling beauty. [93]

They overflow with tenfold power,
Immersed within their fearlessness,
Never straying from the inconceivable
Buddhadharmas without reference point. [94]

Through all their actions³²⁷ of outstanding conduct,
Their merit and their wisdom are complete—
This full moon’s surrounded everywhere
By the stars that are its retinue. [95]

In the sun that is the Buddha’s hands,
Stainless jewels shine their light.
Through empowering their eldest children,
They bestow empowerment on them. [96]

Abiding in this yoga that’s so great,
With divine eyes, they behold
Worldly beings debased by ignorance,
Distracted and terrified by suffering. [97]

From their bodies, without effort,
Light rays are beaming forth,
And open wide the gates for those
Who are engulfed in ignorance’s gloom. [98]

It’s held that those in the nirvāṇa with remainder
Into the nirvāṇa without remainder pass.
But here, the actual nirvāṇa
Is mind that’s free from any stain. [99]

The nonbeing of all beings—
This nature is its sphere.
The mighty bodhicitta seeing it
Is fully stainless dharmakāya. [100]

In the stainless dharmakāya,
The sea of wisdom finds its place.
Like with variegated jewels,³²⁸
Beings’ welfare is fulfilled from it. [101]

*This completes In Praise of Dharmadhātu composed by the great Ācārya³²⁹
Nāgārjuna. It was translated by the Indian Upādhyāya Kṛṣṇa Paṇḍita and the
[Tibetan] translator³³⁰ Tsültrim Gyälwa.³³¹*

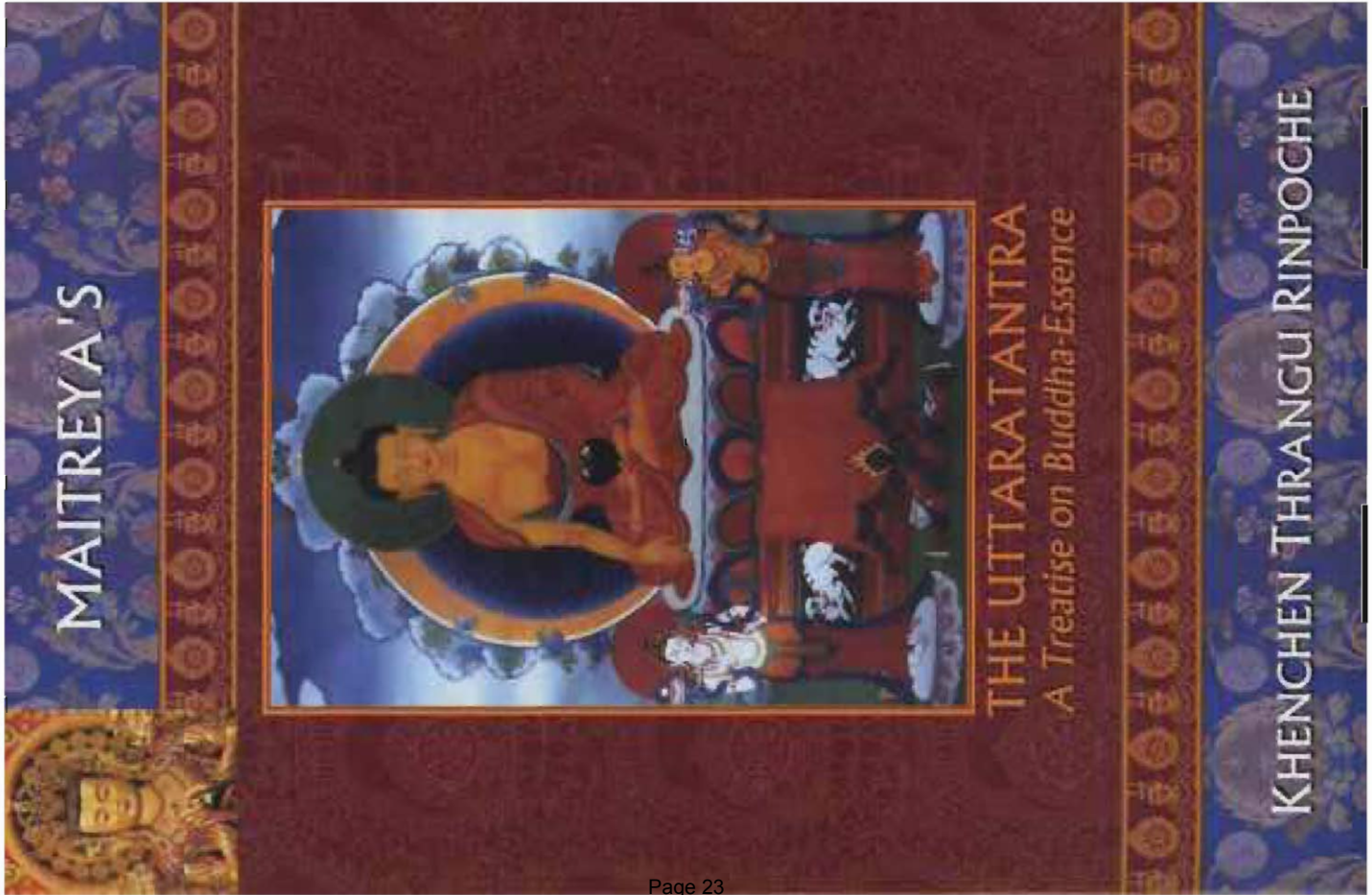
THE ULTIMATE MAHAYANA TREATISE ON THE CHANGELESS CONTINUITY OF THE TRUE NATURE

Homage to all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

1. The entire body of this treatise can be condensed into the following seven vajra abodes. Buddha, dharma, sangha, Buddha-nature, enlightenment, qualities and Buddha-activity.
2. These are in a natural order and one should know the first three abodes to be deriving from the introductory and the latter four from the Wise and Victors' Qualities chapters of the Dharanirajavarasutra
3. From the Buddha comes the dharma, from the dharma comes the realized sangha, from the sangha, the presence of the jnana nature, the essence. Ultimately, when this jnana has been made manifest, there will be supreme enlightenment, powers and so forth, endowed with every ability to accomplish the good for each and everyone.

THE BUDDHA
The First Vajra Point

4. I bow down to the beginningless, centerless and infinite, to perfect peace, Buddha, fully self-awakened and self-blossomed which, once purified and developed,



shows the fearless, permanent path, to bring realization to those with no realization and which, wielding the supreme sword and vajra of knowledge and compassionate love hews down the seedlings of sufferings and destroys the walls of doubt surrounded by the dense forests of mistaken views.

5. Buddhahood is endowed with two-fold value. It is uncreated, spontaneous and not to be realized through external causes. It possesses knowledge, compassionate love and ability.

6. It is the uncreated because its nature is without beginning, middle, or end. It is said to be spontaneity since it is peace, possession of the dharmakaya.

7. Its realization is not due to any external cause since it has to be realized through pure apperception. It is knowledge since it has realization of these three. It is great compassionate love because it shows the way.

8. It is ability because it removes suffering and defilements by jnana and compassion. Through these first three there is value for oneself and through the latter three there is value for others.

THE DHARMA
The Second Vajra Point

9. I bow down to the sun of dharma, which is neither existence nor non-existence nor a combination of existence and non-existence, nor something other than existence and non-existence: the unexamined, beyond all verbal definition, self-cognizant, peace, stainless, brilliant with the light of

jnana, which completely destroys craving for aversion to or dullness towards mental objects.

10. The dharma is that imbued with the intrinsic characteristics of the two truths: that which is and that which causes freedom from bondage. Inconceivable, not two and concept-free, Purity, clarity and the remedy.

11. 'Freedom from bondage' applies to the truth of cessation and the truth of the path. Each of these has qualities three, for each, respectively:

12. It is inconceivable (because it cannot be examined by thought, it is inexpressible and it is the knowledge of the realized), without the two and concept-free, peace. It is purity and so forth, these three being like the sun.

THE SANGHA
The Third Vajra Point

13. I bow down to those whose mind is no longer obscured, the deeply realized who have jnana's perception, awareness of the total purity present in limitless beings. As the true nature of mind is lucid clarity, they see the defilements to be without essence and hence truly realize ultimate no-self – peace within all beings. Thus they know the all-pervading presence of perfect Buddhahood in each and every one of them.

14. The sangha of the wise, who never regress, possesses unsurpassable qualities through pure perception: thusness, all-encompassing and the inner.

15. They have thusness (jnana) because they realize the peaceful nature of all beings,

their absolute purity by nature, and that all defilements have been non-existent from the very beginning.

16. They have the all-encompassing, because their intelligence, which understands the ultimate object of knowledge, perceives that all beings have the nature of omniscience.
17. Such understanding is the seeing of self-cognizant jnana. It is completely pure because the 'stainless space' is free from hindrance and desire.
18. The never-regressing deeply-realized are a refuge for all beings because of their unsurpassable Buddha-jnana since they have exceedingly pure perception, through jnana.
19. The refuges are presented as three, through the aspects of teacher, teaching and those who learn, in relation to three yana and to three kinds of activity.
20. Neither both aspects of dharma nor the deeply-realized sangha constitute a supreme refuge which will last forever: because they are to be abandoned, one is inconstant and one is nothing whatsoever and they (the sangha) fear.
21. Ultimately, only the Buddha constitutes a refuge for beings because the great Victor is the embodiment of dharma which is the ultimate attainment of the sangha.
22. 'Rare and Supreme' because their occurrence is most rare, they are stainless, powerful, the ornament of the world, the best possible thing and changeless.
23. That these three rare and supreme arise from tainted suchness, untainted suchness, the qualities of immaculate enlightenment and the deeds of the Victorious Ones is precisely the domain of those aware of the ultimate.

24. The potential for the rare and sublime is the domain of wisdom of the omniscient. In respective order, there are four reasons why these four aspects are inconceivable.

25. It is pure yet accompanied by defilements, and completely undefiled yet to be purified, it has truly inseparable qualities and is total non-thought and spontaneity.
26. Since there is that to be realized, the realization, the attributes of realization and that which brings realization, then respectively, the first point is the prime cause, that to be purified, and the remaining three points constitute conditions.

BUDDHA-ESSENCE

The Fourth Vajra Point

27. The Buddha-essence is ever-present in everyone because the dharmakaya of perfect Buddhahood pervades all, the suchness is without differences and they have potential.
28. It is taught that all beings possess the essence of Buddha because Buddha-jnana has ever dwelt in them, the immaculate nature is non-dual and the Buddha-potential is named after its result.
29. The meaning intended by 'ultimate domain' should be known through its essential character, cause, result, function, endowments, approach, phases, all-pervasiveness, unalterability and the inseparability of its qualities.
30. Like the purity of a jewel, space, or water, it is always undefiled in essence.

It emerges through aspiration for dharma, highest prajna, meditation, and compassion.

31. Its qualities resemble those of a valued gem because it is powerful, of space because it is unalterable, and of water because it moistens.

32. Hostility towards the dharma, the view that self-entirety exists, fear of samsara's sufferings and disregard for the benefiting of beings are the four sorts of obscuration.

33. ... of the desire-bound, the mistaken, shravakas, and pratyekabuddhas respectively. The causes of purification are four: strong aspiration for the dharma and so on.

34. Those whose seed is aspiration for the supreme yana, whose mother is prajna, originator of Buddha qualities, for whom meditative stability is a comfortable womb, and compassion of a nanny – these are born as Buddha's offspring.

35. Its result has the transcendent qualities of purity, identity, happiness, and permanence. Its function is revulsion for suffering accompanied by an aspiration, a longing, for peace.

36. In brief the result of these constitute the respective remedies to both the four ways of straying from dharmakaya and their four antidotes.

37. This is purity because its nature is pure and all impurities of karma have been removed.

It is true identity because all of the complications of 'self' Or 'no-self' have been absolutely quelled.

38. It is happiness through the demise of the five aggregates, which are of a mental nature, and their causes. It is permanence since the sameness of samsara and nirvana have been realized.

39. Those of compassionate love have, through prajna, completely severed all self-cherishing. They will not want to enter a personal nirvana because they dearly care for every being. Hence, by reliance upon these means to enlightenment i.e. wisdom and compassion, the deeply-realized abide neither in samsara nor the quiescence of a personal nirvana.

40. Were there no Buddha-essence there would be no discontent with suffering nor desire, effort and the aspiration for nirvana.

41. Awareness of samsara's shortcomings, suffering and nirvana's quality, happiness, are due to the existence of this potential. Why is this so? Without such potential they would not be present.

42. It is like a great ocean – an inexhaustible abode containing precious substances of inestimable qualities. It is like a lamp-flame because this essence is endowed with inseparable qualities.

43. Because it contains the essence of dharmakaya, the jnana of the Victors and great compassion, it has been taught as being similar to an ocean through being an environment, its gems and its waters.

44. Since direct cognition, jnana and freedom from stain are inseparable within the immaculate ground, they are compared to the light, heat and color of a flame.

45. Suchness is approached in different ways by ordinary beings, the deeply realized and the completely-enlightened.

This is how those who see the true nature have taught beings about this heart-essence of the Victors.

46. Ordinary beings distort, those who see the truth correct the distortion and tathagatas (approach it) just as it is, undistortedly and without conceptual complication.

47. The impure, those both pure yet impure and those absolutely, perfectly pure are known respectively as ordinary beings, bodhisattvas, and tathagatas.

48. Buddha-essence, summarized by the six points, essence and so forth, is explained through three phases and by means of three terms.

49. Just as space, concept-free by nature is all-embracing, so also is the immaculate space, the nature of mind, all-pervading.

50. This, the general characteristic of all, permeates the faulty, the noble and the ultimate, just as space permeates all forms whether lesser, mediocre or perfect.

51. Since the faults are only incidental whereas its qualities are part of its very character,

it is the changeless reality, the same after as it was before.

52. Space pervades all yet remains absolutely uncorrupted on account of its extreme subtlety; likewise this, present in all beings, remains absolutely taint-free.

53. Just as universes always arise and disintegrate in space, likewise do the senses arise and disintegrate in the uncreated space.

54. Just as space has never been consumed by fire, likewise this is never consumed by the fires of ageing, sickness and death.

55. Earth is sustained by water, water by air and air is sustained by space, but space is sustained by neither air, water nor earth.

56. In a similar way, the aggregates, elements, and entrances are based upon action and the defilements. Action and the defilements are always based upon an erroneous way of using the mind.

57. This aberrant way of using the mind is based upon the purity of the mind, yet mind's true nature is based upon none of the multitude of phenomena.

58. The aggregates, entrances, and elements should be known as being similar to earth. The karma and defilements of beings are to be known as similar to water.

59. The improper way of using the mind is similar to wind whereas the true nature is like the element of space, having no basis and no abiding.

60. The improper way of using the mind abides within the true nature of mind. This improper way of using the mind gives rise to the defilements and to action.

61. From the waters of action and the defilements arise the aggregates, entrances and elements, occurring and disintegrating just like all things that have beginning and end.

62. The nature of mind is like the space element: it has neither causes nor conditions nor these in combination, nor arising, abiding or destruction.

63. This true nature of mind, clarity, is, like space, unchanging, never defiled by desire and so forth, the incidental ills which arise from an improper use of the mind.

64. It is not produced by the waters of karma, defilements and so forth, nor will it be burnt by the cruel fires of aging, sickness and death.

65. One should know the three fires of death, sickness and aging to be similar, **respectively**, to the fires which blaze at the end of time, hellfire and ordinary fire.

66. Free from birth, aging, sickness and death, they have realized the true nature, just as it is. On account of this, the wise

have awakened compassion for beings and, even though free from the sufferings of birth and so forth, they demonstrate them.

67. The deeply-realized have radically removed the sufferings of aging, sickness and death. They are without them because their birth is not brought about by karma and what is defiled.

68. Since they have seen the truth, just as it is, their compassionate nature shows birth, aging, sickness, and death, even though they have transcended birth and the rest.

69. Those blinded by ignorance see the Victors' children, who have realized this changeless true nature, as though they were born and so forth. This is indeed a wonder!

70. Those who have reached the domain of realization appear within the experience of the immature. Thus the skills and compassion of these friends for beings are truly excellent.

71. Even though they have transcended everything worldly, they do not leave the world, acting within the world for the world but unblemished by worldly impurity.

72. A lotus, born of water, by water remains unblemished. Similarly, even though they are born in the world, by worldly beings they are unblemished.

73. In order to accomplish their task, their brilliant intelligence is like a fire blazing incessantly. They are at all times profoundly immersed in meditative union with peace.

74. Due to previous impetus and being concept-free, no effort need be made to bring beings to maturity.
75. They know precisely the ways and means to train anyone and whichever teaching, physical form, mode of conduct or action would be most appropriate.
76. In this way, those of unhindered intelligence excellently engage themselves in benefiting beings as limitless as the sky, continually and spontaneously.
77. The way in which these bodhisattvas act in the worlds, to help beings, during the post-meditation phase, is the same as the tathagatas' way of truly liberating beings.
78. Although this is true, the differences between these bodhisattvas and the Buddhas are like those between the Earth and an atom or between an ox's hoof-print and the ocean.
79. Because it has inexhaustible qualities, its nature is not to alter. It is the refuge of beings because it has no limits in the future. Right to the very end, it is always non-dual because it is non-conceptual. It is also of indestructible character because it is non-compounded, by nature.
80. This has no birth because it is permanent, no death because it is enduring, no ailment because it is peace and no aging because it is unchanging.

81. It has no birth in a mental form because it is permanent. It has no inconceivable death and transmigration, because it is everlasting.
82. It is unharmed by the disease of the finer imprints of karma because it is peace. It has no aging produced by untainted karma because it is immutable.
83. This uncreated space has the attributes of permanence, etc., which should be known respectively through the first pair of verses, and likewise the next pair and the next pair and the last.
84. Being endowed with inexhaustible qualities, it has the attribute of permanence, the quality of not altering. Because it equals the furthest end, its attribute is everlasting, the nature of a refuge. Because its very character is not to conceptualize, it has the attribute of peace: the non-dual true nature. As its qualities are not things fabricated, its attribute is immutability – the changeless nature. It is the dharmakaya. It is the tathagata. It is the highest truth. It is the ultimately-true nirvana. Like the sun and its rays, these aspects are inseparable: thus there is no nirvana apart from Buddhahood itself.
85. In brief, since the meaning of this untainted domain is classified into four aspects, dharmakaya and so forth, the latter should be known as four synonyms for it:
86. that inseparable from the Buddha qualities, the achievement of the potential, just as it is, the true nature, neither false nor unreliable and that having, from time immemorial, the very nature of peace.

87. Buddhahood is every aspect of true, perfect enlightenment.
Nirvana is total removal of impurities and conditioning.
In the true sense, these are not different.

88. The characteristic of liberation is to be inseparable from its qualities – replete, numberless, inconceivable and stainless.
This liberation is the tathagata.
Compare this to artists specialized in drawing, one part or another of the body.
However, whichever part one knew, the others had not fully mastered.

89. Their king and ruler gives them a canvas, with the order, 'All of you must now paint my picture.'

90. Having received the command, they commence the painting as best they can.
However, one of them departs, leaving for some far and foreign land.

91. Since this man was missing, through having gone to another land, the portrait, in all its parts, could not be finished.
This is the example.

92. The artists are generosity, right conduct, patience, and so on.
Voidness, endowed with every finest aspect is said to be like the royal portrait.

93. Prajna, jnana, and perfect liberation are like the sun's light, beams, and orb, because respectively bright, radiant and pure, and being inseparable.

94. Therefore, until the achievement of Buddhahood, nirvana is never achieved, just as without sunlight and sunbeams, the sun could never be seen.

95. Thus has the Victors' essence been described through a tenfold presentation.
One should understand, from the following examples, its presence within the confines of the defilements.

96. Similar to a Buddha in a decaying lotus, honey amidst bees, grains in their husks, gold in filth, a treasure under the ground, shoots and the like piercing through fruits, a Buddha statue inside tattered rags,

97. a monarch in a poor and wretched woman's womb, or a precious image inside some clay, this nature is present within all beings but obscured by the impurity of passing defilement.

98. The impurities correspond to the lotus, the insects, the husks, filth, the ground, the fruit, the tattered rags, the woman severely afflicted by burning sorrows, and clay.
The Buddha, honey, grains, gold, treasure, a mighty tree, precious statue, supreme ruler of the continents and precious image correspond to this supreme, immaculate nature.

99. Someone endowed with pure divine vision, upon seeing a tathagata shining and adorned with a thousand signs, within a decaying lotus, would remove him from the prison formed by the petals of the 'water born.'

100. Similarly the sugatas, with their Buddha eyes, see their own true nature even in those in the worst of hells. Their nature being compassion present until the very end, they bring freedom from all those veils.

101. Once the sugata within the closed, decaying lotus had been seen by one with divine vision, the petals were sliced asunder. Likewise, when the Buddhas see the essence of perfect Buddhahood in beings, yet obscured by an impure shell of desire, hatred and so on, these Victors, through compassion, destroy such obscurations.

102. A clever person trying to get the honey amid the swarm would, having spotted it, employ skillful means to separate that honey from the host of bees and then actually take hold of it.

103. Likewise, the great sages with their omniscient vision, upon seeing the honey-like causal basis, the essence, bring total radical relinquishment of bee-like obscurations.

104. The person trying to get honey surrounded by myriad bees disperses them all and procures the honey just as planned. The untainted intelligence in all beings is like the honey. The Buddhas, skillful victors over bee-like defilements, are like the person.

105. Humans cannot use kernels of grains still in their husks. Whoever wants them as food must de-husk them.

106. Similarly, while Buddhahood, present in all beings but combined with defilement impurities, has not been freed from the defilements, Buddha activity in the three realms will not be accomplished.

107. Incompletely-threshed kernels of rice, buckwheat and barley that are not fully de-husked still have husks and beards. Just as these are not usable, tasty food for humans likewise the 'lord of all qualities,' present in living beings,

and whose form has not yet been freed from defilements, will not give the taste of dharma joy to beings afflicted by the hunger of defilements.

108. The gold of a man on a journey fell into a place containing much rotting filth. Being itself of incorruptible nature the gold remained there for many a century in that same place yet quite unchanged.

109. A god with great divine vision, upon noticing it there, told someone, 'There is gold here. Once you have cleansed this most prized thing, do what can be done with such a precious substance.'

110. In a similar way, the Victors see the quality of beings, which has sunken into the filth-like defilements and shower upon them a rain of true dharma that they may be purified of defilement's mire.

111. Just as the gold fallen into the place rotting with garbage was seen there by a god who, with great insistence, showed the man that most beautiful of things so that it might be completely cleansed, so also do the Victors perceive that most precious perfect Buddhahood within all beings has fallen in defilement's great mire. Therefore they teach them all the dharma in order that they may be purified.

112. Were there an inexhaustible treasure underground, beneath a poor man's hovel, neither would he know of its presence nor could the treasure tell him, 'I am here.'

113. Similarly, as they have not realized the very precious treasure contained within their mind,

the immaculate nature to which nothing need be added and from which nothing need be taken, beings continually experience many varied sufferings of deprivation.

114. The jewel treasure contained in the poor man's house cannot tell him, 'I, the precious treasure, am here' and the man would never know it to be there.

All beings, who possess the dharmakaya treasure within the mansion of their mind, resemble the pauper. Hence the Great Sages have taken worldly birth, perfectly, so that those beings may obtain the treasure.

115. Just as, in the seeds of mangoes and other fruits, the imperishable quality of germinating meeting the presence of prepared soil, water and so forth, will gradually produce the body of a regal tree,

116. so also, within the 'rind' confine of beings' ignorance and the like, is contained the pure dharma nature. When this is sustained by virtue it will gradually attain the very substance of a 'King of Victors'.

117. Just as a tree grows from within the skin of a banana or mango fruit, due to conditions – humidity, sunlight, air, soil, space and time, likewise is the seed and germ of perfect Buddhahood contained within the skin of that fruit: sentient beings' defilements.

Due to the condition, virtue, this true nature will be seen and augmented.

118. A god, having discovered a precious image of a tathagata by the road, yet wrapped in smelly, tattered rags, would tell someone about it lying there, on the roadside, in order that it be recovered.

119. Similarly, when those of un hindered vision, the Buddhas, see the very substance of the tathagatas (present even in animals), but wrapped within the envelope of defilement, they also show the means by which it may be set free.

120. A god with divine vision who had perceived the image of the tathagata, precious by nature, yet wrapped in smelly rags and lying by the roadside would point it out to people, that it might be freed. Just like that, the Victors see Buddha-essence (even in animals) lying by samsara's road, wrapped in defilements' tatters, and they teach the dharma in order that it be liberated.

121. A wretched woman, having no one to whom to turn and living in a pauper hostel, may hold the glory of a future king within her womb yet not know this ruler of men to be present within her.

122. Worldly existence is like the pauper hostel and impure beings are like the pregnant woman. Having this being within her, she has a protector and the embryo is like the immaculate nature.

123. The woman is dressed in dirty clothes, her form is unpleasant and she must endure, in the pauper home, the worst of sorrows even though a ruler dwells within her womb. Similarly, even though a protector resides within, beings believe themselves undefended and never find peace of mind. By defilements overpowered, they remain in 'the ground of suffering.'

124. Upon seeing a complete and peaceful statue, cast in gold yet still within its clay mould, externally like clay,

those who know remove the outer covering to expose the gold that lies within.

125. The perfectly enlightened perfectly see that the nature of mind, luminous clarity, is covered by transient impurities. Hence, they cleanse beings, who are like mines of precious gems, of their obscurations.

126. Just as an expert removes all the clay, knowing the nature of the peaceful statue contained in the bright, stainless gold, likewise the omniscient know mental peace, like cleansed gold. Chipping away, by means of dharma explanation, they clean away each and every obscuration.

127. Within the lotus, bees, husk, filth, ground, fruit skin, tattered rags, woman's womb and the clay mould are

128. the Buddha, honey, kernel, gold, treasure, great tree, precious image, universal monarch and golden figure.

129. Similarly it is said that the shell of defilement covering the nature of beings is beginningless and unconnected with it and that the stainlessness of that nature of mind is beginningless.

130. Desire, aversion and ignorance and these in active state or as latent imprints to be abandoned through insight, or to be abandoned through cultivation (of insight) – the impurities present in the impure and the impurities present in the pure –

131. are nine things illustrated by the example of the lotus 'shell' and so forth. The 'shell' of subsidiary defilements divides into infinite categories.

132. Summarized briefly, the nine impurities, desire, etc., have been well illustrated through nine examples, the lotus 'shell' and so forth respectively.

133. The impurities cause, respectively, the four impurities of ordinary beings, one of arhats, two of beings training in dharma and two impurities of the wise.

134. The mind is delighted by the 'mud-born,' the lotus, but later becomes disappointed: such is desire's happiness.

135. When irritated, bees sting. Likewise, anger arises and brings suffering to the heart.

136. Just as kernels of rice and other grains are covered outwardly by husks and skins, so is the vision of the very essence obscured by the 'shell' of ignorance.

137. Filth is something unpleasant. Akin to it is the active state, causing those who are involved to indulge in gratification

138. When the wealth was covered over, they did not know and could not obtain its treasures.

In a similar way, the spontaneously-arising is concealed by ignorance's latent traces.

139. Just as the germ and so forth split the husk of their grain, through a gradual growth, likewise insight into thatness dispels the obscurations to be abandoned through insight.

140. Those who, by following the path of the realized, have overcome the very pith, beliefs

that the destructible and multiple is a self, still have obscurations to be abandoned, through the primordial wisdom of the path of cultivation. These have been illustrated as being like tattered rags.

141. The impurities which remain in the seven profound levels are compared to the impurities in the confines of a womb.

Release from them is like freedom from that womb whereas non-conceptual jnana is like final maturation.

142. The impurities related in the three profound levels should be known as similar to the traces of clay. These are the ones to be eliminated by the vajra-like samadhi of the 'Great Self'.

143. Thus nine impurities, desire and so forth, correspond to the lotus and other (examples). Buddha-essence corresponds to the Buddha and so on, being the union of three natures.

144. Its three natures are the dharmakaya, tathata and gotra, to be understood respectively through three, one, and five examples.

145. The dharmakaya should be known as two: the perfectly immaculate dharmadhatu and the favorable conditions for it -- the teachings in their profound and manifold aspects.

146. As it transcends the world, there is no example for its manifestation within the world, thus it has been represented by representing the essence to the form of a Tathagata.

147. The teachings in their subtle and profound aspect should be known to be like the unique taste of honey.

The teachings in their manifold aspect are like the various grains in their husks.

148. Thatness is said to be similar to the substance of gold because this essence is immutable, perfectly pure and noble.

149. One should know the potential as having two aspects, similar to the treasure and the tree grown from the fruit: that naturally present since beginningless time and that perfected through proper cultivation.

150. From this twofold potential comes achievement of the three Buddhakayas: the first through the former and the other two through the latter.

151. The embodiment of the magnificent essence should be known as being similar to the statue made of precious substances, being natural and non-created and a treasure of jewel-like qualities.

152. The perfect expression is like the chakravartin, being endowed with the greater dharma's majesty. Like the golden image are the emanations, having the very nature of a representation.

153. This ultimate truth of the spontaneously born is to be understood by faith alone: the orb of the sun may shine but it cannot be seen by the blind.

154. There is nothing whatever to remove from this nor the slightest thing thereon to add. Truly beholding the true nature, when truly seen, complete liberation.

155. The element is devoid of transient things to be purified, that have a character separable from it.

It is not devoid of the ultimate qualities of character indifferntiable from it.

156. He had taught in various places that every knowable thing is ever void, like a cloud, dream or illusion.

Why therefore did the Buddha declare the essence of Buddhahood to be present in every sentient being?

157. There are five mistakes: faint-heartedness, contempt for those of lesser ability, belief in the false, slandering the true meaning and self-cherishing. So that those in whom the above exist may rid themselves of these, thus it was declared.

158. The ultimate and true nature is always devoid of any compounded thing. Therefore it is taught that defilements, actions and their full maturation are like a clouds and so forth.

159. The defilements are taught to be like clouds, karma is likened to the experience in dreams and the full ripening of karma and defilements, the aggregates, are likened to conjurations.

160. Thus was it presented previously and then 'the element exists' was taught ultimately as this continuum in this way so that these five faults could be abandoned.

161. Not learning this, some people are disheartened, through mistaken self-contempt; bodhichitta will not develop in them.

162. Some people, through pride, think, 'I am better,' because bodhichitta has dawned in them. They dwell insistently in the notion that those in whom it has not dawned are inferior.

163. Right understanding cannot arise in those who think like this. Thus, since they misinterpret the true, they will not understand the truth.

164. Beings' defects are not truly real, as they are but a fabrication and incidental. In reality, these faults are not entities whereas the qualities are naturally pure.

165. If one clings to the faults, the untrue, and disparages the qualities, the true, one will not have the loving kindness of the wise which sees the similarity between oneself and others.

166. Through learning in such a fashion, there arises enthusiastic diligence, respect (as for a Buddha), prajna, jnana, and great love.

167. Due to the growth of these five qualities, unhealthy aspects will be absent and similarity will be seen. Through faultlessness, innate qualities and loving kindness which recognizes the similarity of self and other, Buddhahood will be swiftly achieved.

ENLIGHTENMENT
The Fifth Vajra Point

168. Purity, achievement, freedom, benefit for oneself and others, basis, depth, vastness, greatness of nature, their enduring nature and suchness itself

169. present the state of Buddhahood according to its nature, cause, fruit, function, endowments, manifestation, permanence and inconceivability.



OXFORD JOURNALS
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Buddhist Hermeneutics

Author(s): Robert A. F. Thurman

Source: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Mar., 1978), pp. 19-39

Published by: Oxford University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1462752>

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=oup>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Oxford University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

same scriptural status as do those that record the actual sayings of the Buddha. Furthermore, if we note their correspondence with categories of practice, the “Three Disciplines” (*trīśikṣā*) of Morality, Mind, and Wisdom, it can be seen that in some respects the Abhidharma collection is superior to the Sutra collection. The latter merely records sermons given in the context of personal interviews, whereas the former represents the abstract quintessence of all those sermons. Hence, the prefix “*abhi-*,” which means “super-,” is attached to Dharma as “doctrine,” giving “Super-Dharma.” Certainly the early monastic schools devoted most of their energy to study of the Abhidharma, considering it the elite teaching of greatest practical value. And it is the Abhidharma that contains the earliest forms of the hermeneutical concepts such as we will encounter below /8/.

In sum, the first Reliance alerts us to the fact that Buddha’s Dharma claims to stand on its own philosophical cogency, not requiring a personal authoritarianism for its legitimation. We are reminded of the famous goldsmith verse: “O monks—Sages accept my teachings after a thorough examination and not from (mere) devotion; just like a goldsmith accepts gold only after burning, cutting, and polishing” /9/.

IV. Rely on the Meaning, Not the Letter

The three disciplines exactly correspond to the three collections, constituting the “realizational” or “practical Dharma” (*adhigamadharma*), while the latter constitute the “verbal Dharma” (*āgamadharmā*). The point is that the essence of the teachings lies in the practice of them. This is a point that is generally understood about Buddhism, at least conceptually, and we need not elaborate here. Important to note in this regard, however, is that again in the threefold classification, it is wisdom (*prajñā*), here in its Abhidharmic meaning of analytic discernment of realities (*dharmapracicaya*), that is preminent, not either meditation or ethical behavior, although all are of course needed in combination. And, in our special context, it is wisdom that is reached via the practice of hermeneutics. Finally, note that wisdom, presented as the culmination of the intellectual enterprise, as the perfection of analytic reason, the ultimate refinement of discriminative awareness, is considered a practice, considered to be experiential and realizational (*adhigamadharma*). Thus, there is no dichotomy between intellect and experience, the rational and the mystical, and so forth. Enlightenment as wisdom is perfected as the culmination of the most refined rational inquiry, not at the cost of reason.

V. Rely on Definitive Meaning, Not Interpretable Meaning

This brings us to the main subject: for, granted the meaning is more important than the mere letter, how is the meaning to be decided? What kind of meaning is to be accepted? Here we are in the realm of hermeneutical strategies.

The obvious and most simplistic approach to this question of interpretability and definitiveness is found in the Hinayāna Abhidharma

tradition, where “definitive meaning” (*nītārtha*) is defined as “meaning acceptable as literally expressed” (*yathāruṭavaśena jñatavyārtham*), and “interpretable meaning” (*neyārtha*) as “meaning acceptable after interpretation” (*niddharetva grahitavyārtham*) (Poussin, V, 246, n.2). Thus the two can be aligned merely with explicit and implicit teaching, i.e., teachings wherein a teacher directly states his point, and those in which a teacher hints at his point, perhaps because his disciple is not ready for the explicit statement, or perhaps because the impact will be greater when indirectly approached. This interpretation of the two categories has been prevalent in Western scholarship to date, and most Buddhologists translate the terms simply as “implicit” and “explicit” meanings. Indeed, in the Abhidharma context these terms will do, but we shall see how they will fare in the Mahāyāna context. A final point about this type of scheme is that it has no historical dimension. That is to say, a Buddha might switch from interpretable meaning statement to definitive meaning statement in the same discourse, depending upon the context, and thus one would not necessarily consider the entire discourse to be interpretable in meaning or *vice versa*. This is a general characteristic of hermeneutical strategies that depend upon content rather than context.

The next strategy we will consider is set forth in the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*, a Mahāyāna Scripture, believed by Mahāyānists to record the actual words of the Buddha. This Scripture was highly regarded by Asanga, one of the greatest Buddhist philosophers, known as the “hero” (*mahāratha*) of the expansive stage of the path (that emphasizing love and compassion [*maitrikaruṇā*]), and he founded the hermeneutical strategy of the Vijñānavāda school upon it. The strategy is that known as the Three Wheels of the Dharma (a Buddha’s teaching is metaphorically called a “turning of the wheel of Dharma”) and, in the Scripture’s words, runs as follows:

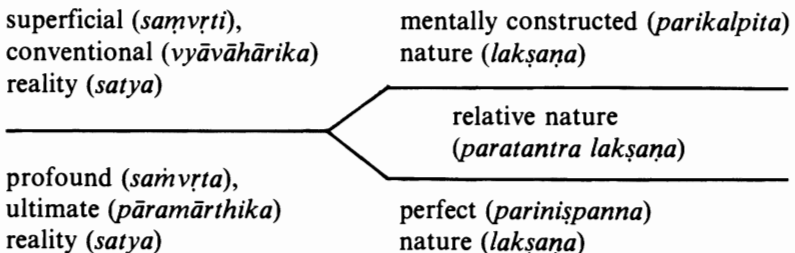
First of all, in the Deer Park at Rshipatana in Varanasi for the sake of those involved in the disciple vehicle, the Lord turned a wonderful, amazing wheel of Dharma, such as had never before been turned in the world by men or gods, and he showed the (sixteen) aspects of the Four Holy Truths. Yet even that wheel of Dharma turned by the Lord was surpassable, provisory, interpretable in meaning, and subject to dispute. Then the Lord, for the sake of those involved in the Mahāyāna turned a second wheel of Dharma even more wonderful and amazing, by proclaiming voidness, starting from the fact of the unreality, uncreatedness, ceaselessness, primordial peace, and natural liberation of all things. Nevertheless, even this wheel of Dharma was surpassable, provisory, interpretable, and subject to dispute. Finally, the Lord, for the sake of those involved in all vehicles turned the third wheel of Dharma, by showing the fine discrimination (of things), addressing the fact of the unreality, uncreatedness, ceaselessness, primordial peace, and natural liberation of all things. And this turning of the wheel of Dharma by the Lord was unsurpassed, not provisory, definitive in meaning, and left no room for dispute. (Lamotte: 85, 206)

Of course, the “first wheel” here is the Hīnayāna teaching, teaching the truth of suffering of *samsāra* and the truth of its cessation in *nirvāṇa* and so on. It presupposes the truth-status of things, both mundane and transcendental, and hence is suitable for the realistically minded. The “second wheel” is the *Prajñāpāramitā* or “Transcendent Wisdom” type of Mahāyāna teaching, teaching the fundamental truthlessness of persons and things, which is called their absolute emptiness. It aims to free its disciples from attachments and ignorance, but can be dangerous if taken too literally and interpreted nihilistically. Therefore, the “third wheel” is the supreme one, being the teaching of the *Saṃdhinirmocana* itself, known as the “subtly discriminative” type of Mahāyāna teaching.

What are the “fine distinctions” drawn in the third wheel that make it “subtly discriminative”?

At stake primarily is the interpretation of the frequent statements of the Buddha in the Mahāyāna scriptures to the effect that all things are empty, often phrased as straight negations, i.e., “there is no form, no feeling, no Buddha, no enlightenment, no non-enlightenment . . .” and so forth. The Mādhyamikas supply the qualifier “ultimately” in all contexts other than the *100,000-Line Prajñāpāramitā*, where the qualifier is in the text. But for the Vijñānavādins, Buddha considered this insufficient, and hence devised a scheme known as the “three natures” (*trilakṣaṇa*). Things have three natures, a mentally constructed (*parikalpita*) nature, a relative (*paratantra*) nature, and a perfect, or absolute (*pariniṣpanna*) nature. When all things are said to be empty of intrinsic substance, this only applies to them in their mentally constructed nature—they continue to exist as relative things, and their ineffable relativity devoid of conceptual differentiation is their absolute nature. Thus, the insertion of the relative category between the conceptual (*parikalpita*) and the absolute (*pariniṣpanna*) insulates the practitioner against nihilism.

The following diagram illustrates the relation of the three natures with the Mādhyamika two reality theory. Using this hermeneutical scheme, the disciple of the third wheel can follow exactly what is said and attain the highest goal, without any hermeneutical dilemma, free of the dangers of naive realism or nihilism, and thus this teaching is definitive in meaning.



It is noteworthy that this scheme of the *Samdhinirmocana*, fundamental in the Vijñānavāda school, is both historical (as relating to Buddha's biography) and philosophical, as relating to the content of the teaching. It seems to present a rather logical progression from the elementary to the advanced. Tsong Khapa (Thurman, 1978: 102ff.) points out that it treats the interpretability of the first two wheels differently, since the first wheel is plainly misleading as it stands, as things are not intrinsically real as they appear, and hence the mode of interpretation involved must justify its teachings as purely pedagogic techniques. Thus, in teaching that wheel, the Buddha expounds the analysis of the elements of internal and external reality in order to convey the message of personal selflessness, leaving intact for the time the hearer's false notions concerning the truth-status of such objects. On the other hand, the second wheel is much closer to the definitive teaching, since it does not actually presume upon any naive realism about external objects, but only falls short of definitiveness by failing to demonstrate explicitly precisely how things are empty. However, once the distinctions brought out in the third wheel are understood, the second wheel can be understood in the light of its intention, and it has great value in practice once one is safe from the danger of a nihilistic extremism. As Tsong Khapa says: "Thus (this Vijñānavāda system) states the *Mother Scripture* (i.e., *Prajñāpāramitā*) to be interpretable not because its meaning is the indiscriminate ultimate unreality of all things, but rather because it requires further explanation, as it is not fit to be literally accepted, hence is not definitive as it is" (Thurman, 1978: 104).

While this system is far more elaborate than the Hīnayāna hermeneutic given above, the literal acceptability or unacceptability of a Scripture still seems to be the basic criterion for its interpretability or definitiveness. Indeed, the Vijñānavāda thinkers did still invoke scriptural authority for the establishment of literally definitive Scriptures. They give three types of literally definitive Scriptures, those that so establish themselves, those that are so established by another Scripture, and those established both by themselves and by others, exemplified by the *Lankāvatāra* and the *Samdhinirmocana*, by the *8000-Line Prajñāpāramitā*, and by the *18,000-Line Prajñāpāramitā*, respectively (Thurman, 1978: 109).

There are two main criticisms of this Vijñānavāda hermeneutic. First, mere literal acceptability is an inadequate criterion of definitiveness, since there are varieties of interpretability, some involving symbolism, some involving intention, some involving context, some merely involving restoring abbreviated expressions, and so forth. Hence the criterion is too rigid and simplistic to cope with the intricacies of the teachings. Second, for all its claims to fine analytic discrimination, three nature theory and all, this hermeneutical strategy is still itself scripturally justified—it is after all the scheme set forth in the *Samdhinirmocana* Scripture. No abstract rational rule or criterion to distinguish between scriptural claims is disclosed, and hence the obvious circularity of invoking a Scripture's own claim of definitiveness as proof of its own definitiveness. The great Mādhyamikas, especially

Candrakīrti and Tsong Khapa, level these criticisms at the Vijñānavāda hermeneutic, before setting forth their own strategies. But before we take these up, we should consider briefly the Chinese tradition.

Although Leon Hurvitz makes no mention of the fact in his important study of Chih I, our first Chinese hermeneutician, the *Samdhinirmocana* was well known in China before his time, having been translated during the fifth century both by Guṇabhadra and by Bodhiruci (Nanjio: 49, 68). It is almost certain that the ten schools mentioned by Chih I as preceding him in elaborating hermeneutical strategies were influenced by this Scripture, as their main categories, “sign-doctrine” and “signless doctrine” correspond precisely to the *Samdhinirmocana* characterization of the first two wheels respectively. However, according to Hurvitz the *Lankāvātāra* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa* were the most important scriptural sources for the Chinese hermeneuticians, which discipline they called “doctrinal analysis” (Hurvitz: 214ff.). Most important for Chih I was the parable of the five stages of milk in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*:

It is just as from a cow one extracts milk, from milk one extracts cream, from cream butter, from butter clarified butter, and from clarified butter the essence of clarified butter. The essence is the best of these. If anyone take it, his ailments shall all be cleared away, and all medicines that are shall enter his system. Good Sir! The Buddha is also like this. From the Buddha are extracted the twelve kinds of scriptures, from them are extracted the (Mahāyāna) sutras, from the (Mahāyāna) sutras are extracted the Expansive (Vaipulya) Scriptures, from the Expansive Scriptures is extracted the *Prajñāpāramitā*, and from the *Prajñāpāramitā* is extracted the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*. (Hurvitz: 217)

We note immediately that Chih I’s doctrine of the five periods follows this scriptural theme almost exactly, with the differences that Chih I reverses the order of numbers one and two, taking the general “sutras” as the *Garland (Avatamsaka) Scripture*, and that he includes the *Lotus Scripture* in the final category, which he takes to be supreme, as teaching the eternality of Buddhahood, the universality of Buddha-nature, and the happiness and bliss of *nirvāṇa*. Of course, the *Garland Scripture*, according to Chih I, has already conveyed this message from the moment of the Buddha’s enlightenment, but only a very few were able to realize its meaning at that time.

Now, although this scheme, like the three wheels of Dharma theory of the *Samdhinirmocana*, is historical in using the Buddha’s biography as framework, Chih I’s analysis of it is somewhat more sophisticated. First, while each period is dominated by the teaching it is associated with, the other teachings may be given to some disciples during any of the periods, as the Buddha’s capacities are ever adaptable to the pedagogical necessities. Second, Chih I coordinates the context-classification to a methodological classification, known as the “Four Methods of Conversion,” which consist of 1) the sudden teaching, which corresponds to the first period of the *Garland Scripture*, which conveys instantaneous enlightenment to those with the

necessary ability, 2) the gradual teaching, corresponding to the second through fourth periods, giving the stages of progress of Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna disciples, 3) the secret indeterminate teaching, which is Buddha's method of teaching a number of different disciples different teachings simultaneously without knowing each other, and 4) the express indeterminate teaching, which is Buddha's method of doing the same to different disciples in the same assembly. The two latter methods are practiced in the first four periods. Finally, Chih I also coordinates the historical context and the methodological scheme with a content-scheme, known as the "Four Principles of Conversion," namely, 1) the storehouse teaching, or the Hīnayāna, 2) the Pervasive (Transitional) teaching, including the Mādhyamika and general analytic counteractive to Hīnayāna notions, 3) the Separate (Discriminate) teaching, which consists of the Vijñānavāda, and 4) the Round teaching, which consists of the teaching of the ultimate nonduality of the world of common experience with the ultimate reality, the Dharma-body, the containment of infinity in an atom, of eternity in an instant, and so on. We may again note here that the first three Principles correspond quite precisely to the three wheels of Dharma of the *Samdhinirmocana*.

This latter classification of Chih I is further refined by Fa Tsang, who pays less heed to the historical approach, although he does not contest it. He puts the last four of Chih I's categories into his first three, adds a new one which is a scriptureless, meditational school, later identified with Ch'an or Zen, and places his own beloved *Garland Scripture* with its miraculous view of reality at the very top. Fa Tsang was one of the greatest philosophers of all of Chinese philosophy, and his elaboration of a hermeneutic is extremely refined and detailed, dealing as it does with most of the major problems of the tradition. These schemes can perhaps best be conveyed in the following diagram (Fig. A).

In general, the Chinese tradition was essentially extremely Scripture-oriented, as relatively few of the myriad Indian scientific treatises (*śāstra*) were translated into Chinese. Thus, while the hermeneutical strategies were extremely refined in some respects, they still based themselves finally on a particular Scripture, Chih I on the *Lotus*, Fa Tsang on the *Garland*, others on the *Pure Land*. Their hermeneutics' main thrust was to place their favorite Scripture at the apex of a doctrinal pyramid. In contrast, of course, was the Ch'an school, which eschewed the whole enterprise, purporting to cast aside all Scriptures ultimately, although this is perhaps one of the most important of all hermeneutical strategies, certainly eminently rational. But I will return to this in a final section.

Now for the final hermeneutical strategies we proceed to those of the Mādhyamikas of India and Tibet, which are the most content-oriented perhaps, although they too depart from a scriptural basis, though one with a difference.

In the *Akṣayamatīrdeśa Scripture* there is the following famous passage:

Which scriptures are definitive in meaning? And which interpretable?
Those teaching superficial realities are interpretable, and those

(Figure A)

SCRIPTURE-BASED HERMENEUTICAL SCHEMES

<p>Three Wheels of Dharma from the <i>Samādhirimocana</i></p>	<p><i>Chih I's T'ien Tai</i></p>	<p><i>Fa Tsang's Hua Yen</i></p>
<p>1. Hinayāna, at Deer Park, for disciples, realistic, on Four Holy Truths.</p> <p>2. Mahāyāna, <i>Prajñāpāramitā</i>, at Vulture Peak, for bodhisattvas, emptiness, signlessness, interpretable to avoid nihilism.</p> <p>3. Mahāyāna, <i>Samādhirimocana</i>, at Vaiśālī and in heaven, for bodhisattvas, three natures, fine distinctions, definitive in meaning, etc.</p>	<p>Historical</p> <p>1. <i>Garland Sutra</i>, at Bodhi tree for three weeks; sudden teaching.</p> <p>2. Hinayāna, twelve years; gradual teaching.</p> <p>3. General Mahāyāna to correct Hinayāna narrowness, eight years; gradual teaching.</p> <p>4. <i>Prajñāpāramitā</i>, twenty-two years, on emptiness; gradual teaching; secret and express indeterminate teachings in 1 through 4.</p> <p>5. <i>Lotus Sutra</i>, for eight years; <i>Mahāparinirvāna</i> for twenty-four hours, supreme teaching of universal enlightenment; sudden teaching again.</p>	<p>Philosophical</p> <p>1. Storehouse teaching (Hinayāna)</p> <p>2. Pervasive teaching (Mādhyamika)</p> <p>3. Discriminate teaching (Vijñānavāda)</p> <p>4. Round teaching (<i>Lotus Sutra</i>, etc.)</p>
<p>1. Hinayāna</p> <p>2. Preliminary Mahāyāna (including Chih I's historical Nos. 3 and 4).</p> <p>3. Final Mahāyāna (including Chih I's No. 5 i.e., <i>Lotus Sutra</i> and <i>Mahāparinirvāna</i>).</p> <p>4. Instantaneous Enlightenment; Scriptureless school, later identified with Ch'an.</p> <p>5. Round Doctrine of the <i>Garland (Avatamsaka) Scripture</i>; one in one, all in all, one in all, all in one, etc.</p>		

teaching ultimate realities are definitive in meaning. Those teaching various words and letters are interpretable, while those teaching the profound, the hard to see, and the hard to understand are definitive. Those introducing the path are interpretable. Those introducing the fruit are definitive. Those scriptures that teach as if there were a lord in the lordless, using such expressions as "ego," "living being," "life," "soul," "creature," "person," "human," "man," "agent," "experiencer," etc., are interpretable. And those scriptures that teach the doors of liberation, the emptiness of things, their signlessness, wishlessness, inactivity, birthlessness, creationlessness, beginninglessness, lifelessness, personlessness, and lordlessness, and so on, are definitive in meaning. You should rely on the latter, not the former. (Thurman, 1978: 111) /10/

Here we note a new hermeneutical strategy whose essence is the alignment of the categories of interpretable and definitive with the epistemological and ontological categories relative/absolute, superficial/ultimate, i.e., the two realities (*satya dvaya*) of Buddhist philosophy /11/. This is a departure from the equation of the Vijnānavāda, namely, interpretable/definitive = implicit/explicit, since now a non-explicit teaching that concerns itself with the ultimate reality is definitive in meaning, whether or not it requires some verbal interpretation due to its indirectness, figurativeness, or laconicness. On the other hand, a completely explicit statement that concerns itself with some superficial, mundane state of affairs is interpretable in meaning, even if it can be understood literally as it is, since it fails to communicate the ultimate condition of said state of affairs. For example, a statement such as "there is no Buddha," which often occurs in the *Transcendent Wisdom Scriptures*, is definitive in meaning, since its meaning, i.e., that in terms of ultimate reality there is no such relative thing as even a Buddha, concerns the ultimate condition of a Buddha, even though it requires the verbal interpretation of supplying the phrase "in the ultimate," since it does not mean that there is no such thing as a Buddha in the relative, superficial, conventional and mundane realm. Indeed such statements are often made by the Buddha himself, and obviously on the relative level he is making the statement, and thus is there, as it were. Further, as an example of the second type, the statement "the sprout is born from the seed" is interpretable in meaning, even though it is true on the relative, conventional level, since it fails to communicate the ultimate condition of the sprout and the seed, neither of which exist ultimately, while the sentence seems to assume that they do indeed have objective existence.

The philosophically minded will here object that there appears to be a lack of parity at work in the analysis of the statements. After all, the latter statement can be interpreted by supplying the qualification "conventionally" (just as we have supplied the qualification "ultimately" in the first case), which would then make the statement definitive in meaning, while the former statement could be said to be assuming the "reality" of a Buddha in the course of denying it. The mistake that gives rise to this objection is the idea that there is indeed parity between the two realities, i.e., the relative, and the ultimate.

However, the ultimate takes precedence over the relative, not intrinsically or ontologically, as it were, since the “two” realities are in fact merely presented as a conceptual dichotomy, but epistemologically, since the mind’s orientation toward the absolute is more beneficial and liberating than is its orientation toward the relative, which after all includes suffering and ignorance, and so on. Thus, the statement “there is no Buddha” contains the negation of the truth-status of a Buddha, among all other relative things, and points to his ultimate status which is truthlessness, or realitylessness, or emptiness. The directionality of our cognition here is correct, does not need further correction, even though a word might be supplied here and there, since it aims at the absolute, as it were, aimed by an absolute negation. On the other hand, the statement “the sprout is born from the seed” confirms our habitual unconscious assumption of the intrinsic reality of sprout, seed, birth, etc., and brings us no closer to the ultimate, and hence the directionality of our cognition is wrong, we are confirmed in our “naive realism” about persons and things, i.e., our habitual clinging to their objective substantiality, and although the interpretive correction with the supplied qualification “conventionally” may give us pause by having us think “ah, that means not ultimately,” this is secondary and the statement remains interpretable according to this strategy.

Thus, in this system, “interpretation” involved in “interpretable meaning” does not mean any sort of trivial verbal interpretation or qualification, but only that type of interpretation that brings out the ultimate relevance, meaning, reality of things. And the only type of verbal statement that does not require such interpretation is that which is absolutely negative, an absolute negation in the logical sense of only negating its negandum without establishing or implying anything else. Therefore, to apply this scheme to the three wheels of Dharma, the middle wheel of Dharma, that of the *Prajñāpāramitā*, is seen to be the most definitive, although the third and even the first contain some statements that can be accepted as definitive. Such flexibility is there because on this interpretation, the subject matter, the concern, superficial or ultimate, is all-important.

Of course, not all Mādhyamikas were agreed among themselves on the precise ramifications of this principle. Of the two main sub-schools, the Svātantrika and the Prāsāṅgika /12/, the former drew back from the rigorously critical position of the latter and attempted to syncretize the Mādhyamika system with the Vijñānavāda system. Thus Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla took the interesting position that in a strong sense both the second and third wheels of Dharma were definitive in meaning (Thurman, 1978: 150ff.). Indeed, according to the latter, it is the *Samdhinirmocana* interpretation of the *Prajñāpāramitā* message of pure negation that renders the *Prajñāpāramitā* definitive in meaning. For, he reasons, the *Prajñāpāramitā* negations are often laconic, failing to mention the qualification “ultimately,” and the *Samdhinirmocana* type of interpretation through the three nature theory enables us to remember the constant need to assume the qualifier “ultimately” as understood. Thus, a nihilistic skepticism,

or “repudiation” (*apavāda*), is avoided by negating the literalness of negations, and a naive realism, or “presumption” (*samāropa*), is avoided by negating the truth-status of the relative. On this latter point, he differs from the Vijñānavādins, who believe the relative nature to be ultimately real, as distinct from the constructed nature, which is unreal. The type of reality involved here is called by the Vijñānavādins “intrinsic identifiability” (*svalakṣaṇasiddhatvam*), and is distinguished from “objective reality” (*svarūpasiddhatvam*). Kamalaśīla reorganizes somewhat these different types of reality-status, by denying the ultimacy of the relative and perfect natures, i.e., seeing the relative/absolute formula as a conceptual, mentally constructed dichotomy, while affirming the intrinsic identifiability of both of them on the conventional level, as he thinks this necessary to avoid the extremism of repudiation (*apavāda*), or nihilistic skepticism. Thus, not only does he use the *Samdhinirmocana* to interpret the *Prajñāpāramitā* in order to discover the latter’s definitiveness (i.e., not to prove its interpretability as did the Vijñānavāda), but he also uses subtle logical reasoning to interpret the *Samdhinirmocana* itself, taking the emptiness of mentally constructed things (*parikalpitalakṣaṇa*), defined as “nature-unreality” (*lakṣaṇaniḥsvabhāva*), to mean that the relative and the perfect lack ultimacy, instead of to mean that the relative and the perfect gain their ultimacy when distinguished from the ultimately unreal mentally constructed, which is how the Vijñānavāda takes it, and is what is explicitly said in the *Samdhinirmocana* itself. In essence, the Svātantrika tactic is to reconcile the Vijñānavāda with the Mādhyamika by accepting the three nature theory as conventionally, not ultimately, valid.

Candrakīrti, the greatest of the Prāsāngika philosophers, was dissatisfied with any such attempt of the Svātantrikas. He considered the *Akṣayamatīrdeśa* statement to mean just what it said, that only statements concerning the ultimate are definitive, and that all statements concerning any aspect of the superficial, conventional, social, relative reality are interpretable. Thus, the whole interpretive scheme of the three natures is unacceptable to him and is itself interpretable, and he will not allow any intrinsic identifiability in the relative at all. But the full impact of his hermeneutic will be explained under the final heading below.

VI. Rely on (Non-conceptual) Wisdom, Not on (Dualistic) Consciousness

The fourth step of the Buddhist hermeneutical movement serves as a reminder of the unswerving dedication to practice of the Buddhist teaching. Thus, even after having discerned the definitive meaning of the Scriptures as consisting of an absolute negation of the truth-status, intrinsic reality, selfhood, etc., of all things, relative and absolute, having discerned it with a critical consciousness that is properly called “intellectual wisdom” (*cintāmayīprajñā*), one still has not concluded the hermeneutical enterprise. In fact, it cannot be concluded until enlightenment is attained, until intellectual wisdom concerning the ultimate has been combined with one-pointed concentration, which combination leads to the holy knowledge of the space-like equipoise (*ākāśavatsamāhitajñāna*), the meditative wisdom

*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism
Its Fundamentals and History*

Section One: The Translations

Dudjom Rinpoche, Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje

Translated and edited by
Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein



5 *The Provisional and Definitive Meaning of the Transmitted Precepts*

[92a.6-95b.6] When these teachings are allocated between the provisional meaning (*drang-don*) and the definitive meaning (*nges-don*), the three successive promulgations of the doctrinal wheel have the same common purpose, that is, to purify the stains covering the single nucleus of the tathāgata. They differ only in the greatness of their means which respectively purify the gross, subtle and very subtle stains that suddenly arise to obscure it. Thus, by teachings such as impermanence, the first promulgation arouses the mind from saṃsāra and causes it to approach nirvāṇa. In the second, the three approaches to liberation become an antidote to attachment to superficial characteristics, which include the mundane view of self; and the third intends that the extensive way of the sugatas be comprehended through the topics of that irreversible promulgation. This is extensively mentioned in passages such as the following from the *Sūtra of the Dialogue with King Dhāraṇīśvara* (*Dhāraṇīśvarapṛcchāsūtra*, T 147):

Son of the enlightened family, it is in the same way as, for example, a skilled jeweller, who knows well how gems are refined, takes an impure stone from a species of precious gemstones and, after wetting it in dirty salt water, has it cleaned with goats' hair, and similarly after then wetting it in a beverage has it cleaned with a woollen cloth, and afterwards, in the very same way, wets it in a herbal solution and has it cleaned with fine clean linen; when it is well refined, the stainless gem is said to be "a great gemstone of the species beryl". Likewise, when a sentient being has first been induced to enter the Vinaya by the disturbing topics such as suffering and impermanence, and has then been made to realise the way of the tathāgatas by means of the three approaches to liberation, he subsequently is made to enter the objective range of the tathāgatas by the topics of the irreversible promulgation. To enter in this

way and realise reality is to become an unsurpassed object of offering.

Thus, the three successive [promulgations] of transmitted precepts are classified into those of provisional meaning and those of definitive meaning. It says in the *Sūtra which Decisively Reveals the Intention* (*Sandhinirmocanasūtra*, T 106):

The first promulgation of the doctrinal wheel by the Transcendent Lord, through which the four sublime truths were taught to those who enter the vehicle of the pious attendants, is surpassed, circumstantial, of provisional meaning and continues to be a basis for debate. Then, beginning with the Transcendent Lord's teaching that things have no essence, the second promulgation of the doctrinal wheel which teaches emptiness to those who correctly enter the greater vehicle is surpassed, circumstantial, of provisional meaning and continues to be a basis for debate. And then, beginning with the Transcendent Lord's teaching that things have no essence, the third promulgation of the wheel of the exceedingly wondrous and amazing doctrine, which is well distinguished, was revealed to those correctly entering the entire vehicle. That promulgation of the doctrinal wheel is unsurpassed, not circumstantial, of definitive meaning and does not become a basis for debate.

The allocation of provisional and definitive meaning is determined in ways such as these.

The intermediate promulgation has accordingly been allocated provisional meaning because in this turning of the doctrinal wheel the enlightened attributes of ultimate reality, such as the powers of the sugatas, are mostly revealed to be empty of their own essence (*rang-stong*), though they are not actually empty of their own essence, and because it does not teach that these attributes are well distinguished and without inherent contradiction. For such reasons it is said to be surpassed and so on. Definitive meaning, on the other hand, is allocated to the third promulgation because [therein] things of relative appearance are empty of their own essence and the ultimate reality is empty of extraneous entities, so that the nature of these [attributes] is qualitatively well distinguished and then revealed.

If there are those who say that definitive meaning is contained in the intermediate promulgation because it teaches the transcendental perfection of discriminative awareness, but that the final promulgation has an intention of provisional meaning because it teaches the contrary, then they have not made an accurate examination. The attributes, such as uncreated and unceasing original quiescence, which are terms relating

to the transcendental perfection of discriminative awareness, are most extensively revealed in the final promulgation and very profoundly revealed in the vehicle of indestructible reality.

However, there is no distinction in the essence of the transcendental perfection of discriminative awareness, which is said to be distinguished as surpassed or unsurpassed depending on whether it is unclearly, clearly or very clearly revealed; for all the limitless [attributes] which are revealed by names such as the nucleus of the sugata, the expanse of reality, the mind of inner radiance, the naturally pure enlightened family, the genuine goal and the emptiness which is the essential nature devoid of substantiality, are identical in the naturally present, non-dual pristine cognition. This same [pristine cognition] is the transcendental perfection of discriminative awareness. Therefore the master Dignāga [in his *Epitome of the Transcendental Perfection of Discriminative Awareness*, v.1] has said:

Being the transcendental perfection of
 Discriminative awareness,
 This non-dual pristine cognition is the Tathāgata.
 Since it possesses the meaning
 Which is to be accomplished,
 This term applies to the central texts and path.¹⁸¹

The final transmitted precepts are conclusively proven to be the definitive meaning by all [scriptural] transmissions and [logical] reasoning. The Conqueror himself made the classification of provisional and definitive meaning, and moreover, in his own words said:

A monk who is called Asaṅga
 Learned in the meaning of these treatises,
 Will differentiate in many categories
 The sūtras of provisional and definitive meaning.

The final [transmitted precepts] were accordingly allocated conclusive definitive meaning by this sublime [Asaṅga], whom the Conqueror had prophetically declared would differentiate the provisional and definitive meanings.

There are, on the other hand, no authoritative passages declaring the intermediate [transmitted precepts] to have definitive meaning and the final [transmitted precepts] provisional meaning. Indeed, even if the proponents of the Vijñānavāda could have composed these final transmitted precepts as such, they would have mistaken the correct sequence revealed by the above simile of the refinement of gemstones and by other similes which refer to the medical treatment of ill-health and the study of letters.¹⁸² There would be no need even for the definitive order made by the Conqueror himself and the sublime [Asaṅga], and there would be limitless other such faults. In addition, after first teaching

the provisional meaning and intermediately the definitive meaning to those who require training, the provisional meaning would then be repeated, so that one would be obliged to consider just what is the Buddha's intention *vis-à-vis* the teaching. It should be known that by proceeding in this way, there would be all kinds of unbearable evils, such as allocating the conclusive definitive meaning to philosophical systems which propound substantial existence, slandering the buddhas and great bodhisattvas as holders of a relative teaching, and abandoning this doctrine of the nucleus.

Furthermore, since the three vehicles have reference to the definitive meaning gathered in the final promulgation, the definitive meaning is conclusively proven. This is extensively mentioned in passages such as the following from the *Sūtra of the Irreversible Wheel (Avaivartakrasūtra, T 240)*:

Then, in reverence to the Transcendent Lord, the great bodhisattva Madhuranirghoṣa arose from his lotus posture and asked, "Transcendent Lord, what is the dimension of this world system of Patient Endurance?"

He replied, "Son of the enlightened family, in the western direction of this world system there is a world system which outnumbers the sands of the River Ganges."

Then he asked, "Transcendent Lord, in that world system which Transcendent Lord teaches the doctrine?"

"He is called the Tathāgata Śākyamuni."

"What manner of doctrine does he teach?"

"He begins from the three vehicles."

"What are the three vehicles?"

"He reveals the doctrine beginning with the three vehicles, which are the vehicle of the pious attendants, the vehicle of the self-centred buddhas and the greater vehicle."

"Do these conform to the doctrine revealed by the Transcendent Lord Buddha?"

"Son of the enlightened family, the doctrines revealed by the [different] Transcendent Lord Buddhas do conform."

"Just in what respect do the doctrines revealed by the Transcendent Lord Buddhas conform?"

And he replied, "The doctrines revealed by the Transcendent Lord Buddhas conform to the irreversible promulgation."

AVOIDANCE OF CONTRADICTION
BETWEEN THE (DIALECTICIST) SYSTEM
AND THE SCRIPTURES

Tsong Khapa's
Speech of Gold in the
Essence of True Eloquence

Reason and Enlightenment in
the Central Philosophy of Tibet

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

Robert A. F. Thurman



Princeton University Press
Princeton, New Jersey

AVOIDANCE OF CONTRADICTION WITH THE
ELUCIDATION OF INTENTION

Now one may wonder, if the interpretations of the other masters are as explained above, how does this master interpret the differentiation between reality and realitylessness with reference to the three natures and the method of presenting interpretable and definitive meanings of the *Elucidation of Intention*?

On this subject, there is no clear explanation in the original treatises of Nagarjuna and Aryadeva, nor did Buddhapalita explicate the details of this (question). However, (Chandrakirti), in the *Introduction Commentary*, explains four theories (of the Idealists) to be interpretable in meaning: (namely), the theories that the first two natures (respectively) do not and do exist with intrinsic identifiability; that there is a fundamental consciousness; that there are no external objects; and that there is final genealogical determinism. His own words are as follows, (first quoting an Idealist):

“This scriptural reference makes it clear that even other scriptures of that same type are interpretable in meaning.”

Which are the “scriptures of that same type?” (They are) such as the *Elucidation of Intention*, teaching the three natures, imagined, relative, and perfect, with the imagined utterly non-existent and the relative utterly existent; and (teaching that) “the grasping consciousness is deep and subtle, all seeds streaming (therein) like flowing water; thus I do not show it to the naive, thinking it inappropriate, lest they construe it as a self.” And such as these are explained to be interpretable by the scripture: “Just as a doctor prescribes medicines for the sickness of invalids, so the Buddha teaches even ‘mind-only’ to some living beings.”¹

¹ MA, VI, k. 95cd, Poussin ed., p. 195; MABh, VI, Poussin ed., pp. 195-56. The SN

Thinking that the last (of the four doctrines) could be understood as interpretable from the proof of (the doctrine of) the unique vehicle executed (by Nagarjuna) in the *Scripture Synthesis*² (Chandra) in the *Introduction Commentary* proves by reason and reference the interpretability of the first three (doctrines), this quote showing the (proof of) their interpretability through scriptural reference. There are two kinds of "mind-only" references, those that negate external things and those that do not. With reference to the type of scripture that makes such statements as "the externally apparent does not exist,"³ (Chandra states) that the *Mission to Lanka* clearly shows their interpretability. For, the statements of "mind-only" are not in terms of the Teacher's own system but in terms of the inclination of the disciples, just as the doctor does not give medicine to particular patients out of his own whim, but in accord with the particular pattern of the patient's sickness.

(Chandra) continues, saying, "likewise the mention of Buddha-essence in the Buddha's discourses . . ." and concludes his quotations by saying, "thus, such kinds of scriptures, all of which are accepted as definitive in meaning by the Idealists, are clearly shown to be interpretable in meaning by this (very) scriptural reference."⁴ This passage is explained (by Jayananda) in his *Subcommentary* as showing the interpretability of the statements of "mind-only," by using the statements of the interpretability of the "Buddha-essence" as examples, and he also explains "this scriptural reference" as referring to the *Ten Stages* refutation of the world-creator in the context of the realization of relativity.⁵ (But) this is incorrect, since (Chandra) in his own commentary uses the interpretability of "mind-only" statements as the example, and then proves the interpretability of all scriptures taken as definitive by the Experientialists by reason of the statement of the interpretability of the Buddha-essence (doctrine). Thus, "by this scriptural reference," in this context referring to one of two (preceding quotes), refers to the *Mission to Lanka* indication of the interpretability of the Buddha-essence (doctrine) and of the (fact that

quote, "The grasping consciousness . . ." is the concluding verse of SN, V. Lamotte (*Explanation*, p. 58) restores this verse as: *ādanavijjāna gambhīrasūksmo, ogho yathā vartati sarvabhūto / bālāna eso mayi na prakāsi, mā haiva ātmā parikalpayeyuh //*. The scriptural quote, "Just as a doctor . . ." is from the LAS, Vaidya ed., p. 54 (Skt. *āturi āturi bhaisājyam yadavad bhīṣak prayaçchati / citātmātram tathā buddhah sattvānāri deśāyanti vai //*, also quoted *Subhāṣitasamgraha*, f. 25, LVP, p. 250).

²Lo-bzang Phun-ishogs (*Zhi Bris II*, f. 49b4 ff.) mentions a fifth Idealist doctrine also shown to be interpretable by this reference, namely, the doctrine of the permanent phenomenal existence of the Buddha-essence (Tib. *snying po rtag dngos yod par*), discussed by mKhaas-grub at length in *sTong Thun*.

³Tsong Khapa follows the tradition that accepts Nagarjuna's authorship of the *Sūtra samuccaya*. Therein, the *ekayāna* proof runs from TG, C, ki, f. 190 ff.

⁴phvi rol snang ba yod min te / . . . common phrase in Idealist scriptures.

⁵MABh, VI, Poussin ed., p. 196, l. 12 to p. 198, l. 15, here expounded in paraphrase.

⁶Jayananda's MAT a subcommentary on MA often criticized by Tsong Khapa.

realitylessness is to be understood as the inner (gist) of all the scriptures.⁶ And, as for the *Ten Stages* refutation of any other creator (than the mind), this is stated as evidence for the fact that the "only" in the expression "mind-only" does not exclude external things, and not as evidence showing that the negation of external things is interpretable in meaning. "Such kinds of scriptures" refers to those that give teachings such as those in the *Elucidation of Intention* above, and does not show that the Idealists assert the definitiveness of scriptures that show the Buddha-essence (doctrine) to be interpretable! There is no question about both these points. Our own view is that (Chandra's) quotation of the statement of the interpretability of the Buddha-essence (doctrine) is the (scriptural) proof that the *Elucidation of Intention* doctrine of the fundamental consciousness is not to be taken literally.

In this regard, it is first necessary to understand that the teaching of the (Buddha-) essence is not literally intended, as the *Mission to Lanka* states:

Those scriptures that teach according to the inclinations of living beings are erroneous in meaning, not giving the message of Thatness. A teaching which is like a mirage, deceiving thirsty beasts by having no water, may generate devotion in the naive-minded, but is not the message that establishes the wisdom of the Holy Ones. Therefore, you should follow the (intended) meaning, and should not be attached to the expression.⁷

Further, in the *Mission to Lanka*, Mahamati questions:

The Lord promulgates the Buddha-essence in the discourses, saying it is naturally radiant, primordially pure, endowed with the thirty-two marks, and existing within the bodies of all living beings. You say it is like a precious gem, wrapped in a filthy rag, being permanent, stable, and eternal, but wrapped by the defilement of the aggregates, elements, and sense-media. How is this Buddha-essence-theory different from the soul-theory of the heterodox? For the heterodox also espouse a soul as permanent, inactive, qualityless, all-pervading, and indestructible.⁸

⁶ Refers to MABh passage given in n. 4 above.

⁷LAS, Vaidya ed., p. 33 (passage preceding that quoted MABh, Poussin ed., pp. 196-97 (LVP pp. 251-52)): . . . *sūtrāntah sarvasatvāsyaśeṣānārthavyabhicāriṇi, na sa tattvavyavasthānakathā / tadāyathā mahāmāte mīrgatṛṣṇikā mīrgoilāpiṇi udakabhāvābhīveśenābhīveśyate, tasyām codakam nāsti, evameva mahāmāte sarvasūtrāntadeśanā dhārmā bālānām suvikalpasamtoṣanam, na tu sa tattvāryajitānāryavus-thānakathā / tasmāttārhi mahāmāte arthānusārīnā bhavitavyaṇi na deśanābhīlāpābhīnī-vestena //*

⁸(LAS Vaidya ed., following the above, quoted MABh, etc.): . . . *tathāgatagarbhaḥ punarbhāgavatā sūtrāntapāthe 'nūvarṇitaḥ / sa ca kila tvayā prakṛtiprabhāsva-*

In answer, the Lord said that the Buddhas teach the Buddha-essence (intending) the objective selflessness, the non-apparent object, with its synonyms such as "emptiness," "signlessness," and "wishlessness," in order to avoid the fear of selflessness on the part of the naive and to educate the heterodox who are attracted to soul-theories, and thus it is not the same as the heterodox soul-theories. Present and future bodhisattvas should not become attached to it as a self. Thinking that those beings whose thoughts have been dominated by soul-theories will more quickly come to enlightenment if their thoughts dwell in the sphere of the three doors of liberation, the (Buddhas) teach the Buddha-essence to that end. Thus one should understand the Buddha-essence as corresponding to selflessness, in order to eliminate heterodox views. I quote (and paraphrase) here no further, fearing prolixity.⁹

Thus, (Chandra) proves the non-similarity between the theory of the Buddha-essence and the theory of the existence of self by the reason that (the Buddha's) statement intimates as its intended basis the emptiness which is objective selflessness, out of the need to eliminate the (disciples') fear of selflessness and gradually to lead those attached to soul-theories toward selflessness. Such being the case, the soul-theorists are intending just what they are teaching, whereas the Teacher's intended meaning, which he considers when teaching, and his literal meaning are utterly different. When the soul-theorists teach the permanent, and so on, self, they are at all times certainly and firmly committed to their own literal meaning, whereas the Teacher sometimes teaches as if his literal meaning were true, but then later (indicates that he did so) in order to lead (the disciples' minds) around to the intimated meaning he was intending. Thus, (Chandra shows we) must see through the (apparent) similarity, saying "the two are not the same." This clearly shows that if we literally accept the teaching of Buddha-essence as previously expounded, we would be the same as the theorists of soul-existence; and that very fact is the refutation of the explicit (teaching of the Buddha-essence). Thus, what intelligent person would dispute whether or not such statements (of Buddha-essence) in other scriptures are established as interpretable in mean-

rauisuddhyāvisuddha eva varjyate dvatrimśallakṣaṇadharaḥ sarvasattvadehāntargataḥ mahāghaṁḍīyavaraṇāṁ māhāvastraparaveṣṭitam iva skandhadhātāvayatanaavastraparaveṣṭito (rāga dveśamohaparibhūtaḥ parikalpamāmalino) nityo dhruvabhāṣāśūvāśācānuvarnitah / tat katham ayaṁ bhagavān tīrthakārmavādātulyas tathāgatagarbhavādo na bhavāti / tīrthakārāpi bhagavān nityo 'kartā nirguṇo vibhūr auyaya ityātmīvādupadeśaṁ kurvanti //

⁹ (LAS Vaidya ed., following above): *bhagavān āhu / na hi mahāmāte tīrthakārmavādātulyo mama tathāgatagarbhavādupadeśah / kim tu . . . śūnyatābhūtakōṭimūrvānūt-pādāmimittāpranibhūyānām padārbhānām tathāgatagarbhopadeśaṁ kṛtvā . . . bālānām narātmīyasamtrāsapadvavijānārtham . . . deśayanti / na . . . bodhisattvair ātmābhini-veśah kartavyah /, etc.*

ing, when this scripture has shown the intimated basis, the need, and the refutation of literalness? It is very clear about the inappropriateness of literal acceptance, using the example of a mirage, and saying, "one should follow the (intimated) meaning, and should not be attached to the (literal) expression." If, in spite of this, one does not accept the elucidation of (Chandrakīrti), but accepts the interpretability of this teaching from rational refutation of its literalness, that being the personal precept of the Indian sages, and yet still does not admit that the above scripture demonstrates the fact (of the Buddha-essence's interpretability), then one merely exhibits one's own true nature!

Further, in the *Scripture Synthesis*, (Nagarjuna) introduces all the above-quoted scriptural passages with the remark, "the Tathagata, by teaching a variety of doors to the (Great) Vehicle in terms of (the inclinations of) the disciples, teaches this very profound ultimate reality." "This profound ultimate reality" refers directly to the just previously quoted references from the *Transcendent Wisdom*, etc., teaching the emptiness which is objective selflessness.¹⁰ And "in terms of the disciples" means that such explanations are influenced by the inclinations of the disciples, which has the same meaning as (Chandra's) statement above that "this is the teaching to generate devotion in the naive, and is not the teaching of ultimate reality."

As for the way in which literal acceptance (of the Buddha-essence theory) is the same as the advocacy of the existence of self, (this literal acceptance may be formulated as the assertion that) the Buddha-essence exists as literally taught, the Buddha not having taught the Buddha-essence thinking of the intimated meaning of emptiness, non-production, or selflessness, etc., which is the mere exclusion of the fabrications of objective self or of identifiably existent production, but (having meant it) literally as he taught it. And the (Buddha-essence's) permanence is not merely that indestructibility which is the mere exclusion of the negatee, destruction, but is a permanence which arises as an established entity, like (the colors) yellow or blue, not needing to be represented as the exclusion of negatee. Such being the case, as there is no difference (between this position and) the type of permanence (maintained) by the non-Buddhist advocates of the permanent self, (this position) amounts to an assertion of a permanent phenomenon. The refutation of this (theory) is (accomplished by) the elucidations in the higher and lower orthodox schools of the reasonings refuting the permanence advocated by the heterodox (philosophers), since those (Buddhist scholars) do not accept any such (permanent) thing.

Once one asserts the determination of a permanent thing that is not

¹⁰ *Sūtrasamuccaya*, IG, C, ki, f. 207a2-3.

merely a negation excluding destruction, one is not suitably receptive to any sort of explanation of the two selflessnesses, taught to be the selfless reality which is the mere exclusion of the fabrications, the two "selves." As these scriptures have stated above, (the Buddhas) declare (the Buddha-essence, etc.) for the sake of those who are attached to self-theories, in order to eliminate their fear of selflessness.

Therefore, there are two modes (of teachings) with interpretable meaning. There are those interpretable meaning teachings for the sake of gradually leading to reality those Buddhists who are suitably receptive to explanations of the ordinary personal selflessness and the gross objective¹¹ selflessness; and showing the refutation of their literal meaning is extremely difficult. (Second,) there are those interpretable meaning teachings taught in order to educate those of the heterodox type who, as explained above, are not ready for the full explanation of even the ordinary personal selflessness, as they either openly advocate the heterodox self or else have a great habitual affinity for such views from their former lives; and it is easy to show the refutation of their literal meaning.

If thus the doctrine of the existence of a (Buddha-) essence which is permanent, etc., is interpretable in meaning, how does one establish the interpretability of (the doctrine of) fundamental consciousness?

The two expressions, "Buddha-essence" and "fundamental consciousness" are repeatedly declared to be synonymous; thus, from the *Dense Array Scripture*:

The various realms are the fundamental consciousness, and so also are the Buddha-essences. The Tathagatas indicate that very nature by means of the expression "fundamental consciousness." Although the "essence" is renowned as the "fundamental," the feeble-minded are unaware of it.¹²

Likewise, the *Mission to Lanka* mentions that "the Buddha-essence, renowned as the 'fundamental consciousness,' is endowed with the seven (auxiliary) consciousnesses."¹³ Thus, they are the same, being verbally

¹¹ Ordinary, or gross, personal selflessness is defined by all Buddhist schools other than the Dialecticist as the non-existence of a permanent, unique, and independent person. The subtle selflessness of person is defined by these schools as the non-existence of a self-sufficient person. The Dialecticists define the two as non-existence of a self-sufficient person, and non-existence of an intrinsically identifiable person, respectively. As to gross selflessness of things, the Idealists define it as the non-existence of independent objects as such, and the Experientialist-Dogmatists as the non-existence of subject-object difference. Since the Dialecticists themselves do not consider any objective selflessness other than the subtle lack of intrinsic identifiability of things to be genuine, Tsong Khapa may here be using "gross" (*rags pa*) in a less technical sense, referring to the kind of intimation of objective selflessness contained in the similes for the aggregates used even in the Individual Vehicle to indicate their general insubstantiality. See Introduction, VIII, 3, Table D.

¹² *Ghanavyāhasūtra* (Tib. *Rgyan-stug-po-bkod pa*).

¹³ LAS, Vaidya ed.; *tathāgatagarbhaḥ ālayavijñānākṛitah saptaujjīvanāmah* I.

synonymous considering their intended meaning, in spite of the fact that they are not shown to be literally (and conceptually) equivalent, the one being permanent, the other impermanent, since the fundamental consciousness is taught intending the very same thing intended by teaching of the essence. Such being the case, the demonstration of the former's interpretability establishes the latter as interpretable in meaning.¹⁴ Such is the view of Chandra, as he states in the *Introduction Commentary* that "it must be acknowledged that it is precisely emptiness that (the Buddha) indicated by the expression 'fundamental consciousness,' in order to introduce the intrinsic reality of all phenomena."¹⁵

Thus, although that intended is the same thing (when speaking of "essence" and "fundamental"), the disciples are different. The disciple for whom the "fundamental consciousness" is declared is suitably receptive to the teaching of the ordinary personal selflessness and of the objective selflessness which is (defined as) emptiness of subject-object duality. (We know this) because such (a disciple) is unable to understand the intrinsic realitylessness of all persons and things; because the fundamental consciousness is presented out of the necessity of teaching emptiness with respect to external objects, as (Chandra) says in the *Introduction*:

"Fundamental consciousness exists!" "Person exists!" "These aggregates alone exist!"—These teachings are for the sake of those who do not understand Thatness, the most profound of things.¹⁶

(Finally), the source that shows the interpretability of the differentiation of the first two (of the three) natures with regard to not existing and existing (respectively) with intrinsic identifiability is the *Mission to Lanka* passage quoted in the *Introduction Commentary* immediately after the scriptural citations that show the interpretability of the above doctrines; namely, the statement, "Mahamati, this inner understanding of the scriptures of all Buddhas has the nature of emptiness, productionlessness, non-duality, and intrinsic realitylessness. . . ." Thus, (the Buddha here)

¹⁴ This distinction Tsong Khapa makes between the synonymy of the two expressions (*ming gi rnam grangs yin pa*), considering they both intend the same referent, and their literal-conceptual (*sgras zin gyi don*) difference (*gnysis mi gcig pa*) is somewhat obscure. He apparently means, as inferred from Chandra's view, which he subsequently expounds, that both are used by the Buddha intending emptiness, but their conceptual difference, being respectively permanent and impermanent, is part of the interpretable, conventional, pedagogical device.

¹⁵ MABh, VI, ad. k. 41, Poussin ed., p. 131 (LVP, p. 321).

¹⁶ MA, VI, k. 43, Poussin ed., p. 132 (LVP, p. 322); Poussin cites a Skt. version from: *Subhāsitasmgraha: evam hi gambhīratārān padārthān na veti yastam prati dśāneyam / asyālayaḥ pudgala eva cāsti, skandhā ime va khalu dhātavaśca ||*. The Tibetan version was translated from a Skt. version that read *kevalam for dhātavaś*.

declares that any sort of scripture whatsoever should be understood as having this very meaning (of non-duality, etc.).¹⁷

Well then, how does this system present the interpretability and definitiveness of the three wheels (of Dharma)?

(Even) in the first wheel, the statements of intrinsic realitylessness of persons and things are definitive in meaning. (However, the explanation of) personal (selflessness) through negation of merely substantial self-sufficiency (of a supposed self) different in nature from the aggregates, rather than through negation of the intrinsic identifiability (of that supposed self) is interpretable in meaning. That intended by such (explanations) is the mere conventional existence (of self). As for the necessity (for such an interpretable teaching,) it is in order to avoid the arising of nihilism (in such a disciple) from the teaching of the emptiness of persons and things with regard to intrinsic identifiability, to cultivate their mental processes by teaching the gross selflessness, and (finally) to introduce them to the subtle selflessness. And the refutation of the literal acceptability (of these teachings) consists in the reasonings negating intrinsically identifiable status (of things).

Next, in the second wheel, the statements that persons and things are empty with respect to ultimate or intrinsically identifiable existence while yet existing according to mundane conventionality are the ultimate in definitive meaning. They were taught to those Universalists able to understand the equivalency of relativity empty of intrinsic identifiability with emptiness with respect to intrinsic reality, since (causal processes) such as bondage and liberation are definitely non-viable (if presumed) to have intrinsically identifiable status, and it is indispensably necessary to accept the relativity of such (causal processes as) bondage and liberation. In the abbreviated teachings of such (second wheel scriptures) as the *Heart of Transcendent Wisdom*, such as "those five aggregates should be precisely viewed as empty of any intrinsic reality,"¹⁸ the negatee is not explicitly qualified with the expression "in the ultimate," yet is implicitly so qualified, as such (qualification) must be understood from the context of the elucidations of (all) statements of emptiness with respect to intrinsic identifiability. Or, even if such were not the case, such (qualification) must be understood as implicit (in the abbreviated versions), since once the qualification "in the ultimate" is applied in such (extensive) versions as the *Mother Scripture*, it must be understood (as implicit) in

¹⁷ MABh VI, ad. k. 95, Poussin ed., p. 198 (LVP, p. 252). LAS quote found Vaidya ed., p. 33: *etiādhi Mahāmate śūnyatānūpādāvayamīṣvabhāvalakṣaṇaṃ sarvabuddhānāṃ sarvasūtrāntagatam* .i.

¹⁸ *Prajñāpāramitābhūdaya; phung po lnga po de dag kyang rang bzhin gyis stong par mam par yang dag par rjes su bltao.*

all scriptures of the same class. For example, when a contemporary author composes a treatise, and expresses himself consistently on a certain subject, we must understand (as implicit) (his consistent expression) in those contexts where he does not so express himself (for brevity's sake, etc.).

Finally, (in the third wheel), the statements of the lack of intrinsic identifiability of the first nature and of the intrinsically identifiable existence of the latter two natures (are interpretable in meaning). (They are) taught for those (disciples) of the Universal Vehicle class who would find no ground to establish cause-effect and bondage-liberation in the intrinsic realitylessness that is emptiness with respect to intrinsically identifiable status, in order to forestall their falling into the great nihilism from (misinterpreting) the teaching of the middle wheel and in order to introduce them to the subtle objective selflessness by cultivating their mental processes by means of the teaching of the gross objective selflessness. (These statements were made) intending the Idealist differentiation between the first nature and the latter two natures, as (respectively) being established verbally and conventionally and being identifiably established on the conventional level. The refutations of the literal acceptability (of this third wheel teaching) consists of the formulations of the Centrist treatises (to the effect that), although there is no rational refutation of the ultimate non-establishment of persons and things, all presentations such as causality are impossible if (things) are ultimately or intrinsically identifiably existent.¹⁹

Such is (Chandra's) method of presenting the interpretability and definitiveness (of the three wheels of Dharma), which, although in disagreement with the formulation of the *Elucidation of Intention*, is consistent with the *King of Samadhis* and the *Teaching of Aksayamati*.

We must not confuse the (above teachings about the) turning of the wheel of Dharma three times with the meaning of the (following) passage from the *Questions of King Dharmishvara*:

Just as the jeweler perfects a gem by stages with the threefold cleansing and the threefold rubbing, so the Victor, knowing the scope of the impure living beings, makes those infatuated with the world tired at heart and causes them to engage in the religious discipline by means

¹⁹ This last paragraph was resorted in translation into roughly the same order of presentation as the first two paragraphs: that is, 1) such and such a main theme is interpretable; 2) why; 3) intending what; 4) for what reason; 5) refutable by what reasonings—for clarity of comparison. Tsong Khapa, apparently tired of repeating himself in the same fashion, wove all the items together in his final paragraph into two rather convoluted sentences, quite intelligible in the abbreviated Tibetan. They are perfectly accurate, but, presented all at once as it were, might confuse the English reader not so accustomed to handling these doctrines.

of the doctrine of renunciation, such as "impermanence," "misery," "selflessness," and "ugliness." He causes them to realize the deep process of the Tathagata doctrine, by means of the teaching of emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness. Next, he installs those living beings in the Buddha-realm by means of the teaching of irreversibility and the teaching of the purification of the three spheres (of acts, that is, agent, action, and patient). And those living beings, having become equalized in their various genealogies and faculties, realize deeply the ultimate nature of the Tathagata, and are dubbed "the unexcelled worthies for offerings."²⁰

Thus, this (passage teaches) how a single person is led first into the Individual Vehicle. Then, being introduced into the Buddha-realm, the Universal Vehicle, finally he reaches the stage of attaining Buddhahood. (On the other hand,) the three wheels of Dharma are turned for the sake of Individual Vehicle and Universal Vehicle disciples of different characters. (This is also evident from the fact that) the *Scripture Synthesis* quotes this scriptural passage as a proof of the fact that there is ultimately one vehicle,²¹ since even the Individualists enter (eventually) the Universal Vehicle and attain Buddhahood. Thus, as both the first two stages (mentioned in the passage) lead (the disciple) in the Individual Vehicle, the selflessness of that first stage is like the selflessness included in the four (aspects of the first holy truth, that is,) impermanence, etc., said in the *Four Hundred* to be a means of cultivating a (disciple's) character before teaching him the view of emptiness. Such (selflessness) is the absence of the self that is (presumed to be) independent among its possessions. (In the passage above), "irreversibility" means that once one enters that (vehicle) it is not necessary to go on any different vehicle.²²

Here one might object that if the meaning of the scriptures is (both) as the Idealists elucidate it and (also) as the Centrists elucidate it differently, then it becomes a matter of internal contradictions for the speaker (of the scriptural discourses), and the meaning of the scriptures is (entirely) refuted.

Well now, is it the import of the Disciples' Canon that there is no permission for taking life, (even) depending on (certain) circumstances? Or is it not? If it is not, then there would be no difference between the Individual Vehicle and Universal Vehicle Canons with regard to whether taking life is prohibited or allowed. If it is, then, as the import of the

²⁰ *Dhāraṇīśvarāṅgāparipṛcchāsūtra* is unavailable in Skt., and is not quoted in surviving compendia, though quoted in *Sūtrasamuccaya*, itself only extant in Tibetan.

²¹ Quote from *Sūtrasamuccaya* occurs in *ekayāna* section, TG, C, ki, f. 190 ff.

²² This CŚ quote is not a direct quote from the text, although the gist of the statement is contained in CŚ, I.

Universal Vehicle Canon is indeed that, given certain (dire) necessities, taking of life is permitted, there is an internal contradiction for the speaker (of the canons). If I say that, what answer do you have? If you venture that while as far as the Individual Vehicle disciple is concerned there is never permission for taking life, there is no contradiction, since the speaker's intention is that (only) given certain special (cases of) Universal Vehicle (disciples) is there such permission, (then you have answered your own question). Where then is the contradiction in there being (stated) about) intrinsic identifiability, considering the intellects of certain Universal Vehicle class disciples who are not (yet) receptive to the full explanation of the profound, and in there being (statements that there is) no intrinsically identifiable status in anything, considering those disciples who are receptive (and able) to understand the full import of the profound?

We cannot apply (this sort of intentional analysis) to statements such as "Having killed father and mother . . ." where although the literal meaning is not the meaning of the expression, since that is determined by the speaker's desire, namely (that one should eliminate) existence and craving, since the speaker here wants this sort of disciple to understand the actual meaning as explicitly expressed (albeit symbolically). Therefore, our position is that the non-definitiveness (of a teaching) is proven by showing a (logical) refutation of its literal meaning, the explicit meaning having necessarily been expressed, since no subject of the expression is shown other than the literal one, and there must be some subject of expression (in any even interpretable teaching). Therefore, there are two kinds of cases, one where (a teaching) is both the expressed meaning of the scriptural passage as well as the intention of the speaker, and another where it is necessarily established as the meaning of the scriptural passage, even when it is not the intention of the speaker.²³

THE DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN THE (ELUCIDATION OF INTENTION) AND THE QUESTIONS OF MAITREYA (CHAPTER OF THE TRANSCENDENT WISDOM EIGHTEEN THOUSAND)

(Here, it is commonly objected that) if the *Elucidation of Intention* presentation of the three natures is as explained in the Idealist system, do

²³ The gist seems to be that: 1) there is no internal contradiction in a passage that is intentionally to be interpreted differently by different disciples; 2) this is not just a case of literalness or non-literalness, there being different types of expressions and different intentions in different cases; 3) and of the two cases, the former are normally definitive and the latter interpretable.

The Precious Treasury of Philosophical Systems

*A Treatise Elucidating the Meaning of the
Entire Range of Spiritual Approaches*

Published by Padma Publishing
P.O. Box 279
Junction City, California 96048-0279

© Padma Publishing 2007

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced
in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical,
including photocopying, recording, or any information storage
or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Klon-chen-pa Dri-med-'od-zer. 1308-1363
The precious treasury of philosophical systems / Longchen Rabjam;
translated by Richard Barron (Lama Chökyl Nyima).

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN-13: 9-78-1-88184-44-1 (alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 1-88184-44-6 (alk. paper)

I. Rñin-ma-pa (Sect.)—Doctrines—Early works to 1800.

I. Barron, Richard H., Title.

BQ7662-4.K43413 2007

194.3420423—dc22

2007032634

Longchen Rabjam

Translated by Richard Barron
(Lama Chökyl Nyima)



PADMA PUBLISHING

2007

the Mahayana sense of the term) requires that one traverse the five paths of the Mahayana.

III. THE BODHISATTVA APPROACH

My discussion of the third path, that of the bodhisattva, has three parts: the nature of the spiritual potential that is the basis of this path,⁵⁸ the method by which someone with this spiritual potential arouses bodhicitta, or awakening mind; and how the stages of the path are traversed according to that method.

A. Spiritual Potential

The sutra *The Cluster of Stems* states:

O heirs of the victorious ones, what is termed “spiritual potential” for those of the bodhisattva family refers to their firm intention to realize the basic space of phenomena, spacious like the sky, utterly lucid by nature. Bodhisattvas who abide in full awareness of that potential take birth in the family of buddhas—transcendent and accomplished conquerors—of the past, present, and future.

According to *The Highest Continuum*:

That which is the utterly lucid nature of mind is unchanging, like space.⁵⁹

Basic space, completely pure by nature, is ultimate truth—naturally occurring timeless awareness. [81b] Its nature is such that when it is associated with distortions, it is called “spiritual potential,” “fundamental being,” or “buddha nature,”⁶⁰ whereas when it is free of distortions, it is called “enlightenment” or “the state of having gone to suchness.” To come to a definitive understanding of this, there are four points to consider: the nature of this spiritual potential, its omnipresence, a detailed analysis of it, and the rationale for relying on it.

1. THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL POTENTIAL

In *The Highest Continuum*, we read the following:

There is nothing whatsoever to remove from this, nor anything in the slightest to add.

Look truly to what is true in itself; if what is true is seen, there is total freedom.⁶¹

Essentially, basic space, the heart essence of being, has never had any distortions to be removed, because it is by nature utterly lucid and without distortions. The qualities of enlightenment are spontaneously present, and so it is not that these qualities never existed previously and are attained as something new. The same source states:

Because it is pure yet associated with afflictive states,⁶² because it is pure and entirely without afflictive states, because it is indivisible, because it is spontaneously present and completely nonconceptual, . . .⁶³

The authentic view lies in the essence of what has ultimate meaning. Once one has perceived it, one is free of the adventitious distortions of afflictive states, which are like an enveloping caul. Asanga explains this in his *Commentary on “The Highest Continuum”*:

With respect to the qualities of buddhahood, which are without distortions, there is no difference whatsoever between the true nature of phenomena in some earlier state and that nature in any later one, as timeless awareness is inseparable from the state of an ordinary being who is subject to all-consuming afflictive states. These qualities are thus inconceivable to the ordinary mind.

Enlightenment can be described as the state in which previously existent qualities, not newly created ones, have become fully evident. [82a] Therefore, from the standpoint of what basic space—the heart essence of being—is in essence, it is devoid of anything that could characterize it as a real entity that stands up under analysis, for that would involve distortions and flaws; it is not, however, devoid of the qualities of enlightenment, for these are timelessly present as its natural attributes. *The Highest Continuum* states:

Although one’s fundamental being is devoid of adventitious factors that are characterized as separate from it, it is not devoid of unsurpassable factors that are characterized as inseparable from it.⁶⁴

Moreover, the commentary on this source explains:

What does this demonstrate, you ask? There is no reason whatsoever for regarding all-consuming afflictive states as things to be removed from the fundamental being of the tathagatas, which is innately and totally pure, because its nature is such that it is free of adventitious distortions. There is nothing in the slightest to add to it, nothing that is the result of any process of complete refinement, because its nature is the pure nature of phenomena, which is indivisible.

Thus, the source text is stating that buddha nature is devoid of all the enshrouding overlays of afflictive states, which entail division and can be separated from it. But it is not devoid of the inconceivable attributes of buddhahood, which entail no division and cannot be separated from it, and which are more numerous than the grains of sand in the bed of the river Ganges.

In this way, we understand that where Y is absent from X, we can say, “X is devoid of Y,” for Y cannot be perceived to be in accordance with what is actually so. Where Y continues to be present, [82b] we can say, “Y is constantly present in X,” for it is understood to be actually so, just as it is.

These two stanzas demonstrate the characteristics of emptiness, which is impeccable in that there is freedom from the extremes of exaggeration and denigration.⁶⁵

If you wonder how a spiritual potential such as this is associated with the phenomena of samsara or nirvana, you should understand the following: Its relationship to the phenomena of samsara is that of something obscured to what obscures it, like that of the sun to clouds. Its relationship to the phenomena of nirvana is one of essential identity, like that of the sun to its rays. Once the phenomena of samsara and their attendant distortions—which are supported within the “support” of basic space—are eliminated at a certain point by means of antidotes, this process results in the phenomena of nirvana becoming fully evident. *The Highest Continuum* indicates that the phenomena of samsara are adventitious, whereas the qualities of enlightenment are present such that they are timelessly uncompounded:

Because it is associated with adventitious faults yet is innately imbued with the qualities of enlightenment, as it was before, so is it afterward—the unchanging nature of phenomena.⁶⁶

In the context of this spiritual potential—the basic space of phenomena, which like space is without transition or change—there is a process whereby, for countless lifetimes, physical bodies are left behind and taken up again on the basis of karma and habit patterns that perpetuate samsara endlessly. The same source describes this process:

Just as all universes originate and disintegrate in space, so the components of experience originate and disintegrate in uncompounded basic space.⁶⁷ [83a]

Moreover, although the components of experience seem to originate and disintegrate as a result of karma and incidental circumstances, one’s fundamental being is without origination or cessation, just as space is not incinerated even though the fire at the end of an eon incinerates the universe. The same source states:

Just as space has never been incinerated by flames, similarly this is not incinerated by the flames of death, illness, or aging.⁶⁸

All birth and death, all happiness and suffering come about as a result of karma and afflictive states. These in turn come about as a result of the nonrecognition of awareness, which is the cause of the all-consuming and fallacious thought processes of the ordinary mind. That nonrecognition, moreover, is sustained within the mind’s utterly lucid nature, just as the universe is sustained within space. As this source states:

Earth is based firmly on water, water on air, and air on space. Space is not based on wind, water, or the element of earth.

Similarly, the mind-body aggregates, components of perception, and faculties are based on karma and afflictive states. Karma and afflictive states are always based on the fallacious functioning of mind.

Whereas the fallacious functioning of mind is based entirely on the purity of mind, the true nature of mind is not based on any of these factors.⁶⁹

The qualities of nirvana are innate and abide timelessly, like the sun's rays with the sun. They include both manifest aspects (such as the *ka-ya*s, light rays, pure realms, and immeasurable mansions) and qualities of awareness (such as strengths and states of fearlessness).⁷⁰ There is an extensive discussion of these in the sutra *The Garlands of Buddhas*, [83b] but they are summarized concisely in *The Commentary on "The Highest Continuum"*:

With respect to the qualities of buddhahood, which are without distortions, there is no difference whatsoever between the true nature of phenomena in some earlier state and that nature in any later one, as timeless awareness is inseparable from the state of an ordinary being who is subject to all-consuming afflictive states. These qualities are thus inconceivable to the ordinary mind. Why is this so? Because among all the classes of ordinary beings, there is no being who is not imbued with the boundless timeless awareness of the tathagatas.

However, because of the reification involved in ordinary perception, the timeless awareness of the tathagatas is not evident. Once there is freedom from reification in ordinary perception, omniscient timeless awareness—naturally occurring timeless awareness—is experienced fully, without obstruction.

"O heirs of the victorious ones, it is thus: Suppose, for example, that there were an enormous piece of silk cloth, equal in size to the immense universe of the three-thousand-fold world system, and that the whole universe of the three-thousand-fold world system were drawn on that enormous silk cloth in its entirety. It would be thus: The vast surrounding horizon would be drawn to the size of the vast surrounding horizon; the vast foundation would be drawn to the size of the vast foundation; the intermediate universes of two-thousand-fold world systems would be drawn to the size of the universes of two-thousand-fold world systems; the universes of one-thousand-fold world systems would be drawn to the size of the universes of one-thousand-fold world systems; the world systems of four continents would be drawn to the size of the world systems of four continents; the great ocean would be drawn to the size of the great ocean; the continent of Jambudvīpa would be drawn to the size of Jambudvīpa; the eastern continent of Vīdeha would be drawn to the size of the eastern continent of Vīdeha; the western continent of Godaniya would be drawn to the size of the western continent of Godaniya; [84a]

the northern continent of Kuru would be drawn to the size of the northern continent of Kuru; Sumeru would be drawn to the size of Sumeru; the mansions of the gods dwelling on its slopes would be drawn to the size of the mansions of the gods dwelling on its slopes; the mansions of the gods dwelling in the realm of desire would be drawn to the size of the mansions of the gods dwelling in the realm of desire; and the mansions of the gods dwelling in the realm of form would be drawn to the size of the mansions of the gods dwelling in the realm of form.

"Suppose that, although this enormous piece of silk cloth was, in length and breadth, the size of the entire universe—the three-thousand-fold universe—this enormous piece of silk cloth was inserted into an atom. And suppose that, just as this enormous piece of silk cloth was inserted into one atom, enormous pieces of silk cloth of the same size were inserted into every atom without exception.

"Then suppose that there appeared some who were learned, wise, clear-minded, and insightful, and whose conduct showed them to be imbued with these qualities. They would be clairvoyant, their vision like that of the gods, so that everything was utterly clear, totally pure in every way. They would scrutinize things with that divine vision and see an enormous piece of silk cloth contained within an atom, where it did not come into contact with any beings at all.

"They would think, 'Ah! What if someone were to split this atom open by the strength and force of mighty effort, and use this enormous piece of silk cloth to provide support for all beings!' [84b] With this thought, they would generate the strong force of mighty effort, split the atom open using a tiny vajra, and, just as they had wished, provide support for unlimited beings with that enormous piece of silk cloth. They would do just the same in the case of every atom without exception as they had done in this one case.

"O heirs of the victorious ones, in a similar way, the timeless awareness of tathagatas—immeasurable timeless awareness, the timeless awareness that sustains all beings—fully imbues the minds of all beings. Moreover, the minds of beings, like the timeless awareness of tathagatas, are immeasurable."⁷¹

Therefore, with respect to the essence of one's being, the qualities of enlightenment are spontaneously present, and it has never known any

sully as a result of flaws. With respect to its expression, it seems to be associated with afflictive states and then purified at a later time. There is no contradiction between its purity, on the one hand, and impurity, on the other; it is inconceivable to the ordinary mind. The same commentary continues:

As for suchness that is still associated with distortions, at one and the same time it is both completely pure and associated with all-consuming afflictive states, and so this state is inconceivable to the ordinary mind. . . . As for suchness without distortions, it is not that distortions have made it an all-consuming afflictive state at some prior point and that it later becomes totally pure, [85a] and so this state is inconceivable to the ordinary mind.

2. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF SPIRITUAL POTENTIAL

My discussion of the omnipresence of spiritual potential has three aspects: how spiritual potential is omnipresent by nature, its indications, and its qualities. With regard to its omnipresent nature, the sutra *Queen Srimala* states:

Buddha nature permeates absolutely every being.

According to *The Highest Continuum*:

Because the kaya of perfect buddhahood is pervasive, because the state of suchness is indivisible, and because all beings possess spiritual potential, beings are forever endowed with buddha nature.⁷²

The indications of spiritual potential are twofold. The same source describes the signs of those who have not yet awakened to this potential, even though they possess it:

If one lacks sensitivity to one's fundamental being, one's buddha nature, one will never be sufficiently dissatisfied with suffering, or desire nirvana, or strive for it, or even aspire to it.⁷³

Some very ordinary people are like that. The signs of those who have awakened to this potential are given in the same source:

This perception of the respective flaws and advantages of the suffering of samsara and the happiness of nirvana is a result of one's sensitivity to this spiritual potential. Why is this?

Because these flaws and advantages are not perceived by those who lack such sensitivity.⁷⁴

These two types of people are mentioned in *The Ornament of the Sutras*. Those who have not awakened, or are temporarily cut off, are described as follows:

Some lack the virtue conducive to liberation, deficient in positive factors, they are divorced from its cause.⁷⁵

Those who have awakened are referred to in the following way:

Even before one undertakes training, to have compassion, devoted interest, and patience, and to pursue virtue authentically, are explained to be true indications of spiritual potential.⁷⁶ [85b]

The qualities of enlightenment cultivated in the bodhisattva approach can be shown to be most excellent, for they are far superior to those of the Hinayana approach. The same source states:

Because it causes the tree of enlightenment to grow with abundant qualities, because it brings about the attainment of happiness and the subsiding of great suffering, and because its fruition ensures benefit and happiness for oneself and others, that most excellent spiritual potential is like a fine taproot.⁷⁷

The word *gotra* in the Sanskrit language of India can be broken down into *go*, which if interpreted to be cognate to *guna* implies "qualities," and *tra*, which if interpreted to be cognate to *tara* implies "to liberate." This means that spiritual potential acts as a support for the qualities of enlightenment and so brings liberation, leading one beyond samsara. According to the same source:

. . . as for the qualities, these are to be understood as the ultimate meaning of liberation.⁷⁸

3. A DETAILED ANALYSIS OF SPIRITUAL POTENTIAL

My detailed analysis of spiritual potential is based on three considerations: the supporting and supported factors, specific situations, and analogies and their meaning.

a. *The Supporting and Supported Factors*

The Ornament of the Sūtras states:

It has naturally abiding and increasingly evident aspects, which are the supporting and supported factors—both existent and nonexistent—and their qualities.⁷⁹ These should be understood to be the ultimate meaning of liberation.⁸⁰

This verse signifies that the omnipresent and utterly lucid nature referred to previously can be explained to be twofold, in that a distinction can be made between its manifestation and its emptiness. Empty basic space is the supporting factor, the cause of disengagement that leads to dharmakaya as the essence of being itself.⁸¹ Manifest timeless awareness, naturally radiant and entailing the major and minor marks of perfect form, is the supported factor, abiding as the two rupakayas that ensue from this disengagement. According to *The Highest Continuum*:

Like a treasure trove and a fruit-bearing tree, respectively, this spiritual potential should be understood to have two aspects: the beginningless aspect, which is naturally abiding, and the sublime aspect, which is perfectly developed. [86a]

It is held that the three kayas of buddhahood are attained through this twofold potential, the first kaya through the first aspect and the remaining two through the second.

The magnificent svabhavikakaya⁸² is understood to be like an image made of a precious substance that is by nature uncreated and a treasure trove of invaluable qualities.

In that it has supreme dominion over the preeminent state of being, sambhogakaya is like a universal monarch.

In that they are by nature reflections, nirmanakaya emanations are like images reflected on a surface of gold.⁸³

That is, one can analyze the naturally abiding aspect of this spiritual potential and its perfectly developed aspect by distinguishing one as the ground and the other as the path.

Basic space is, by nature, the ground of being, abiding such that it permeates everything. In that context, the aspect of basic space that serves as the ground for the arising of things is analogous to a treasure trove of precious gems, in that it abides as the basis for all that could be desired, yet cannot itself be determined to be anything at all. Given that this is so, basic space—dharmakaya as the essence of being itself—can be considered from the standpoint of providing an open avenue for the arising of the kayas and timeless awareness.

The arising, manifest aspect of timeless awareness is that of pure awareness and the kayas. It can be described as being analogous to a flourishing fruit-bearing tree, simply in that the qualities of enlightenment inherent within one are certain to become evident on the strength of one's being freed from circumstantial obscurations. This is a matter of using the name of what results from purification to label what causes purification, as *The Ornament of the Sūtras* explains by means of analogies to gold and the finest jewel.⁸⁴ [86b]

Let me digress briefly and explain these aspects in the context of training on the path. Both aspects of spiritual potential as basic space,⁸⁵ being spontaneously present by nature, are implied by what is called “naturally abiding spiritual potential,” in that they abide as the supporting factor. On that basis, all of the fundamentally positive factors included in the two kinds of spiritual development—those of merit and the experience of timeless awareness—from the first moment that one arouses bodhicitta up to the very threshold of enlightenment on the tenth spiritual level are termed “the perfectly developed aspect,” or “the increasingly evident aspect,” of this potential.⁸⁶ The latter two terms signify that the qualities of enlightenment, which are in fact inherent, seem to come into being as something new because the above-mentioned positive factors are newly applied as antidotes and, on the strength of this, the distortions that overlie one's natural spiritual potential are eliminated.

These days there is a failure to take the two foregoing aspects of spiritual potential into account in considering the ground of being,⁸⁷ instead,

the ground is classified as suchness itself and the path as the increasingly evident aspect. This seems to me indicative of a failure to understand basic space, because such a classification fails to appreciate the unity—of what is manifest and its emptiness—that is spontaneously present within the ground of being. *The Ornament of the Sūtras* states:

Although there is no difference between some earlier state and any later one, suchness . . . has “become pure.”⁸⁸

According to *The Highest Continuum*:

Uncompounded and spontaneously present, it is not realized through the agency of anyone or anything else and is endowed with wisdom, love, and energy. This is buddhahood itself, which embodies the two kinds of benefit.⁸⁹

These quotations indicate that because buddhahood is timelessly and spontaneously present, it is not achieved through a causal process that involves something being developed and something developing it, but through a causal process that involves disengagement.⁹⁰

Given these two aspects of spiritual potential, buddhahood should be understood to be the timeless endowment of the three kayas. [87a] That is, on the level of buddhahood, the increasingly evident, or manifest, aspect of that potential corresponds to sambhogakaya, whereas the naturally abiding, or empty, aspect corresponds to dharmakaya. The blessings that result from the inseparability of these two aspects bring about the appearance of nirmanakaya manifestations in the perceptions of ordinary beings according to those beings’ individual good fortune. [This is analogous to the form of a universal monarch appearing in the sky and being reflected on the slopes of a mountain of gold.]

b. *Specific Situations*

Spiritual potential can be analyzed in light of three specific situations: the impure situation (spiritual potential with respect to ordinary beings), the transitional situation from impure to pure (spiritual potential with respect to bodhisattvas), and the utterly pure situation (spiritual potential, or fundamental being, with respect to tathagatas). The fact that on the level of buddhahood there is freedom from distortions is antithetical

to its entailing any spiritual potential, or fundamental being (in the true sense of these terms), but there is nothing wrong with applying these labels. *The Highest Continuum* states:

The fundamental being that is buddhahood, the enlightenment of buddhahood, . . .⁹¹

With respect to these three situations, the same source explains:

These situations—impure, transitional from impure to pure, and utterly pure—are respectively described as those of ordinary beings, bodhisattvas, and tathagatas.⁹²

According to the commentary on this source:

Thus it is. In the impure situation, the term “fundamental being of ordinary individuals” is used; in the transitional situation from impure to pure, the term “bodhisattva” is used; in the utterly and completely pure situation, the term “tathagata” is used.

Alternatively, [87b] spiritual potential is threefold with respect to three spiritual approaches;⁹³ it can also be classified in thirteen ways with respect to specific stages of spiritual development, as well as in other ways. The single basic space that is mind itself—spiritual potential in the ultimate sense—is pervasive, for it is omnipresent, without any gradation of better or worse. Nevertheless, spiritual potential can be expediently referred to by different terms, according to the categories of different spiritual approaches, as well as to those of the range of higher and lower spiritual levels and paths. In the same way, the name of a single container may change depending on what is poured into it. *The Ornament of Manifest Realization* states:

It is because of the specific factors it supports that it can be analyzed so thoroughly.⁹⁴

Spiritual potential as utterly lucid basic space abides in all who manifest as ordinary beings, high or low, or as spiritually advanced beings, both high and low—shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and so forth. In this context, it is present without any gradation of its essence into better or worse, without any diminishment or augmentation. This is, for example, similar to the fact that although clay pots, wooden bowls, and vessels

c. Analogies and Their Meaning

My analysis of spiritual potential based on analogies and their meaning has three steps: presenting these analogies and their meaning in detail, correlating them, and demonstrating the nature of the heart essence of being.

i. A Detailed Presentation

One of the treatises concerned with correctly interpreting the definitive meaning of the final series of teachings spoken by the Buddha, *In Praise of the Basic Space of Phenomena*, states:

Just as the essence of butter is not evident [88b] when it is still mixed with milk, so the basic space of phenomena is not perceived when mixed with afflictive states.

Just as the essence of butter becomes flawless through the refining away of the other ingredients of milk, so the basic space of phenomena becomes utterly undistorted through the refining away of afflictive states.

Just as a lamp inside a vase is not visible in the slightest, so the basic space of phenomena is not perceived inside the vase of afflictive states.

When an opening in the vase [containing the lamp] is oriented toward the place where one sits, the radiance, the nature of the lamp, will be cast in that specific direction.

Similarly, when the vajra of meditative absorption shatters the vase [of afflictive states], at that point the light will illuminate all of space to its furthest limits.⁹⁷

Just as when a rare jewel (while remaining utterly clear at all times) is embedded in rock its utter clarity is not evident,

so when obscured by afflictive states even the basic space of phenomena, completely free of distortions,

of precious metals and stones appear to have different qualities, there is no difference in the quality of the space within these containers. As *The Highest Continuum* indicates:

Just as space, which epitomizes a nonconceptual state, extends everywhere, so the true nature of mind—basic space without distortions—is omnipresent.

Its general characteristic is that it permeates things, including both faults and positive qualities, to the utmost extent,

which is similar to space permeating specific forms, whether inferior, mediocre, or sublime.⁹⁵

The seeming distinction between better and worse is based on whether or not there is freedom from distortions. [88a] Blinded by the sheer density of their obscurations, ordinary beings display no more than the merest hint of the qualities of enlightenment. Arhats of the shravaka and pratyekabuddha approaches, for whom these distortions have diminished, are more advanced with respect to such qualities. Bodhisattvas, who have progressed further and attained the spiritual levels, manifest these qualities in a more advanced way than arhats, who have not yet left all states of ignorance behind. Buddhas, free of all obscuration, manifest them in the most advanced way. According to this paradigm, it can be posited that there is no nirvana (in the true sense of the word) for arhats of the shravaka and pratyekabuddha approaches, only a mere respite from the suffering of samsara. The same source states:

Why is this so? Because there is dharmakaya, arrival at the state of suchness,

truth for those who are spiritually advanced, ultimate nirvana.

Therefore, since the qualities of enlightenment are as inseparable from it as rays are from the sun,

there is no nirvana other than buddhahood itself.

.....

Therefore, until buddhahood is attained, nirvana is not attained.

Just as one cannot see the sun separate from its light and its rays.⁹⁶

The second analogy is that of bees' honey:

When honey is surrounded by swarming bees, a wise person who, having seen it, is motivated to obtain it uscs skillful means [89b] to remove it entirely from the swarm. Similarly, with omniscient vision, the great seers perceive this spiritual potential, fundamental being, which is like the honey, and cause what obscures it, which is like the bees, to be forever and utterly left behind.¹⁰⁰

The third analogy is that of ripened grains still in their husks:

People cannot enjoy ripened grains encased in husks,¹⁰¹ but anyone who wants to eat or otherwise use them can remove them from their husks. Similarly, so long as what is victorious—mixed with the distortions,¹⁰² of the afflictive states of ordinary beings—¹⁰³ is not freed from this association with the distortions of afflictive states, the enlightened deeds of victorious ones will not affect those in the three realms of conditioned existence.¹⁰⁴

The fourth analogy is that of gold buried in a swamp:

When people are hurrying a long, their gold may fall into a rotting mire and, with its property of indestructibility, remain there for many centuries. A god endowed with clairvoyance¹⁰⁵ might perceive it and say to people, "Gold can be found here. Clean this sublime precious metal and use it for the purpose such metal serves." Similarly, the Sage perceives the potential for enlightenment in ordinary beings mired in the filth of afflictive states¹⁰⁶ and, to purify that emotional swamp, causes a rain of sacred teachings to fall on all beings.¹⁰⁷

The fifth analogy is that of an underground treasure: [90a]

There might be an inexhaustible treasure in the earth under a poor man's house,

does not evince its utter lucidity in samsara; it evinces this lucidity in nirvana.

When the element of gold is present, through one's efforts one will perceive pure gold; but if one lacks sensitivity to one's fundamental being, one's efforts will create nothing but afflictive states.

Just as a ripened grain is not evident when covered by a husk, so there is nothing evident called "buddhahood" when there is the overlay of afflictive states. [89a]

But just as the grain becomes evident when free of the husk, so dharmakaya itself becomes utterly evident when free of afflictive states.

Although the plantain tree is a common analogy in the world for what has nothing at its core, its fruit, its quintessence, is eaten as a delicacy.

Similarly, although samsara has nothing at its core, once one is free of the cage of afflictive states, the fruit of this—buddhahood itself—becomes nectar for all beings.⁹⁸

This passage contains six analogies—employing the images of butter, a lamp, a gem, gold, grain, and the fruit of a tree, respectively—which illustrate the three situations of ground, path, and fruition.

Maitreya presents nine analogies in *The Highest Continuum*. The first is that of a statue of the Buddha enclosed in a lotus bud:

The Tathagata, radiant with a thousand characteristics but enclosed in a decaying lotus, would be seen by a person with flawless clairvoyance and taken out of the bud of the water-born lotus. Similarly, with the vision of a buddha, a sugata sees the true nature of even those dwelling in the Hell of Endless Torment. Out of compassion, one who dwells at the furthest limit of unobscured being frees those who are caught up in the obscuration of believing that things have identity.⁹⁹

but he does not know of it, nor can the treasure say to him, "I am here!"

Similarly, the precious buried treasure of the mind is its flawless nature, with nothing to add or remove. But failing to realize this, all beings experience the suffering of deprivation constantly and in many ways.¹⁰⁸

The sixth analogy is that of the seed of a tree within its hull:

The fruit of a mango or some other tree has a seed with an indestructible nature; with cultivation, watering, and so forth, a majestic, verdant tree eventually results. Similarly, the positive state of fundamental being is concealed within

an enveloping fruit—the ignorance and so forth of ordinary beings—and in like manner, owing to various positive conditions, a majestic sage eventually appears.¹⁰⁹

The seventh analogy is that of a jeweled statue wrapped in rags:

A statue of the Victorious One, made of precious things but wrapped in vile-smelling, tattered rags and lying by the roadside, might be seen by a god who tells someone of it lying by the roadside

so that it may be recovered.

Similarly, those with unobstructed vision perceive the nature of the

Sugata—albeit cloaked in a plethora of afflictive states—even in animals, and consequently they demonstrate the means to gain liberation.¹¹⁰ [90b]

The eighth analogy is that of a future ruler gestating in the womb of a low-born woman:

Some deformed, helpless woman languishing in a house for the destitute may carry a glorious future monarch in her womb, yet not know of the ruler who is in her own belly.

Birth in conditioned existence is like the house for the destitute, and impure beings are like this pregnant woman.

The one she bears will be her protector.¹¹¹

the flawless state of fundamental being is like the one in her womb.¹¹²

The ninth analogy is that of a golden statue still in its clay mold:

A splendid statue cast of molten gold but still in a mold could bring peace of mind, but is covered with clay.

Those who see and understand this remove the covering to reveal the gold within.

Similarly, sublime enlightened ones accurately see that distortions¹¹³

of the utterly lucid nature are adventitious

and ensure that those beings who are like a source of riches are purified of their obscurations.¹¹⁴

These nine analogies describe the heart essence of being from the standpoint of nine ways in which its nature can be obscured. Generally speaking, these analogies refer to fundamental being as it is present in unenlightened individuals.

More specifically, the distortions present in the minds of ordinary beings who have not yet entered the path are karmic patterns—meritorious and otherwise—that serve only to perpetuate samsara. [91a] The four analogies employing the images of a lotus, bees, a grain husk, and a swamp, respectively, illustrate four deeply ingrained and powerful patterns: desire, aversion, delusion, and a combination of these three in equal measure. The single analogy of a poor man's treasure buried in the earth illustrates the heart essence of being whose nature is obscured by the habit patterns of ignorance present in the minds of shravaka and pratīyeka-buddha arhats. The two analogies employing the images of a hull and rags, respectively, illustrate two kinds of distortions, those that are present in the minds of ordinary beings training on the path and that are to be eliminated through the path of seeing, and those that are present in the minds of spiritually advanced beings and that are to be eliminated through the path of meditation. The two analogies of a ruler gestating in a womb and a clay mold encasing gold illustrate distortions affecting those on the ten spiritual levels—on the first seven (or "impure") levels and the last three (or "pure") levels, respectively. As is said:

The deeply ingrained, powerful habit patterns caused by attachment, aversion, and delusion,

as well as the factors to be eliminated on the paths of seeing and meditation, and those pertaining to the impure and pure spiritual levels:

nine kinds of distortions are illustrated by the analogies of the lotus bud and so forth.

The shell of derivative afflictive states can be analyzed as countless millions of variations.¹¹⁵

Having been summarized, these nine kinds of distortions—*i.e.*, attachment and so forth—are accurately illustrated in their respective order by the nine analogies of the lotus bud and so forth.

As a result of these distortions, spiritually immature individuals, arhats, those still learning, and those at the stage of further learning¹¹⁷

can be respectively illustrated (9 *tib*) by four, one, two, and two analogies to be in states of impurity.¹¹⁸

ii. Correlating the Analogies with Their Meaning

Next, I will explain the meaning of these nine analogies. By illustrating flaws, they are meant to help one understand that the veils of the nine kinds of distortions are factors to be eliminated. As is said:

A lotus growing from the mud is pleasing to one's mind when it first appears, but later, when it withers, it no longer pleases; the pleasure deriving from desire and attachment is like this.

Insects such as bees attack and sting when they are disturbed; similarly, when aversion arises, it brings pain to the heart.

Kernels of rice and other grains are covered by husks; similarly, one's perception of the significance of the heart essence of being is obscured by a shell of ignorance.

Filth is disagreeable; similarly, in that deeply ingrained patterns cause those caught up in attachment to depend on their desires, these patterns resemble filth.

When riches are concealed, one who lacks knowledge of them cannot see the treasure; similarly, what lies naturally within ordinary beings is obscured by habit patterns of ignorance.

The gradual growth of a seedling splits its enveloping hull; similarly, the perception of suchness removes the factors to be eliminated on the path of seeing.

For those who are engaged in the path of the spiritually advanced and have overcome their fundamental belief in the reality of the perishable aggregates, there are factors to be eliminated through timeless awareness on the path of meditation; these are shown to be analogous to tattered rags.

The distortions affecting those on the seven spiritual levels are analogous to the defects of confinement in a womb. Similar to deliverance from the confines of the womb (92a) is the full maturation of nonconceptual timeless awareness.

The distortions associated with the three spiritual levels are understood to be like a covering of clay. They are the factors to be conquered by the truly great state of vajra-like meditative absorption.¹¹⁹

iii. Demonstrating the Nature of the Heart Essence of Being

Now I will demonstrate the nature of the heart essence of being. Fundamental being—the very heart of enlightenment—which is spontaneously present in individuals, is called “the nature as dharmakaya” in that it is pure by nature and a perfect embodiment of the qualities of enlightenment; this is illustrated by three analogies: a statue of the Buddha in the center of a lotus, honey covered by bees, and a kernel of grain in its hull. It is called “the nature as suchness” from the perspective of the unchanging,

uncompounded quality that indicates its presence within one; this is illustrated by the fourth analogy of gold in a swamp. It is called “the nature of being as spiritual potential” in that the freeing of this heart essence from distortions through the training one undergoes on the path makes it seem as though the three kayas are created; this is illustrated by five analogies employing the images of a treasure, a tree, a jeweled statue, a universal monarch, and a golden statue. Again, *The Highest Continuum* states:

The nature as dharmakaya,
as suchness, and as spiritual potential
is to be understood through three, one,
and five analogies.¹²⁰

In one’s present situation, in which distortions are still involved, the significance of one’s fundamental being cannot be fully expressed by an analogy, and so any analogy would have to apply to dharmakaya itself. However, as is said:

Since [dharmakaya] transcends the transitory world,
it cannot be portrayed by a mundane analogy,
and so the fundamental being of the tathagatas [92b]
can only be pointed out by means of some approximation.¹²¹

Two aspects of dharmakaya can be pointed out through approximation: fundamental being, which is the cause of a process of disengagement, and self-knowing timeless awareness, the very essence of buddhahood, which is the result of that disengagement. A long with these are two related aspects of the sacred dharma: the scriptural and the experiential. As is said:

Dharmakaya is understood to have two aspects:
the utterly flawless basic space of phenomena
and, in accordance with that,
the causal aspect, demonstrated by means of profound and
myriad methods.¹²²

The causal aspect of dharmakaya is omnipresent, as *The Commentary on “The Highest Continuum”* states:

The dharmakaya of the tathagatas permeates the realms of all beings without exception. From this standpoint, all of these beings are endowed with buddha nature. In the realms of ordinary be-

ings, there is no one, no single being, who falls outside the dharmakaya of the tathagatas. This is similar to the realm of forms being permeated by the realm of space.

Concerning this nature, which is without transition or change, it is said:

Because the nature of being is unchanging,
positive, and completely pure,
this suchness is described
as being like an image of gold.¹²³

To speak of the nature of being as “spiritual potential” is to refer to that nature from the standpoint of the qualities of enlightenment developing. The analogies of a treasure and a tree have already been discussed.

While one is on the paths of accumulation and linkage, one has the firm conviction, based on intellectual evaluation, that fundamental being—the essence of ultimate reality—is definitely present within one; [93a] other than that, one has no direct experience of it. From the first spiritual level onward, one has a partial perception of it, but on the level of buddhahood, the nature of being is seen directly, having become fully evident, just as it is. To give an analogy, although the sun is shining, those without eyes do not see it while those with eyes do. As is said:

The ultimate reality of naturally occurring beings¹²⁴
is that which can be realized through faith.¹²⁵
Although the orb of the sun blazes with light,
those without eyes do not see it.¹²⁶

Therefore, the three kinds of spiritually advanced beings of lesser development—shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas—do not perceive this nature just as it is.¹²⁷ Even spiritually advanced bodhisattvas are similar to small infants who see the sun only through a skylight, without seeing how it shines throughout the countryside. As is said:

Even the spiritually advanced are similar to small infants
who see the sun from their nursery.¹²⁸

The Commentary on “The Highest Continuum” refers to a buddha perceiving everything:

Like one who sees the sun through a skylight, those whose insight
is limited—
even spiritually advanced beings with the pure vision of the
intelligent—do not perceive everything.

But transcendent and accomplished conquerors, with the unlimited intelligence of completely pure dharmakaya, see all limitless objects of knowledge pervading the reaches of space.

Given that ultimate truth is basic space, when one directly perceives the nature of basic space, it is said that one “perceives ultimate truth.” [93b] Ultimate truth is not emptiness in the sense of a void! Concepts such as the nonexistence of identity are taught as antidotes to the fixation on identity experienced by ordinary beings, who are spiritually immature, and by beginning practitioners. But in actuality, one should understand basic space to be utterly lucid, uncompounded, and spontaneously present. The same commentary states:

To summarize briefly, four kinds of individuals are considered to lack the vision to perceive buddha nature. Who are these four, you ask? They are ordinary beings, shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and those bodhisattvas who have only recently begun their training. As is said, “This buddha nature of the transcendent and accomplished conquerors is not within the scope of those who err by regarding the perishable aggregates as real, who take great delight in erroneous ideas, or whose minds are completely distracted by emptiness.”¹²⁹

4. THE RATIONALE FOR RELYING ON SPIRITUAL POTENTIAL

This discussion has two parts: an objection that calls into question the necessity for this potential and my response to this objection. As is said:

Making comparisons to clouds, dreams, and illusions, they say, “All that is knowable is empty in every respect”; how is it, then, that in this case victorious ones say that the very essence of buddhahood exists in ordinary beings?¹³⁰

To elaborate, in the intermediate series of his teachings, the Buddha speaks of all phenomena as impermanent (like clouds), untrue (like dream images), lacking any independent nature even though they result from the interaction of causes and conditions (like illusions), and so forth. [94a] This being so, people of inferior intellect might object, “How is it that there are statements asserting that the heart essence of being is permanent (in that it exists timelessly; and without change), true (in that it

is naturally indwelling), and uncompounded (in that it is not created by causes and conditions)? This seems to be contradictory.” This objection can be countered by the argument that this heart essence is empty insofar as it is devoid of flaws, anything of a compounded nature, and so forth, but it is not empty in the sense that its qualities are discounted. As cited previously:

Although one’s fundamental being is devoid of adventitious factors that are characterized as separate from it, it is not devoid of unsurpassable factors that are characterized as inseparable from it.¹³¹

My response to this objection can be delineated as follows: The ultimate authentic state—that is, fundamental being, which is completely pure by nature—is like space in that it is uncompounded. Nevertheless, karma, afflictive states, and factors that foster experiences of pleasure and pain in samsara manifest within it like cloud formations. It can be shown that suffering is as ephemeral as clouds, for it results from afflictive states—from the fallacious functioning of ordinary mind. It can be shown that karma is like dream images, for it is manifest yet lacks any independent nature. It can be shown that the mind-body aggregates, which are created by afflictive states and karma, are like illusions and phantoms. Teachings that convey these points serve as antidotes to overt fixation on identity as something absolute.

Five further faults may arise, such as a fixation on affirming or denying that emptiness is absolute. To avert these faults, one’s fundamental being is shown to be buddha nature, ultimate reality. [94b] This is indicated by the following:

Everything that is compounded is absent from the ultimate authentic state. Afflictive states, karma, and their inevitable consequences are described as being like clouds and so forth. Afflictive states can be said to be like clouds. Karma is like the experiences in a dream. The inevitable consequences of afflictive states and karma—the mind-body aggregates—are like illusions or phantoms. Once that has been established, in order to avert five faults

this treatise, *The Highest Continuum*, also teaches the presence of one's fundamental being.¹³²

What are these five faults, you wonder? As is said:

Faintheartedness, belittling lesser beings, failing to perceive what is authentic, disparaging what is authentic,¹³³ and egocentric attachment: the Buddha spoke of these five specific faults so that those who had them could eliminate them.¹³⁴

To elaborate, one might not perceive that the very heart of enlightenment is present within one and so would become fainthearted, thinking, "Someone such as I cannot attain buddhahood!"; one, therefore, would not arouse bodhichitta. Even if one aroused bodhichitta, one might belittle beings, thinking, "I am a bodhisattva, while others are very ordinary"; this would hinder one's attainment of higher stages on the path. If one regarded emptiness as something absolute, one would not experience the basic space of phenomena, the nature of ultimate reality, and so would fail to perceive what is authentic. By falling into naive affirmation or denial, one would disparage whatever is authentic. In not seeing oneself and other beings as equals, one would perceive things egocentrically: in terms of self and other. As is said: [95a]

Not having heard of their fundamental being, owing to the flaw of belittling themselves some who are faint of heart might not arouse bodhichitta.

If those who have aroused bodhichitta become arrogant, thinking, "I am great," they fall under the sway of the idea that those who have not aroused bodhichitta are inferior.

Knowledge of what is authentic will not awaken in those with such an attitude. Therefore, they will not perceive what is authentic¹³⁵ and so will be unaware of the significance of what is authentic.

Because they are unnatural and adventitious, the flaws of beings are not true:

what is true is their lack of identity.¹³⁶ The qualities of enlightenment are pure by nature.

Fixating on flaws that are not true, one disparages what is authentic; someone with this attitude will not find the love that sees the equality of oneself and other beings.¹³⁸

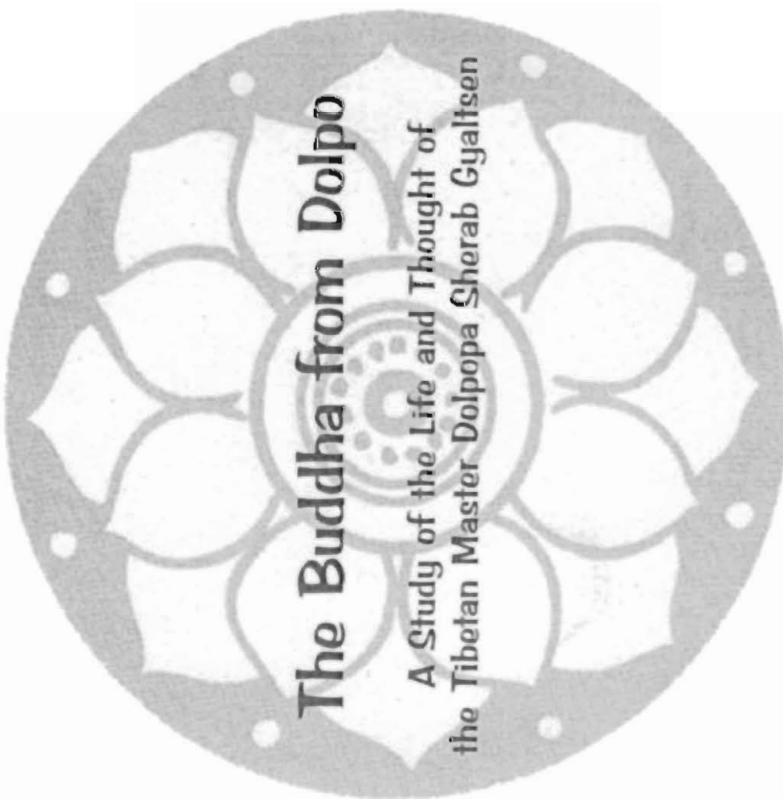
If one understands that fundamental being is spontaneously present in oneself and others, one will feel enthusiasm, understanding that there is nothing to prevent one's mind from achieving liberation. One can develop respect for all beings as though they were buddhas, so that in addition to not harming or injuring them, one can benefit them. One can ensure the welfare of others by expanding the scope of sublime knowing (by understanding the basic space of ultimate reality), timeless awareness (by perceiving the way in which things abide), and immeasurable love. As is said:

Having heard of fundamental beings, one arouses enthusiasm, respect for others as though for the Teacher, sublime knowing, timeless awareness, and great love. Because these five qualities are born, [95b] one incurs no censure, but experiences one's equality to others, is without flaws, is endowed with the qualities of enlightenment, and loves beings for their equality to oneself. Buddhahood itself is swiftly attained.¹³⁹

It should be understood that the foregoing discussion of spiritual potential is based entirely on the definitive meaning of the teachings; it does not rely on the provisional meaning at all. Because this theme is pivotal to the Mahayana and is difficult to realize, I have explained it in detail here.

B. Arousing Bodhichitta

My discussion of how someone with this spiritual potential arouses bodhichitta has three parts: coming to an understanding of the nature of the attitude aroused, how the attitude is aroused in light of this understanding, and the stages of training to be observed.



The Doctrine of the Buddha from Dolpo

Existence and nirvāna are not identical,
but like a shadow and the sun.

—Bhagavān Avalokiteśvara¹

The title alone of Dolpopa's *The Great Calculation of the Doctrine Which Has the Significance of a Fourth Council* (*Bka' bsdu bzhi pa'i don bstan rtsis chen po*) would have been enough to rattle those who were opposed to his interpretations of Buddhist Doctrine. In Tibet it was universally accepted that there had been three great councils (*bka' bsdu*) in India for the purpose of gathering and accurately preserving the teachings of the Buddha after his final nirvāna.² Dolpopa's audacious claim that his text served as a fourth such council would obviously have provoked incredulous reactions among many of his contemporaries. That he anticipated certain objections is clear from the following comments at the end of his autocommentary to *The Fourth Council*:

Having realized that the Doctrine of the Buddha remains in a superior, a middling, and an inferior [form, it is realized that] the superior is the Kṛtavyuga Dharma, which is the witness and authority. The middling is the Tretayuga Dharma and the inferior is the Dvāparayuga Dharma. Those two are not witnesses. This realization by the great experts who stand guard over the Doctrine is very important.

To establish the path of perfect view, meditation, and conduct after cleansing the flawless Doctrine of flaws which have

Cyrus Stearns

SUNY series in
Buddhist Studies

Matthew Kapstein, editor

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS

been mixed in, and contamination which has been imposed by the flawed intellects of ordinary persons, is also the purpose of a council. There were three councils before, and this is the fourth. It is also a great calculation of the Doctrine.³ It is called impartial and unbiased because all the faithful respect, pure vision, expressions of disagreement, appeals, love, compassion, and so forth, remain impartial and unbiased, without falling into any prejudice.

Objection: While it is known that many arhats [destroyers of the enemy] gathered for the previous councils, here the gathering is just to destroy [your] enemies.

[Reply:] In the sublime Kṛtayuga teachings there are many thousands of profound quotations by the great arhat, the Blessed One, the Buddha, which very clearly present the meaning of this. Since those [quotations] are the same as the [actual presence of] the great arhat, this has been compiled according to his tradition.

Future compilers please also do likewise, and if there is disagreement in regard to the interpretation of the quotations, please use the autocommentaries of the Buddha himself as witnesses.⁴

In addition to clarifying the meaning of the title of his text, these remarks also touch upon the first major point raised by Dolpopa in *The Fourth Council* itself. In this work, and many of his earlier compositions as well, Dolpopa speaks of a fourfold division of the Buddhist teachings according to four eons (*yuga*). Basing himself upon the teachings of the *Vimalaprabhā*, Dolpopa mentions two sets of four eons (*yuga*), the first of which is the greater, referring to the quality of the eons which make up a cosmic age (*kalpa*), while the lesser set refers to the quality of the different periods of the Buddhist teachings.⁵ In the autocommentary he states his criteria for this classification, and makes it obvious that he is speaking of a doxographical scheme in regard to the eons of the Doctrine. This has recently been noted by M. Kapstein, who has said that Dolpopa was “allocating philosophical doctrines to ‘aeons’ according to purely dogmatic criteria.”⁶ According to Dolpopa, the teachings of the perfect Kṛtayuga are those which apply directly to the truth just as it is, whereas the teachings which belong to the Tretayuga,

Dvāparayuga, and Kaliyuga are progressively contaminated and filled with flaws, due to the nature of the individuals who have composed them. Thus the Kṛtayuga teachings are the only ones which should be regarded as valid testimonies to the enlightened intentions of the Buddha.⁷

This classification of the historical degeneration of the Buddhist teachings is indeed found in full form in the *Vimalaprabhā*, primarily in the section of commentary upon verses 22 and 23 of the *Lośadhātupaṭala* of the *Kālacakra tantra*.⁸ Budōn’s annotations to these passages make it clear that Dolpopa was not here making any innovative interpretations of the original treatise.⁹ What is less clear is what the *Vimalaprabhā* and Dolpopa both consider to be the teachings of the Kṛtayuga. As indicated by quotations found throughout his writings, Dolpopa certainly considered the Kṛtayuga Dharma to include many, if not all of the highest tantras, as well as *The Trilogy of Bodhisattva Commentaries*, *The Ten Sūtras on the Buddha-nature*, *The Ten Sūtras of Definitive Meaning*,¹⁰ and the works of Maitreya, Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu, Asaṅga, Nāropa, and Saraha. As Kapstein has mentioned, Dolpopa seems to have considered Ārya Vimuktisena, Haribhadra, Yaśomitra, and other late Indian masters to represent the Tretayuga.¹¹

It will become obvious in the translation of *The Fourth Council* in part 2 that Dolpopa identified his own tradition with the teachings of those scriptures and writers which he viewed as truly portraying the Kṛtayuga tradition. This was also a motivating factor behind his wish to redefine what had until his time been accepted as the orthodox lines of scriptural interpretation in Tibet.

1. Emptiness of Self-Nature and Emptiness of Other

The key to Dolpopa’s approach was to link his doctrine of the absolute as empty only of other relative phenomena (*gzhan stong*) to the teachings of the Kṛtayuga, as opposed to the teachings of the Tretayuga and later eons which emphasized that even absolute reality was empty of self-nature (*rang stong*). This he makes clear early in *The Fourth Council*:

Thoroughly understanding each of those divisions, I wish to purge the Doctrine,

And wishing for myself and others to enter upon a fine path, I honor the sublime Kṛtayuga Dharma as a witness.

The Tretayuga and later [eons] are flawed, and their treatises which have been diluted like milk in the marketplace are in every case unfit to act as witnesses.

The higher refutes the lower, as the higher philosophical systems refute the lower.

The Kṛtayuga Dharma is the immaculate words of the Victor, and those well spoken by the lords on the tenth spiritual level, and by the great originators of systems which are flawless and endowed with sublime qualities.

In that tradition all is not empty of self-nature. Finely distinguishing empty of self-nature and empty of other, whatever is relative is all stated to be empty of self-nature, and whatever is absolute is stated to be precisely empty of other.¹²

Dolpopa maintained that there are two modes of emptiness that can be correlated with the two truths, and with phenomena and reality. He emphasized that absolute truth is not empty of itself (*rang stong*), but is the ground or substratum which is empty of all other relative phenomena, and thus is described as the profound emptiness of other (*gzhan stong*). This is the mode of emptiness for the true nature (*chos nyid*, *dharmatā*) of reality. Absolute truth is uncreated and indestructible, noncomposite and beyond the chain of dependent origination. Relative truth and ordinary phenomena are empty of self-nature (*rang stong*), and completely unestablished in the ontological sense. The relative is the created and destructible phenomena which are composite and dependent upon causes and conditions.

One of the central themes of Dolpopa's work is the importance of correctly distinguishing the meaning of the term *emptiness* when used in reference to the incidental stains which veil the Buddha-nature, and when used in reference to the Buddha-nature itself. Both *are* empty, but not in the same sense. In a text addressed to one of the rulers of Chang, Dolpopa made the following statement:

Because everything which exists in the two modes of emptiness are equal in being emptiness, there are statements

with the single phrase—"Everything is emptiness." But there are also statements in which there is a distinction between empty of self-nature and empty of other. The intent of those [statements] must also be precisely presented.

In regard to this, because relative and incidental entities are completely nonexistent in their mode of existence, they are empty of individual essence. That is being empty of self-nature.

Because the primordial absolute which is empty of those relative [phenomena] is never nonexistent, it is empty of other.¹³

In brief, Dolpopa considered the Buddha-nature to be naturally luminous radiant light, which is synonymous with the buddha-body of reality (*dharmakāya*), and a primordial, indestructible, and eternal state of great bliss inherently present in all its glory within every living being. On the other hand, the incidental stains or impurities which veil the Buddha-nature are the various states of mind associated with the myriad experiences of mundane existence. Whereas the veils of temporary defilement are empty of self-nature (*rang stong*), the Buddha-nature is empty only of phenomena other than itself (*gzhan stong*).

In discussions of these topics, Dolpopa often employed the three-fold paradigm of the basis or ground, the spiritual path, and the result or fruit of enlightenment. Using this approach, he would first say that the Buddha-nature is the gnosis which is the universal ground or substratum (*ālayajñāna*, *kun gzhi ye shes*) for every phenomenon experienced in saṃsāra and nirvāna. He is careful to point out that although this luminous enlightened expanse inherent within the mind-stream of each living being is not the cause of saṃsāra, even saṃsāra would be impossible without it, and from this point of view only is it referred to as the ground of saṃsāra.¹⁴ It is the basis from which all imperfections and faults are cleansed, and the ground in which all spiritual qualities are actualized.

Second, the spiritual path is the process of erasing all imperfections or faults from that ground or substratum, and thereby allowing the spiritual qualities to actualize or become evident. This path is composed of two aspects. The first is the accumulation of gnosis (*jñāna*, *ye shes*) that burns away all the veils that have been obscuring the

spiritual qualities of the buddha-body of reality (*dharmakāya*), which is eternal and spontaneously present within each living being. The second aspect of the path is the accumulation of merit (*puṇya*, *bsod nams*), which gradually creates the previously absent spiritual qualities of the buddha-bodies of form (*rupakāya*).

Third, the result of this process is the state of buddhahood, the optimum condition in which the greatest good may be achieved for both oneself and others. This is accomplished by means of what Dolpopa speaks of as the attainment of “the separated result” (*bral ’bras*) of the buddha-body of reality (*dharmakāya*), the absolute state of authentic being which has been separated from obscuration by the emotional and intellectual veils. It is also accomplished by means of the attainment of the buddha-bodies of form (*rupakāya*), referred to by Dolpopa as “the produced result” (*bskyed ’bras*), which is the relative symbolic manifestations of buddhahood.

As pointed out above, the majority of Buddhist teachers in Tibet did not agree with Dolpopa’s ideas. Personal statements by Dolpopa about his earlier views before coming to Jonang are almost nonexistent. The following excerpt from his writings is very revealing in regard to the opinions of others, and to what Dolpopa himself had accepted earlier in his career while he was still at Sakya.

According to the opinions of some scholars in India who were not noble individuals, and some spiritual friends in Tibet as well, other than the emptiness such as that of a pillar or a pot, the emptiness of other does not fit the definition of emptiness. Furthermore, only the emptiness of self-nature, in which all phenomena are each empty of individual essence, fits the definition of emptiness; there is absolutely no definition of emptiness beyond that. That being the case, as with the emptiness of the relative, the absolute is also empty of the absolute. As phenomena are empty of phenomena, the true nature is also empty of true nature. As *samsāra* is empty of *samsāra*, great *nirvāna* is also empty of great *nirvāna*. As the buddha-bodies of form are empty of the buddha-bodies of form, the buddha-body of reality is also empty of the buddha-body of reality, and so forth. In brief, there are many opinions in which everything is accepted as empty of self-nature, but in which it is impossible for anything whatsoever not to be empty of self-nature.

For a long time my mind was also accustomed to the habitual propensity for that well-known [view]. Even though I did understand a small amount of Dharma, for as long as I had not beheld the great kingdom of the exceptional, profound, uncommon, and sublime Dharma, I also merely relied upon the verbal regurgitation of others, and said, “Only an emptiness of self-nature fits the definition of emptiness; there is no definition of emptiness beyond that,” and so forth, as was mentioned above. Therefore, it is not the case that I do not also understand that tradition.

At a later time, due to the kindness of having come into contact with *The Trilogy of Bodhisattva Commentaries*, [I understood] many profound and extremely important points of Dharma which I had not understood well before. . . . Now, if I think about the understanding I had at that time, and the corresponding statements I made, I am simply mortified.¹⁵

The process of enlightenment according to Dolpopa may be further illuminated by means of some traditional examples. First of all, Dolpopa maintained that there are two types of “universal ground” (*ālaya*, *kun gzhi*). He considered the Buddha-nature to be the “universal ground gnosis” (**ālayajñāna*, *kun gzhi ye shes*). While it is still veiled by the temporary emotional and intellectual stains, it is like the sky filled with clouds, or a jewel covered with mud. On the other hand, the “universal ground consciousness” (*ālayavijñāna*, *kun gzhi rnam shes*) is the impurities or incidental stains which are to be removed, and the deeply imprinted habitual propensities associated with it. They may be likened to the clouds in the sky, or the mud covering the jewel. Second, the spiritual path is composed of the various techniques of practice which bring about the removal of the impurities. This path may be likened to the wind which scatters the clouds, or the stream of water which washes the mud from the jewel. Finally, the result is spoken of as an attainment, but it is really the total integration of bliss and emptiness, a self-arisen gnosis which has been eternally present, but is now manifest or actualized. This is like the appearance of the clear cloudless sky, or the jewel separated from the mud. Therefore, Dolpopa would say, the incidental stains should be understood as empty of self-nature (*rang stong*), and suitable to be removed through spiritual practice, while the Buddha-nature itself is empty only of other

extrinsic factors (*gzhan stong*), such as the incidental stains which veil its eternal and indestructible nature.¹⁶

2. A Redefinition of Cittamātra and Madhyamaka

It is significant that Dolpopa often signs his works with the pseudonym Dönpa Zhiden (Rton pa bzhi ldan), which means “endowed with the four reliances.” This clearly summarizes his hermeneutical approach, referring to the four guidelines, or points to be relied upon (*catuḥpratisaraṇa*, *rton pa bzhi*), which the Buddha himself prescribed in several Mahāyāna sūtras, such as the *Catuḥpratisaraṇa sūtra*, and the *Samdhinirmocana sūtra*. These four are:

Rely upon the teaching, not the teacher.

Rely upon the meaning, not the text.

Rely upon the definitive meaning, not the provisional meaning.

Rely upon gnosis, not consciousness.

Dolpopa strongly felt that the Buddhist tradition as it had developed in Tibet emphasized the teachings of provisional meaning at the expense of those of definitive meaning. For centuries scholars had been concerned with resolving apparently conflicting notions about the meaning of emptiness, and in particular its relationship or identity with the Buddha-nature. In the opinion of many Tibetan experts the teachings of emptiness found in the Second Turning of the Dharma Wheel, for example in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, are definitive in meaning, while the teachings of the Buddha-nature found in the Third Turning of the Dharma Wheel, for example in the *Uttaratantra* attributed to Maitreya, and a large number of Mahāyāna sūtras, are of provisional meaning. There were, however, other traditions which maintained just the opposite, that the teachings of Buddha-nature were definitive and only by means of them could the true meaning of emptiness be understood.

Mati Panchen, who was one of Dolpopa’s chief disciples and successors, gives a succinct definition of the Jonang position in regard to this question:

The meaning of the Middle Wheel is the manner in which the relative is empty.

The meaning of the Final Wheel is the manner in which the absolute is empty.

Since they teach the nonexistence of what does not exist, and the existence of what does exist, the ultimate intention of both are identical.¹⁷

According to Dolpopa the first two Turnings of the Dharma Wheel, concerned respectively with the Four Noble Truths and the presentation of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) as a lack of all defining characteristics, do not emphasize the definitive teachings on ultimate truth. Specifically, he stated that the Second Turning primarily presented relative phenomena as empty of self-nature (*rang stong*) and not transcending the chain of dependent origination. On the other hand, the Third Turning of the Dharma Wheel presented the teachings on the Buddha-nature, which are the final definitive statements on the nature of ultimate reality, the primordial ground or substratum beyond the chain of dependent origination, and which is only empty of other relative phenomena (*gzhan stong*).

However, Dolpopa was also very concerned with showing that the nature of absolute reality taught in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* of the Second Turning, and the teachings of the Buddha-nature found in the scriptures of the Third Turning were fundamentally in agreement, as indeed were the traditions of Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga, and Vasubandhu.¹⁸ In this regard he emphasized that the absolute emptiness taught in the Second Turning of the Dharma Wheel, in the Third Turning, and in all the highest teachings of the tantras, was the profound emptiness of other, and not that of a mere emptiness of self-nature.¹⁹ An integral part of his approach in this regard was to illustrate that the different terminology utilized in a wide variety of Buddhist scripture was actually often used to describe the same thing. For example, in a text devoted primarily to clarifying the nine true or fully established natures (*pariniṣpanna*, *yongs grub*) in the context of the three-nature (*trisvabhāva*) theory, Dolpopa alternately refers to them as the nine fully established natures (*pariniṣpanna*), the nine transcendent knowledges (*prajñāpāramitā*), and the nine Buddha-natures (*tathāgatagarbha*). Elsewhere he further illustrated his point that such Dharma language is interchangeable by also speaking of the nine Great Seals (*mahāmudrā*), the nine Great Madhyamakas, and the nine absolute states that are empty of other (*gzhan stong*), all of which

describe the same profound ground of emptiness (*stong gzhi*) or profound mode of reality (*gshis lugs*).²⁰

In opposition to the dominant tradition of interpretation in Tibet, Dolpopa maintained that Indian masters such as Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, Dignāga, and Nāgārjuna were all representative of the tradition which he labeled the Great Madhyamaka (*mahāmādhyanika*, *dbu ma chen po*). Dolpopa considered one of the essential characteristics of this Great Madhyamaka to be the use of the paradigm of the three-nature theory (*trisvabhāva*), which was almost always considered a hallmark of the Yogācāra or Cittamātra tradition.²¹ A significant Tibetan precedent for Dolpopa's point of view was recorded by one of his most important successors, Jonang Kunga Drolchok. He recorded some of the actual teachings of the eleventh-century master Tsen Khawoche, who is often thought to be the first Tibetan to have taught what later came to be known as the Zhentong view.²² Kunga Drolchok preserved these teachings under the title of *Instructions on the View of the Emptiness of Other* (*Gzhan stong gi lta khrid*), which he states have been condensed from the instruction manual of Tsen Khawoche himself. This short text provides a fascinating glimpse into an early source for the Zhentong tradition in Tibet. There are themes present here which can definitely be identified in the later work of Dolpopa, but there is none of Dolpopa's characteristic terminology, such as the term "empty of other" (*gzhan stong*):

The attachment to delusory [phenomena] as true is the imagined [nature]. The attachment to the incorrect pervasive conceptualization itself as actual objects and subjects, is like [mistaking] a rope for a snake. As many [subjects] as there are from form to omniscience,²³ there are also that many imagined objects.

If based upon causes and conditions, they are dependent [in nature], and appear in various [guises], but are merely incorrect conceptualization, [like] the rope as the basis which is mistaken for a snake. Due to karma and the afflicting emotions, [there are such] conceptualizations, from form to omniscience.

The self-arisen true nature, pervading the dependent from the beginning like the space pervading the rope, is the unmistakably established [nature], the immutable fully established [na-

ture), the two buddha-bodies of form, the components of enlightenment, the Truth of the Path, and [the topics] from the form of true nature to omniscience. In the conventional sense they are empty of the imagined [nature's] characteristics.

Although classified as three [natures] without essence, if investigated, only the dependent phenomena and the fully established true nature have a single true nature which is taintless and spontaneous, because there are no objects and subjects except for the mind. Therefore, the imagined [nature] is an emptiness of self-nature, like the horn of a rabbit. Empty of the imagined [nature], the dependent is like an illusion. Empty of both the imagined and the dependent [natures], the fully established is like the sky. The distinctions of an imagined and a dependent [nature] exist in the relative, but do not exist in the absolute. The fully established true nature exists in the absolute, but it is the Great Madhyamaka free from all extremes, without any essence which is identical or different than relative phenomena.²⁴

There are several points of considerable interest in Tsen Khawoche's teachings as presented by Kunga Drolchok. The first thing which strikes the reader is that it is structured according to the three-nature (*trisvabhāva*) doctrine usually associated with the Yogācāra tradition of the Mahāyāna, and not the Madhyamaka. In particular, Tsen Khawoche states that the fully established nature is empty of both the imagined and the dependent. In this he is certainly following the description found in the *Brhatṭīkā* (*Yum gsum gnod joms*), a vast commentary on the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, and not the orthodox Yogācāra position as found in the works of Vasubandhu. Dolpopa would later do the same, and specifically point to the *Brhatṭīkā* as the scriptural source for his position. These teachings of the *Brhatṭīkā* and their relation to Dolpopa's theories will be investigated in some detail below.

Like Tsen Khawoche, Dolpopa would also refer to his teaching as the Great Madhyamaka.²⁵ He makes his case for this in *The Fourth Council*:

In the flawed traditions of the Tretayuga and later [eons], it is claimed that the immutable fully established nature is only Cittamātra.

They allege that all three natures are also only Cittamātra.

Because the three natures are repeatedly taught in the treatises of the flawless Kṛtavyuga Madhyamaka,

Because that language does not occur in the Cittamātra treatises, and because there are many refutations to the contrary,

It emerges from the Kṛtavyuga tradition that the three natures are the Dharma tradition of only the Madhyamaka.

Therefore, by not understanding that type of classification, and by mixing it up, the dregs of the view have arisen.

Those Madhyamaka [treatises] which present the three natures of the fully established, and so forth, have been demoted to Cittamātra treatises.²⁶

The great experts of the Great Madhyamaka who taught them have also been demoted to Cittamātra adherents.²⁷

In his autocommentary Dolpopa explains this section in considerable detail.²⁸ First he notes that the three-nature (*trisvabhāva*) theory occurs in many of the scriptures which he considers Kṛtavyuga Madhyamaka, such as *The Eight Thousand Line Prajñāpāramitā*, *The Twenty-five Thousand Line Prajñāpāramitā*, *The Five Hundred Line Prajñāpāramitā*, the *Laṅkāvatāra*, the *Samādhirimocana sūtra*, and the *Suvarṇaprabhāṣā*. Furthermore, he maintains that texts in which the term *three natures (trisvabhāva)* occur cannot be considered Cittamātra treatises because the immutable fully established nature (*pariniṣpanna*) and the philosophical system of the Cittamātra are in conflict. Whereas the Cittamātra assert that momentary consciousness is truth in the absolute, Dolpopa contends that the immutable fully established nature (*pariniṣpanna*) is absolute noncomposite space and intrinsic awareness indivisible, which transcends momentary consciousness. Momentary consciousness is a composite, impermanent, fabricated, and incidental limited phenomenon, whereas the immutable fully established nature (*pariniṣpanna*) is a noncomposite, permanent, natural, and primordial middle ground free from extremes. Therefore, momentary consciousness cannot be equated to the immutable fully established nature.

As long as the phenomena of momentary consciousness are not transcended, there can be no nondual gnosis, Great Madhyamaka,

or immutable fully established nature (*pariniṣpanna*). When the phenomena of momentary consciousness have been transcended, the immutable fully established nature is attained. But at this point the doctrine of Cittamātra has also been transcended. The immutable fully established nature is thus Madhyamaka, not Cittamātra. Here Dolpopa mentions that it is also necessary to understand the division of the Cittamātra according to the two truths. He maintains the existence of an absolute Cittamātra which may be considered identical to the Madhyamaka, because both state that in reality there are no phenomena other than absolute mind, and because absolute mind always exists as the omnipresent indestructible thusness. To say that there are no phenomena other than the expanse of reality (*dharmadhātū*) is equivalent to saying that there are no phenomena other than nondual gnosis. Dolpopa identifies the relative Cittamātra with what was usually referred to as Cittamātra in Tibet during his time. This position should properly be called Vijñānavada.

The three-nature theory as one of the fundamental paradigms associated with the Yogācāra or Cittamātra tradition of Indian Buddhism derives its authority from a number of scriptures, perhaps the most important of which are the *Samādhirimocana sūtra* and the *Laṅkāvatāra sūtra*. It was especially elaborated upon by Asaṅga in works such as the *Bodhisattvabhūṣā*, the *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha*, and the *Madhyāntavibhāṅga*, as well as in the *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa* and *Triṃśikā* of his brother Vasubandhu. Although the three-nature theory is an integral part of the Yogācāra system, as Dolpopa pointed out it is also found in some of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*. In Tibet this fact had important hermeneutical implications for the understanding of the development of Indian Buddhist doctrine. In particular, what might be called the “orthodox” Tibetan view of the Three Turnings of the Dharma Wheel was challenged by the presence of this theory in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*. This was because it was generally accepted in Tibet that the scriptures and treatises of the Yogācāra or Cittamātra school belonged to what was known as the Third Turning of the Dharma Wheel, while those of the Second Turning of the Dharma Wheel, such as the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, were associated with the Madhyamaka tradition. In this context it is of particular significance that the *Brhāṭṭikā (Yum gsum gnod joms)*, a commentary upon the specific *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* in which the three-nature theory

are presented, has survived in Tibetan translation, and that Tibetan teachers have often attributed this commentary to Vasubandhu. The intense interest in the presence of the three natures in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, and in the interpretations found in the *Brhatīkā*, seems to have only arisen in Tibet.

As Dolpopa noted, the presentation of the three-nature theory is found in the twenty-five-thousand-line and the eighteen-thousand-line versions of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*. In each of these sūtras the theory is taught by the Buddha in response to questions from the bodhisattva Maitreya; in the seventy-second chapter of the twenty-five-thousand-line version and the eighty-third chapter of the eighteen-thousand-line version.²⁹ It is quite surprising that no modern scholars have examined the section in the Tibetan translation of the *Brhatīkā*, the enormous commentary to the *Prajñāpāramitā* in which the "Maitreya Chapter" in the twenty-five-thousand-line sūtra is specifically explained.³⁰ The *Brhatīkā* is the only extant text of Indian origin which directly comments upon the controversial chapter. This anonymous commentary, which has often been attributed to Vasubandhu, is the obvious place to look for clarification of the three-nature theory as found in the *Prajñāpāramitā*. The work is best known in Tibet by the short title *The Conquest of Objections in Regard to the Three Mother Scriptures* (*Yum gsum gnod joms*). It is a commentary upon the versions of the *Prajñāpāramitā* in eighteen-thousand, in twenty-five-thousand, and in one-hundred-thousand lines. Dolpopa emphasized that the *Brhatīkā* was the work of Vasubandhu, and gave it a place of central importance in his interpretation of *Prajñāpāramitā* thought.³¹

In his translation of Budón's *History of Buddhism*, Obermiller first mentioned the existence of a Tibetan controversy concerning the authorship of the *Brhatīkā*. In the Nartang edition of the Tibetan canon, which was edited by Budón, the title page of the work specifically states "composed by the master Vasubandhu." Although Budón rejected the opinion of some scholars that it was the work of the Kashmiri master Damṣṭrasena, Tsongkapa would later state that it had been composed by the Kashmiri scholar.³² Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo (1382-1456), representing the opinion of the Sakya tradition in Tibet, accepted the commentary as a work by Vasubandhu. Scholars of the ancient tradition of the Nyingma still accept it as an authentic work by Vasubandhu.³³ In short, the

only Tibetan scholars who did not accept it as a composition of Vasubandhu seem to have been followers of the Geluk tradition.³⁴ The lineage of sūtra interpretation maintained by Dolpopa's tradition in Tibet was eventually eclipsed by that of the Geluk school in the early fifteenth century. Although this is not yet generally acknowledged, it is clear that much of Tsongkapa's philosophical doctrine was formulated in direct reaction to the teachings of Dolpopa which he had come in contact with during his studies of Mahāyāna treatises under the direction of some of Dolpopa's disciples. It seems quite possible that Tsongkapa's unique attribution of the *Brhatīkā* to Damṣṭrasena, instead of to Vasubandhu as was accepted by both Dolpopa and Budón, was part of his broader refutation of Dolpopa's teachings which had been so influential in the preceding generation.

Although the "Maitreya Chapter" itself is the primary locus for the expression of the three-nature theory in the twenty-five-thousand- and the eighteen-thousand-line *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, there is frequent mention of the three natures throughout the *Brhatīkā*, and not just in the final section which specifically comments upon this chapter as found in the twenty-five-thousand-line sūtra. A very informative example is found in a section of the *Brhatīkā* which is concerned with proving the nature of emptiness to be free from the two extremes (*mtsh' gnyis dang bral ba*).³⁵ In commenting upon the intention of the Buddha in teaching that form is emptiness and emptiness is also form, the *Brhatīkā* makes the following statements:

In regard to the statement "form is empty of form," [it should be known that] there are three aspects of form—imagined form, discerned form, and the form of the true nature.

The tangible form that is apprehended by childish ordinary persons as a characteristic suitable to be [referred to] as form, is known as "imagined form."

Precisely that, in whatever aspect it becomes an object of consciousness appearing as an external entity, is known as "discerned form."

That which is free from the aspects of both the imagined and the discerned, and which is solely the fully established thusness, is known as "the form of the true nature."

Since that which is the form of the fully established true nature is empty of the characteristics of existence as imagined form, and so forth, and also [empty] of form which appears in the aspect of an object discerned as form, it is known as "empty."⁷

So it has been explained, but these doubtful thoughts about it may arise: "Does that which is the form of the true nature, empty of imagined and discerned form, have some other characteristic of form? Why is it even known as 'form'?"⁸

Therefore it is explained: "That which is the emptiness of form is also not form." That which is empty of imagined and discerned form, and is the form of true nature possessing the characteristic of fully established thusness, is not the nature of form, because it is in every way isolated from the aspect of form.³⁶

This section of the *Brhaṭṭīkā* is extremely clear in establishing that the true nature, or fully established nature, is referred to as "empty" because it is free from *both* the imagined and discerned natures. Here there are definite grounds for Dolpopa's declaration of absolute reality as empty only of other relative phenomena (*gzhan stong*). In a manner very similar to the above passage from the *Brhaṭṭīkā* in which the fully established (*pariniṣpanna*) nature is presented as empty of both the imagined (*parikalpita*) and the discerned (*vikalpita*) natures, Dolpopa stated that ultimate reality was empty of other relative phenomena, but not itself empty. For example, he claimed that "the imagined and the dependent natures are impossible if the fully established true nature does not [really] exist."³⁷ In one of his earliest major works, *A General Commentary on the Doctrine (Bstan pa spyi 'gral)*, the theory is touched upon in the following verse:

I bow at the feet of the masters who state that all the imagined and dependent phenomena are nonexistent, but the fully established true nature is never nonexistent,

Thus carefully distinguishing and teaching that which transcends existence and nonexistence, and eternalism and nihilism.³⁸

In his commentary to *A General Commentary on the Doctrine*, Nyaön Kunga Bal specifically refers to Dolpopa's opinions several times when explaining this verse.³⁹ According to Dolpopa, the phenomena of the imagined nature (*parikalpita*) are simply nonexistent. The elements, and so forth, which appear to be external, actually have no existence outside of the consciousness of the beholder, and thus are totally nonexistent, like the horn of a rabbit. This is termed the "authentic imagined nature" (*kun brtags mtshan nyid pa*). The concepts which arise in the mind in the wake of the appearance of apparent phenomena, and which thus identify those phenomena as external, are termed "the imagined nature existing in merely the conventional sense" (*tha snyad tsam du yod pa'i kun brtags*). The dependent nature (*paratantra*) is also twofold. The "impure dependent nature" (*ma dag pa'i gzhan dbang*) is all the ordinary worldly thoughts and mental states. The "pure dependent nature" (*dag pa'i gzhan dbang*) is the composite gnosis which directly realizes selflessness, and the worldly gnosis experienced outside of meditation sessions. These are dependent in nature because they arise from causes and conditions. The fully established nature (*pariniṣpanna*) is the state of ultimate reality which can withstand rigorous and reasoned examination from the absolute point of view, and is empty of both the imagined and the dependent natures. In this way all the imagined and dependent phenomena are nonexistent in reality, whereas the fully established nature is fully established in reality, is never nonexistent as the true nature of phenomena, and always exists in truth. To say that the first two natures exist in the absolute sense is the extreme view of eternalism, and to say that the third nature does not exist in the absolute sense is the extreme view of nihilism. This fully established nature, or absolute reality, is the ultimate Madhyamaka or middle which transcends those two extremes.

In numerous writings Dolpopa consistently maintained that the three-nature theory belonged to the Madhyamaka tradition, and not to the Cittamātra or Yogācāra. As mentioned above, he was able to make this statement in large part by claiming that Vasubandhu and Asaṅga were upholders of what was known as the Great Madhyamaka tradition, one of the key themes of which was the combination of the three-nature theory with standard Madhyamaka doctrine.⁴⁰ Dolpopa wrote more than two thousand pages of annotations and explanations concerning the different

Prajñāpāramitā sūtras. It is especially interesting to note that large portions of his annotations to the twenty-five-thousand- and eighteen-thousand-line versions of the *sūtra* are copied directly from the *Brhaffikā*, although it is not acknowledged as the source. At the end of such glosses he repeatedly adds “thus the Madhyamaka teaches.”⁴¹ In his interpretations of the three natures Dolpopa clearly followed the unique interpretation of the *Brhaffikā*.

Dolpopa also mentions the occurrence of the three-nature theory in still other versions of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*. He specifically refers to the versions of the *sūtra* in five hundred, eight thousand, eighteen thousand, and twenty-five thousand lines as teaching the three natures. The “Maitreya Chapter” is found only in the eighteen-thousand- and twenty-five-thousand-line versions. In citing the other versions Dolpopa is referring to statements in the *sūtras* which present the three-nature theory without actually using the three specific terms. For example, in the autocommentary to *The Fourth Council* he makes the following statement:

In the *Five Hundred Line Prajñāpāramitā* it is also stated that since the form, and so forth, which are nonexistent entities, are the imagined [nature], they are to be understood [as totally nonexistent]; since the form, and so forth, which are base entities, are the dependent [nature], they are to be rejected; and since the form, and so forth, which are entities existing in reality, are the fully established [nature], they are precisely what is to be obtained after the removal of impurities. Those which are in the three categories in this way are to be understood, rejected, and actualized after the removal of impurities.

It is also stated that if even the enlightenments of the listeners and solitary buddhas are not achieved if one does not practice in that way, what need is there to mention that the enlightenment of the Mahāyāna [is not achieved]?⁴²

This quotation clearly illustrates how Dolpopa would interpret a passage of scripture in order to highlight its significance in the context of his own philosophical agenda. Let us compare his interpretation to what is actually found at the very beginning of the Tibetan translation of the five-hundred-line *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, which is of course the version Dolpopa was using. The first words of the Buddha are: “Form, Subhūti, is a nonexistent entity, a base

entity, and an existent entity.”⁴³ After stating that the same three-fold classification applies to the remaining aggregates, bases of sense cognition, and so forth, the Buddha continues:

Since childish persons do not precisely comprehend form in those three categories, they are addicted to form, cultivate it, and obscure it. If certain renunciation will not come about by means of the vehicle of the listeners or the vehicle of the solitary buddhas for those who are addicted to form, cultivate it, and obscure it, what need is there to mention [that it will not come about] by means of the great vehicle of the Mahāyāna?⁴⁴

Now the extent of Dolpopa’s interpretation is obvious. In the original *sūtra* passage there is only a bare mention of the three categories, although they are clearly of fundamental importance in understanding the intent of the scripture. Dolpopa has elaborated upon them, and seen them to correspond to the three aspects of the three-nature theory. Without examination of the numerous *Prajñāpāramitā* commentaries in the Tibetan canon, it is uncertain whether he based his interpretations on earlier Indian or Tibetan precedent, or whether this is another facet of his still largely unexplored and perhaps original hermeneutical work. Jonang Tāranātha, certainly the most influential heir to Dolpopa’s tradition, also emphasized the presence of the three natures in the *Prajñāpāramitā*, and quoted a large portion of the “Maitreya Chapter” when later seeking to establish the canonical sources for the Madhyamaka tradition of “the emptiness of other” (*gzhan stong*) in his school.⁴⁵

Dolpopa not only tried to show the compatibility of different Mahāyāna scriptures and treatises, but to illustrate as well how the same points of doctrine were expressed in the Vajrayāna scriptures. In particular, he often taught the *Kālacakra tantra* according to the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, and vice-versa.⁴⁶ For example, he pointed out that Nāgārjuna had presented the infallible teachings of the Madhyamaka by means of refuting the extreme of the nihilistic view of nonexistence through his *Collection of Eulogies (Bstod pa'i tshogs)*, and refuting the eternalistic view of existence through his *Collection of Reasoning (Rigs pa'i tshogs)*. Likewise, Asanga and Vasubandhu had established the meaning of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* as Madhyamaka by refuting the extreme view of existence through denying the reality of both the imagined (*parikalpita*) and dependent

(*paratantra*) natures, and refuting the extreme view of nonexistence through affirming the reality of the profound and fully established nature (*pariniṣpanna*). In this way, Dolpopa felt, there is no contradiction between the teachings of Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga, and Vasubandhu, nor are any of the flaws of the inferior Cittamātra doctrine to be found. Moreover, all of the categories of pristine form, and so forth, which are taught in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* are actually to be understood as indicating the divine assemblies described in the tantras.⁴⁷

Dolpopa's consistent treatment of doctrinal topics of both sūtra and tantra in the same works, and his insistence that these two traditions of explication and practice are in actuality saying the same thing, albeit with different terminology and style, is another area in which he departed from what was the norm in Tibetan scholarly discourse. Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna theory and practice had for the most part been the subjects of separate works, and were not discussed side by side. But Dolpopa felt that the entire Buddhist tradition as it had been received in Tibet should be utilized when seeking to understand the true intentions of the Buddha and his great successors. As he stated in the autocommentary to *The Fourth Council*:

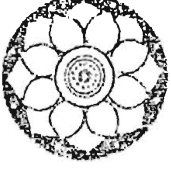
Tantras should be understood by means of other tantras.
Sūtras should be understood by means of other sūtras.
Sūtras should also be understood by means of the tantras.
Tantras should also be understood by means of the sūtras.
Both should be understood by means of both.
Moreover, [they should be understood] by means of pristine learning, contemplation, meditation, explication, and practice.

By means of that, the many profound [aspects of] the ground, path, and result of the many profound teachings are realized.

All the ground and result of definitive meaning are one as the Buddha-nature itself, and the path is its yoga.⁴⁸

3. Two Approaches to Enlightenment

When it came to the question of how enlightenment actually occurs, Dolpopa, like almost all Tibetan masters, taught that the spiritual path described in the Buddhist tantras was the superior



The Supplication Entitled A General Commentary on the Doctrine

(Opening expressions of homage and offering)

OM GURU BUDDHA BODHISATTVEBHYO
NAMO NAMAḤ¹

I respectfully pay homage and take refuge at the immaculate lotus-feet of the Dharma Lords, the excellent masters, the emanation buddha-bodies. Please grace me at all times with your great love.²

I bow at the feet of the permanent, stable, and eternal precious Dharma Lords, the masters endowed with the four reliances,

Who spontaneously perform enlightened actions filling space, and clarify the unmistakable definitive secret of the absolute.³

(Main Section)

(1 Respectfully bowing to the masters because they correctly realize and teach the individual intended meanings of the three Dharma Wheels in sequence)

(1a Respectfully bowing to the masters because they correctly realize and teach the intended meaning of the First Dharma Wheel)

I bow at the feet of the masters who carefully teach that all composite phenomena are impermanent, unstable, and changeable,

Like a mountain waterfall, like a cloud, like lightning, and like dew⁽⁶⁸⁷⁾ on a blade of grass.⁴

I bow at the feet of the masters who teach that the nature of suffering is the same for the entire three realms,

Like being caught in a pit of fire or in a vicious viper's mouth, or like a bee circling inside a pot.⁵

I bow at the feet of the masters who teach that those who cling to the impure body as pure

Are the same as ignorant children who like and desire a vase of vomit beautified with ornaments.⁶

I bow at the feet of the masters who cause sentient beings who delight in saṃsāra itself to feel revulsion and sadness toward the impermanent and the impure,

And then teach them the Four Truths for entering the path of empty and peaceful selflessness.⁷

(1b Respectfully bowing to the masters because they correctly realize and teach the intended meaning of the Second Dharma Wheel)

I bow at the feet of the masters who teach that all phenomena⁽⁶⁸⁸⁾ arise just from conditions,

Without any self, sentient beings, soul, or creator, and are like a dream, an illusion, a mirage, or an echo.⁸

I bow at the feet of the masters who clearly teach that objects appear to be external, but are merely the habitual propensities of mind,

And that even mind, intellect, and consciousness are mere names, mere designations, just empty like space.⁹

I bow at the feet of the masters who teach that the aggregates of form, and so forth, are only as substantial as foam, water bubbles, a mirage, and so forth,

And who teach that the bases of sense cognition are the same as an empty town, and the constituents the same as vicious vipers.¹⁰

I bow at the feet of the masters who teach that all the phenomena of existence and nirvāṇa are birthless and ceaseless,

Free from going, coming, and remaining, and without extreme and middle, each empty by nature.¹¹

(1c Respectfully bowing to the masters because they correctly realize and teach the intended meaning of the Third Dharma Wheel)

I bow at the feet of the masters who teach that like a butter lamp inside a vase, the treasure of a pauper, and so forth,

The Buddha-nature of radiant light and the buddha-body of reality exist within the sheath of the relative, incidental aggregates.¹²

I bow at the feet of the masters who state that all the imagined and dependent phenomena are nonexistent, but the fully established true nature is never nonexistent,

Thus carefully distinguishing and teaching that which transcends existence and nonexistence, and eternalism and nihilism.¹³

I bow at the feet of the masters who state that all relative phenomena are merely the dependent origination of cause and result, while the self-arisen absolute transcends dependent origination,⁽⁶⁸⁹⁾

Thus teaching the difference between the gnosis that arises from conditions, and that which is self-arisen.¹⁴

(2 Respectfully bowing to the masters because they correctly realize and teach the meaning of tantra, and mainly what is expressed in the Kālacakra tantra)

I bow at the feet of the masters who state that all outer and inner phenomena are merely the deluded sphere of ignorance, while the other is the true nature, self-arisen gnosis,

Thus teaching the distinction between consciousness and gnosis, saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, and the two truths.¹⁵

I bow at the feet of the masters who distinguish and teach that the relative threefold universe is a deluded appearance, a mere fiction;¹⁶

Whereas, the absolute threefold universe, the Buddha-nature, is the indestructible, nonfictional, undeluded appearance.¹⁶

(3 Respectfully bowing to the masters because they correctly realize and teach the intended meaning of all three Dharma Wheels)

I bow at the feet of the masters who teach the intentions of the Dharma Wheel of the Four Truths,

The Dharma Wheel of no characteristics, and the Dharma Wheel of certainty in the absolute.¹⁷

I bow at the feet of the masters who cleanse the three coarse, subtle, and extremely subtle stains with the nectar of the three Wheels in sequence,

[Enabling disciples] to obtain the sublime jewel of the buddha-body of reality free from stain.¹⁸

I bow at the feet of the masters who teach those who maintain [the existence of] external objects that everything is mind, who teach the Madhyamaka of no appearance to those who are attached to mind,

And who teach the Madhyamaka of perfect appearance to those who maintain no appearance.¹⁹

I bow at the feet of the masters who teach the Dharma of cause and result to the inferior, who teach those who adhere to existence that everything is empty,

And who teach the Buddha-nature of radiant light to those who maintain nothing.²⁰

(4 Respectfully bowing to the masters because they correctly realize and teach the intended meaning of both sūtra and tantra)

I bow at the feet of the masters who teach the vehicle of the listeners to those of inferior faculties, the vehicle of the solitary buddhas to those of middling faculties, ⁽⁶⁸⁰⁾

And the sūtra and mantra styles of cause and result in the sublime vehicle to the superior.²¹

I bow to you who care for trainees with the three Wheels in sequence, and especially secret mantra,

Just like parents care for infants, adolescents, and young adults according to their development.²²

I bow to you who also teach the three Wheels in sequence, and especially the tradition of mantra, according to the character of trainees,

Like assigning work to an inferior, middling, or superior child according to character.²³

I bow to you who teach that the three-storied mansion of the Buddhist Doctrine of the three Wheels in sequence,

And especially of secret mantra, is to be climbed in sequence, like climbing to the top of a three-storied mansion.²⁴

I bow to you who teach the cleansing of the Buddha-nature by the three Wheels in sequence, and especially by secret mantra,

Just like three layers of stain upon a jewel are cleansed in sequence by a jeweler.²⁵

(5 In particular, respectfully bowing to the masters because they correctly realize and teach the intended meaning of mantra)

(5a Praise by presenting the similes of ultimate bliss and emptiness)

I bow to you who teach that the Buddha-nature has another cause and result.

The other cause is the empty images of radiant light, and the other result is immutable great bliss, similar to the eight prognostic images.²⁶

(5b Praise by presenting a number of the names of ultimate emptiness)

I bow to you who teach that many various names, such as Secret, Great Secret, Element of Space, and Viśvamāta,

Source of Phenomena, Lotus, Bhagā, Lion-throne, Nairātmyā, and ⁽⁶⁸¹⁾ Varāhi, have the single meaning of emptiness.²⁷

(5c Praise by presenting a number of the names of ultimate great bliss)

I bow to you who teach that the many names of that itself, such as Vajra, Drop, Heruka, and Gathering, Restraint, He, Great Compassion, Primal Buddha, and Enlightenment Mind, have the single meaning of great bliss.²⁸

(5d Praise by presenting a number of the names of the total integration of bliss and emptiness)

I bow to you who teach that many names, such as Vajrasattva, Evaṃ, Kālacakra, and Cakrasaṃvara, Hevajra, Māyājāla, and Guhyasamāja, have the single meaning of total integration.²⁹

(6 Respectfully bowing to the masters because they correctly realize and teach the intended meaning of the ground, path, and result)

I bow to you who teach that total integration, indivisible, equal-flavored, and indestructible self-arisen gnosis, the primal Buddha,

Is present in everyone as thusness with stains, is like the sky, and exists as the universal ground.³⁰

I bow to you who teach the path of the Vajrayoga, the perfection of transcendent knowledge, the Atiyoga,

And the meditation of the Great Seal, together with its branches, as the method for separating that from the sheath of the stains.³¹

I bow to you who teach that through the sublime method of the path, that which is present as the ground is merely actualized as the result,

An immaculate thusness from which all stains have been purged, like the sky clear of clouds, and so forth.³²

(7 Respectfully bowing to the masters because they correctly realize and teach the two buddha-bodies, together with their enlightened activities, which are the result of the two assemblies)

I bow to you who teach that the sheath of stains upon self-arisen gnosis is destroyed by the assembly of the nonconceptual gnosis of immutable radiant light,

And the excellent benefit for oneself is achieved through the absolute buddha-body of reality.³³

I bow to you who teach that the assembly of merit, which accomplishes benefit and happiness, [and which is created] by a special attitude of great love for those who go without understanding,⁽⁶⁹²⁾

Fully produces the excellent relative buddha-bodies of form, and accomplishes the excellent benefit of others.³⁴

I bow to you who teach that after fully perfecting a sea of prayers, fully maturing a sea of sentient beings,

And fully purifying a sea of pure realms, one dissolves into the perfect culmination.³⁵

I bow to you who teach that due to prior impetus, benefit to others will spontaneously occur in all directions and at all times, even without effort and without thought,

Like the fine vase, the sun, the jewel, the heavenly tree, and the divine drum.³⁶

(8 Respectfully bowing to the masters because they correctly realize and teach the ultimate intended meaning of everything, such as the three Dharma Wheels in sequence)

I bow to you who teach that the ultimate Dharma Wheel is the Final Wheel, the ultimate vehicle is the Mahāyāna,

The ultimate Mahāyāna is the vehicle of the Buddha-nature, and the ultimate Buddha-nature is great bliss.³⁷

I bow to you who teach that the ultimate Doctrine is the Mahāyāna, the ultimate Mahāyāna is the Mantrayāna,

The ultimate mantra is Kālacakra, and the ultimate Kālacakra is bliss and emptiness.³⁸

I bow to you who teach that the ultimate philosophical system is the Great Madhyamaka, the ultimate Madhyamaka is birthless and free from extremes,

The ultimate freedom from extremes is natural radiant light, and ultimate radiant light is great bliss.³⁹

I bow to you who teach that the ultimate view is emptiness free from extremes, the ultimate emptiness is a referential emptiness,⁽⁶⁸³⁾

The ultimate conduct is great compassion, and the ultimate compassion is nonreferential.⁴⁰

I bow to you who teach for the benefit of ultimate disciples that the ultimate initiation is the transcendent initiation,

The ultimate realization is the definitive meaning of the perfection stage, and the ultimate attainment is the great sublime attainment.⁴¹

I bow to you who teach that the ultimate maṇḍala is sublime natural radiant light, the ultimate deity is the buddha-body of the gnosis of bliss and emptiness,

The ultimate seal is the Great Seal of radiant light, and the ultimate mantra protects the mind.⁴²

I bow to you who teach the complete ultimate Dharma of the ultimate ground as thusness with stains,

The ultimate path as the Six-branch Yoga, and the ultimate result as the thusness of the separated result.⁴³

(Conclusion)

This supplication, entitled *A General Commentary on the Doctrine*, was composed by Sherab Gyaltzen Balzangpo, a servant of the Dharma Lords, the excellent masters.⁴⁴

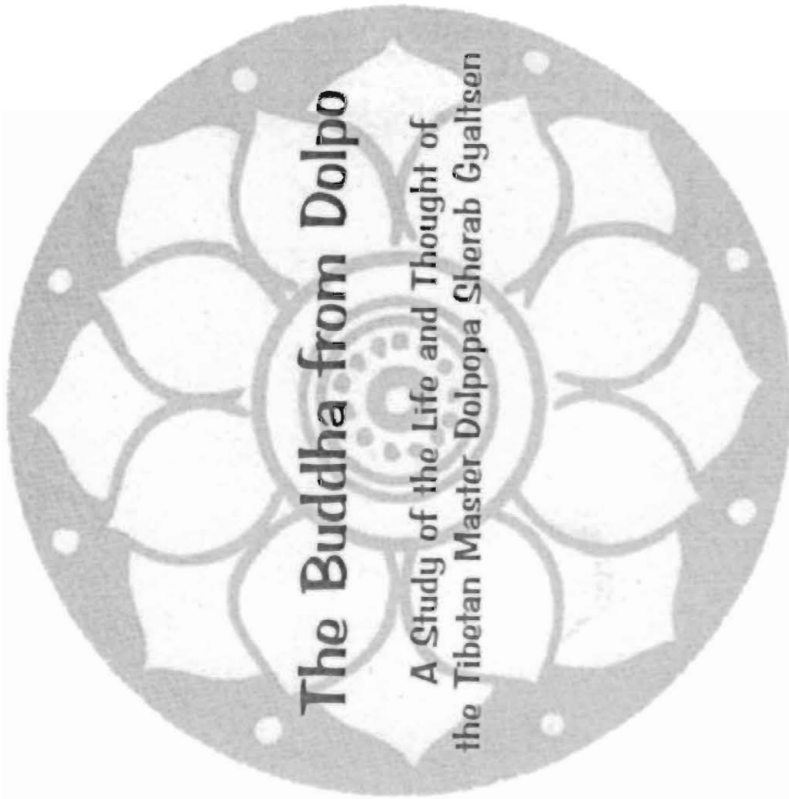
By this virtue, may I and all sentient beings actualize the separated result of the absolute buddha-body of reality,

And by means of the produced result of the twofold relative buddha-bodies of form, work for the benefit of others for the duration of saṃsāra.⁴⁵

For as long as that has not been achieved, by means of the three Wheels in sequence, and especially secret mantra,⁽⁶⁸⁴⁾

May I always strive to cleanse in sequence the stains upon my own and other's Buddha-nature.⁴⁶

MANGALAM BHAVANTU⁴⁷



Cyrus Stearns

SUNY series in
Buddhist Studies

Matthew Kapstein, editor

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS



A Historical Survey of the Zhentong Tradition in Tibet

This advice by the Omniscient Dolpopa should be kept as the essential point in our hearts: "If buddhahood will be reached merely as a result of having heard the word 'Buddha-nature,' what need to mention what will happen from actualizing it by means of faith and devotion, and meditating upon it? Therefore, compassionate experts should teach it even though they may lose their lives, and so forth, and those who strive for liberation should seek it out and listen to it even though they must cross through a great pit of fire."

—Jamgön Kongdrul¹

Very little is known about the early Tibetan proponents of philosophical points of view which would later come to be known as Zhentong (*gzhan stong*). According to Lhey Gyaltsen, many persons with partial realization of the teachings of definitive meaning had appeared in Tibet before the fourteenth century, most of them serious meditators, but no one until Dolpopa had mastered all the teachings of definitive meaning found in the various scriptures, treatises, and esoteric instructions, and then formulated that realization into a coherent philosophical system.² Tāranātha traces a transmission lineage for what he refers to as "the instructions on the view of the Zhentong Middle Way," as well as a separate lineage for the transmission of the Kālacakra teachings passed down in the Jonang tradition.³ The first of these lists is concerned with the transmission of the practical instructions which epitomize the intentions of all the sūtras and commentaries of the Third Turning of the Dharma Wheel. This lineage is primarily traced

through Maitreya and the Indian brothers Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, who are considered to be the originators of the doctrine, but another list is also given for the transmission from Nāgārjuna.⁴ This text may be considered a record of the names of teachers who taught the Zhentong view based upon the teachings of the Mahāyāna scriptures and commentaries. Tāranātha's second text, concerned with the lineage of the Kālacakra as transmitted in the Jonang school, may be considered a record of the names of teachers who taught the Zhentong view based upon the teachings found in the tantras, and specifically as articulated in the Kālacakra tantra and the related literature. Examples of the teachings of only one Tibetan master in each of these lineages before the time of Dolpopa are available at the present time.

1. The Zhentong Tradition in Tibet before Dolpopa

According to Tāranātha, one of the earliest Tibetan masters in the Zhentong lineages based upon Mahāyāna teachings was Drimey Sherab, better known as Tsen Khawoche (b. 1021), who was most intimately connected with the transmission of the *Uttaratantra*.⁵ In his important collection of one hundred different instructions from a variety of lineages, Jonang Kunga Drolchok (1507-1566) preserved some instructions of this teacher, which are the earliest extant materials dealing with the Zhentong tradition in Tibet.⁶ The first excerpt he provides gives some historical context for the issue of the origins of the Zhentong position:

In regard to the instructions on the view of an emptiness of other, Tsen Khawoche said, "Sañjana, the paṇḍita of Kashmir, made the very significant statement that 'The Victor turned the Wheel of Dharma three times. The first Wheel [proclaimed] the Four Truths, the Middle [proclaimed] the lack of defining characteristics, and the Final made careful and thorough distinctions. From among them, the first two did not distinguish between the real and the artificial. The final one, at the point of certainty concerning the absolute, taught by distinguishing between the middle and the extreme, and distinguishing between phenomena and true nature. Although just the original manuscripts of the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāṅga* and the *Uttaratantra* were re-

discovered, if these two texts were lost it would be equivalent to the demise of Maitreya."

This [statement] appearing in an old notebook of Tsen Khawoche himself which bears the title *The Lotus Hook [Padma lcags kyū]*, is informative concerning the later claim that the distinction of an "emptiness of other" was totally unknown in India, and only appeared later in Tibet with the Omniscient Dolpopa. Please also carefully examine the statement appearing in one of the Omniscient Budōn's replies to questions [*dris lan*], in which he states that there was earlier a philosophical system of Danakpa Rinchen Yeshe which appears to have been later enhanced and maintained by Dolpopa.⁷

Kunga Drolchok regards this statement by Tsen Khawoche as an extremely important example of an early precedent for the philosophical distinctions later formulated by Dolpopa. Tsen Khawoche refers to his teacher Sañjana's opinion that only the Third Turning of the Dharma Wheel, wherein clear distinctions are made between phenomena and their true nature, represents the definitive meaning of the Buddha's teachings. Kunga Drolchok feels that this is enough to refute the criticism made by Tibetan critics who claimed that the Zhentong tradition was completely unknown in India and Tibet until the time of Dolpopa. He further remarks that even the great Budōn commented that Dolpopa had enhanced an earlier Tibetan philosophical system held by one Danakpa Rinchen Yeshe, and refers the reader to one of Budōn's replies to questions (*dris lan*). This is an extremely interesting comment, but unfortunately there is no mention of Dolpopa in the replies of Budōn that have been preserved.⁸ However, it is quite certain that Dolpopa did study with the Danak master Rinchen Yeshe. When he was still quite young, and just before his teaching debut at Sakya in 1313, Dolpopa spent about three months at Danak, where he studied with Rinchen Yeshe, and received from him an explanation of *The Five Treatises of Maitreya*, one of which is, of course, the *Uttaratantra*.⁹ The question of important influences on Dolpopa's formulation of the Zhentong doctrine will be dealt with in detail below.

In the lineage of the *Kālacakra tantra* transmissions in the Jonang school, the definitive aspect of the teaching was being emphasized long before the time of Dolpopa. This is most obvious in the collection entitled *Four Clear Lamps (Gsal sgron skor bzhi)* by

the eleventh-century Kālacakra master Yumowa Migyö Dorje, which has only recently become available. In these texts Yumowa is clearly dealing with some of the same themes that Dolpopa later elaborated. In fact, Tāranātha identifies Yumowa as having “initiated the tradition of the philosophical system of tantric Zhentong.”¹⁰ It is very significant, however, that none of the key terms associated with Dolpopa’s theories, such as *gzhan stong*, “emptiness of other,” or *kun gzhi ye shes*, “universal ground gnosis,” appear in the extant writings of Yumowa, nor does he use any of the terminology that Dolpopa apparently borrowed from certain Mahāyāna sūtras and treatises.

Nevertheless, the Geluk master Thukan Lozang Chögyi Nyima (1737–1802) much later states in *A Crystal Mirror of Philosophical Systems* (*Grub mtha’ shel gyi me long*) that Yumowa was the originator of the Zhentong teachings, which he so named, and that they were passed down orally until the time of Dolpopa as a hidden doctrine (*lkog pa’i chos*) without any written texts. Although it is known that Dolpopa actively taught Yumowa’s *Four Clear Lamps* (*Gsal sgron skor bzhi*), he neither mentions Yumowa in his own writings, nor quotes from his texts.¹¹

Yumowa’s four brief treatises are ultimately concerned with the correct practice of the Six-branch Yoga, the perfection-stage meditation system grounded in the *Kālacakra tantra*. The four texts have as their topic matter total integration (*zung ’jug*), the Great Seal (*phyag rgya chen po*), radiant light (*’od gsal*), and emptiness (*stong nyid*). That the extant manuscript was passed down in the Jonang tradition is indicated by the fact that a prayer to the masters in the transmission line of the Kālacakra teachings according to the Jonang lineage is appended to the first of the four texts.¹²

In these texts Yumowa focuses upon the discussion of tantric topics which are beyond the scope of this book. But it may be observed that one of his recurring concerns is to show that he does not accept the opinion of most scholars that the spiritual path is a process of realization in which emptiness is recognized as the ultimate nature of all phenomena, not established by any essential nature of its own, and free from the extremes of existence, nonexistence, both, and neither. He sees this view of emptiness as only the presentation of the philosophical system in which emptiness is established as the ultimate nature of all entities. This is not what is to be meditated upon as the path according to the stages of esoteric

instruction. In short, he feels that emptiness in the context of the path of meditation must be experiential. That which is emptiness by nature (*rang bzhin gyi stong pa nyid*) cannot be directly experienced. In making these statements Yumowa is alluding to specific experiences which occur during the practice of the Six-branch Yoga, when what are known as “empty forms” (*śūnyabimba*, *stong gzugs*) are seen with the eyes. This is the direct experience of emptiness as the path according to the teachings of the *Kālacakra tantra*. So when Yumowa says that emptiness arrived at through logical analysis, and emptiness that is inconceivable, are not the path, he is indicating that it is the emptiness seen with the eyes during the experience of meditation that is the subject of his work.¹³ Echoes of this point of view will also be found in the works of Dolpopa.

The teachings of Dolpopa were also solidly grounded in the doctrine of the tantras, especially the *Kālacakra tantra*, and his treatises do not simply follow established philosophical tenets, but represent a synthesis of the view and practice of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism. This will become clear when his views are actually encountered in the texts translated in part 2.

2. Dolpopa and the Zhentong View

It seems quite certain that the teachings of Tsen Khawoche, Yumowa, and others who taught what was later referred to as the Zhentong view did so only to small groups in the context of private instruction. No treatises written by any of the later members of their lineages, from the eleventh century until the fourteenth century, have survived. It was not until Dolpopa later proclaimed his realization, and gave his doctrine the name Zhentong, that this term and the teachings now associated with it became widely known in Tibet. The circumstances surrounding Dolpopa’s initial proclamation of the Zhentong were already described in chapter 1, and the nature of his controversial theories will be treated below in chapter 3 and in part 2. Here some of the influences behind his theories, his innovative use of language, his motivation, and the method by which he approached the Buddhist scriptures will be discussed.

It is clear from Dolpopa’s own statements that the most important scriptural sources for his controversial theories were *The*

Bodhisattva Trilogy (*Sems 'grel skor gsum*), which are the definitive commentaries on the *Kālacakra tantra*, the *Hevajra tantra*, and the *Cakrasaṃvara tantra*. For example, in a text which he sent to the ruler of the northern principality of Chang, he credits these three texts as being the key scriptural factors in his conversion from the view of absolute reality as an emptiness of self-nature (*rang stong*).¹⁴ From among them, the *Vimalaprabhā* of Kalkin Puṇḍarīka held special significance for him. He once remarked, "Since I discovered all the essential points of profound definitive meaning from the great commentary of the *Kālacakra tantra*, it has been very kind."¹⁵

It is important to keep in mind that Dolpopa was a consummate practitioner of the Six-branch Yoga, the perfection-stage practices of the *Kālacakra tantra*, and although he based his doctrinal discussions upon scripture, in particular the *Kālacakra*-related cycles, his own experience in meditation was crucial to the formation of his theories. Indeed, as George Tanabe has recently emphasized in his study of the Japanese master Myōe, "Buddhists have long insisted that the primary experience—and experience is primary—is that of meditation and practice."¹⁶ Dolpopa obviously felt that he had experienced a special insight into the definitive meaning of the Buddha's message as known in the land of Shambhala, but not understood in Tibet. As mentioned in chapter 1, Dolpopa once claimed to have actually gone to Shambhala during an evening meditation session. The next morning he gave an extensive teaching about the layout of Shambhala, its relation to the rest of the universe, and the esoteric instructions of the *Kālacakra tantra*. After directly seeing Shambhala, he composed versified praises of it, in one of which he declared that he had discovered the precise manner in which Shambhala and Kailash exist, which was previously unknown to Indian and Tibetan scholars.¹⁷

When giving personal meditation advice to his students Dolpopa most often spoke of the special knowledge that he had discovered. He emphasized that although many in Shambhala understood the experiences arising from meditation upon the Six-branch Yoga, no one in Tibet did except for him, and that his own awareness was due solely to the kindness of the Kalkin emperors. For example, he wrote the following verses in an instruction to one of his disciples.

In general, if I speak frankly others do not like it. If I said what others say it would deceive my disciples.

It is hard to be a master in the present times. Even so, I will speak to you frankly.

The Kalkin resides in Shambhala to the north. In the Dharmā Palace of Kalāpa many reside who understand experiences like this. In the kingdom of snowy Tibet only I understand experiences like this.¹⁸

And to another disciple he wrote:

These days most of those who are known as experts, who assert that they have fine meditation and high realization, and who are proud in being great adepts, are not aware of this method, but I have discovered it by the kindness of the Kalkin.¹⁹

The combination of Dolpopa's experience in meditation on the Six-branch Yoga and his visionary contact with the land of Shambhala, its Kalkin emperors, and their special blessings, certainly provided the primary inspiration for his theories. But there is also evidence that many of the themes of interpretation that came to fruition in his teaching had been present within the Buddhist tradition in Tibet for centuries. The teachings of Tsen Khawoche and Yumowa touched upon in the previous section are just two examples of earlier Tibetan teachers whose views certainly provided a precedent for some of Dolpopa's theories.²⁰

It is of considerable interest that some Tibetan sources speak of Dolpopa's contemporary, the third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, as a possible influence, or even as the first adherent of the Zhentong.²¹ The earliest available account of the meeting between these two teachers is by the sixteenth-century Sakya master Mangtö Ludrup Gyantso, who remarks:

Moreover, this lord [Dolpopa] met with Karma Rangjung Dorje, and it is said that since [Dolpopa] upheld the philosophical system of the emptiness of self-nature [*rang stong*], the Karmapa prophesied that he would later become an adherent of the emptiness of other [*gzhan stong*]. In general I think the tradition of the emptiness of other was first upheld

by Karma Rangjung Dorje. The emptiness of other [was accepted] at Jonang following the Great Omniscient [Dolpopa].²²

According to Tāranātha this meeting seems to have taken place when Dolpopa was twenty-nine or thirty years old, just prior to his trip to Jonang to meet Yönden Gyantso in 1322. He describes it like this:

Then [Dolpopa] traveled to Lhasa, Tsurphu, and so forth. He had many discussions about Dharma with the Dharma Lord Rangjung. Although Rangjung could not match the scriptural reasoning of this lord [Dolpopa], he had fine clairvoyance, and prophesied, “You will soon have a view, practice, and Dharma language [*chos skad*] much better than this which you have now.”²³

Tāranātha seems to directly quote the Karmapa’s prophecy, but makes no mention of him as a possible source for Dolpopa’s development of the Zhentong view. Unfortunately, there is no record of this meeting in any of the extant early biographies of either teacher.²⁴ There is, however, mention of it in the late history of the Karma Kamtsang tradition written by Situ Panchen Chögyi Jungney (1700-1774), who specifies that Dolpopa still adhered to the view of reality as an emptiness of self-nature (*rang stong*) at the time of the meeting. According to the chronology of this work the meeting between these two masters can be dated to between 1320 and 1324.²⁵

One of the most innovative aspects of Dolpopa’s philosophical enterprise was his development of a new Dharma language (*chos skad*), which he utilized to express a wide range of themes found in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna scripture. Tāranātha mentions that when Dolpopa first taught the Zhentong he wrote a number of texts containing a certain Dharma language which was incomprehensible to many scholars, who upon reading them experienced a state of what might be termed “hermeneutical shock.”²⁶ As mentioned above, Rangjung Dorje also prophesied that Dolpopa would soon develop a new and superior terminology.

Dolpopa did two things in regard to language that were largely unprecedented in Tibet. Although much research into these points needs to be done, it seems probable that he first developed a special terminology, or Dharma language, that involved the appropriation

of a number of terms from certain Mahāyāna sūtras and treatises; terms that were acceptable in their original context within scripture but were almost never used in ordinary scholarly discourse. Then he created, or at least made first extensive use of, several Tibetan terms, such as *gzhan stong* and *kun gzhi ye shes*, to express scriptural themes he wished to emphasize. He also drew into his vocabulary some key terms such as *dbu ma chen po* (*‘mahāmādhyamaka*), “Great Madhyamaka,” which had been in use in Tibet for centuries, but are not found in any Indian scriptures or commentaries. In this second phase he employed what may be referred to as source-alien terminology, utilizing previously unknown terms to explicate ideas and themes found in many Buddhist scriptures.²⁷

In his unique use of language Dolpopa first borrowed loaded terminology from Mahāyāna sūtras and treatises and incorporated it into his own compositions. A few examples will illustrate this unusual facet of his work. One of the controversial points in his teaching is the assertion that ultimate truth, referred to by terms such as *tathāgathagarbha* (Buddha-nature), *dharmadhātu* (expanse of reality), and *dharmakāya* (buddha-body of reality), is a permanent or eternal state. Of course, statements to this effect are not unusual in certain Mahāyāna sūtras and treatises, but for most scholars in Tibet the hermeneutical approach was to view those statements as provisional, and in need of interpretation (*neyārtha*, *drang don*).²⁸ For Dolpopa, all such statements in the scriptures and commentaries were of definitive meaning (*nītārtha*, *nges don*), and were to be understood literally. He began to freely use the terminology of these scriptures, in a manner suggesting that no interpretation was required, and this was no doubt shocking. For instance, the Tibetan terms *bdag* (*ātman*), *rtag pa* (*nitya*), and *brtan pa* (*dhrūva*), as well as *ther zug*, *g.yung drung*, and *mi jig pa* (all three of which were used to translate Sanskrit *sāsvata*), are found in the Tibetan translations of treatises such as the *Uttaratantra*, and sūtras such as the *Laṅkāvatāra*, *Gaṇḍavyūha*, *Aṅgulimālīya*, *Srīmālā*, and *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, where they are used to describe the buddha-body of reality (*dharmakāya*), the Tathāgata, and the Buddha-nature (*tathāgathagarbha*).²⁹ These terms, which may be translated as “self,” “permanent,” “everlasting,” and “eternal,” are used by Dolpopa throughout his writings, not just when discussing the meaning of a passage in scripture. Budōn’s refutations of the Jonang position in regard to the interpretation of these

very terms as used in scripture, clearly shows that this was one of the areas in which Dolpopa's contemporaries reacted strongly.³⁰

In one of his early short texts, *A General Commentary on the Doctrine (Bstan pa spyi 'grel)*, which is nevertheless considered a major work, most of the terms in question are already in use. In another early and important work, *Exceptional Esoteric Instructions on the Middle Way (Dbu ma'i man ngag khyad 'phags)*, which he wrote at the request of the master Sönam Trakpa, from whom he received ordination, several of these terms are also found, and a number of themes he would later develop more fully may be seen in embryonic form. These terms continue to be found in all of his later writings. In his last major work, *The Fourth Council (Bka' bsdu bzhi pa)*, Dolpopa frequently used all the terms listed above, as well as other unusual compounds, such as "eternal buddha-body" (*g-yung drung sku, ther zug sku; 'śāśvatākāya*).³¹

Unfortunately, Dolpopa never dated his major works, but it may be possible in the future to establish an approximate chronology of his writings through analysis of the terminology used in the different texts. For example, *A General Commentary on the Doctrine* and *Exceptional Esoteric Instructions on the Middle Way* do not contain the terms *gzhan stong* ("emptiness of other") or *kun gzhi ye shes* ("universal ground gnosis"). This gives the impression that they are very early works, and that the borrowing of vocabulary from scriptural sources, which is present in these works, was the first step in the evolution of his use of language, later to be followed by the creation of his own Dharma language.

The term *gzhan stong* is most often associated with Dolpopa, who is usually thought to have coined it.³² There is, however, some evidence of at least a few isolated occurrences of this term before his time. Dolpopa himself quotes a master whom he identifies as Lord Poripa, who makes a statement that could have come from Dolpopa:

Relative truth is empty of self nature [*rang gis stong pa*]

and absolute truth is empty of other [*gzhan gyi stong pa*].

If the mode of emptiness of the two truths is not understood in this way, there is danger of denigrating perfect buddhahood.³³

Although this is certainly the most significant occurrence of the term by a writer who may predate Dolpopa, there is very little

information about any earlier master known as Poripa, or Phoripa, as the name is also spelled. The single possible identification is with the obscure early Kagyü teacher Phoriwa Göchok Gyaltzen.³⁴

Another example of the use of the term *gzhan stong* is found in the biography of Ra Lotsawa Dorje Trak (eleventh to twelfth century), who uses it in contrast to the term *rang stong* in a spiritual song. There are, however, quite definite grounds on which to conclude that this biography was extensively reworked in the seventeenth century, and so the occurrence of the term *gzhan stong* is probably not significant.³⁵

Dolpopa's contemporary, the esteemed Nyingma master Longchen Rabjampa, also mentions the term on one occasion in the context of a discussion of the "three-nature" (*trisvabhāva*) theory of the Yogācāra school. He contrasts the three categories of "empty of self-nature" (*rang gis stong pa*), "empty of other" (*gzhan gyis stong pa*), and "empty of both" (*gyis kas stong pa*), but with none of the connotations inherent in Dolpopa's usage. During a discussion of the Buddha-nature, the expression *gzhan stong* is also used once in a text attributed to Padmasambhava in *The Heartdrop of the Dakinis (Mkha' 'gro snying thig)*, which was revealed in the thirteenth century by Payma Lendrel Tsel.³⁶ Once again, the usage of the term is not similar to that found in Dolpopa's works.

This evidence shows that the term *gzhan stong* had been used in Tibet before the time of Dolpopa, albeit only in isolated instances, and without the same connotation that he attached to it. Although the tradition itself certainly considers him as the one who coined the term, it is probably more accurate to say that Dolpopa made use of an obscure term that had very limited use before him, and gave it a place of fundamental importance in the expression of his philosophy.

Another central theme of Dolpopa's thought is the contrasting of *kun gzhi rnam shes*, (*ālayavijñāna*), the "universal ground consciousness," with *kun gzhi ye shes* (**ālayajñāna*), "universal ground gnosis." The term *kun gzhi ye shes* is not known to have occurred in the writings of any earlier Tibetan authors. Dolpopa includes *kun gzhi ye shes* in a listing of the various topics previously unknown in Tibet that he felt he had realized and explicated.³⁷ As noted above, Karmapa Rangjung Dorje may have had some role in the development of Dolpopa's ideas. Although there is no occurrence in Rangjung Dorje's extant works of the terms *gzhan stong*

or *kun gzhi ye shes*, the latter term may have been used in a work which is not available at the present time. In his commentary to Rangjung Dorje's *The Profound Inner Meaning* (*Zab mo nang don*), Jamgön Kongdrul Lodrö Taye (1813–1899), himself an adherent to the Zhentong view, speaks of Rangjung Dorje's own use of the contrasting terms *kun gzhi nam shes* and *kun gzhi ye shes* in his commentary to *The Profound Inner Meaning*. Unfortunately, Kongdrul does not directly quote Rangjung Dorje's text.³⁸ Rangjung Dorje wrote the *Profound Inner Meaning* in 1322, apparently the year after his meeting with Dolpopa. According to the chronology in the sketch of Rangjung Dorje's life as found in *The Blue Annals*, he wrote the autocommentary before 1326. This is considerably before the writings of Dolpopa began to circulate in Tibet. However, a short text in the collected spiritual songs of Rangjung Dorje, which is devoted to defining the nature of *kun gzhi*, the "universal ground," uses neither the term *kun gzhi nam shes* nor *kun gzhi ye shes*, and the ideas expressed are definitely incompatible with Dolpopa and the Zhentong doctrine.³⁹

The phrase "mirror-like universal ground gnosis" (*kun gzhi me long lta bu'i ye shes*) is found in one of the works of Longchen Rabjampa. He uses this term to characterize the buddha-body of reality (*dharmakāya*), and contrasts it with the "universal ground consciousness" as one of the eight modes of consciousness. In this instance there are some similarities with Dolpopa's ideas, but Longchenpa's usual position is to identify the *kun gzhi* only with impure states of mind.⁴⁰

Until 1322, when he was thirty years old, Dolpopa had spent almost all of his life in the study of Buddhist literature, philosophy, and practice according to the Sakya tradition. For most of the previous decade he had studied and taught at Sakya monastery itself. It is absolutely certain that he had thoroughly examined and mastered the works of Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltsen (1182-1251), such as *Distinguishing the Three Vows* (*Sdom gsum rab dbye*), which were fundamental to the education of a Sakya scholar and practitioner. The similarities between Sakya Pandita's statements concerning his motives for the composition of his controversial works, such as *Distinguishing the Three Vows*, and Dolpopa's own statements about his motives, are as striking as the fact that the two masters were at opposite ends of the spectrum of doctrinal interpretation.

A small example of Dolpopa's familiarity with Sakya Pandita's work, and his sympathy for the sentiments expressed in it, is found at the end of his autocommentary to *The Fourth Council*. In this instance Dolpopa has taken a couplet directly from *Distinguishing the Three Vows*, and then extended Sakya Pandita's metaphor by repeating it as a refrain for several pages.⁴¹ The gist of Sakya Pandita's verse is that no matter how many traditions of Dharma there may be, if they are not linked to an authentic source, they are worthless, like gaming pieces which are off the board and irrelevant, like dead men. Dolpopa used the first couplet of Sakya Pandita's verse as a point of departure, and through its repetition addressed a number of further related issues. For example, he states that there may be numerous teachings of the degenerate Tretayuga, but if they are not linked to the perfect Kṛtayuga they are worthless, like dead men.⁴² He continues in this vein, contrasting the fully established nature (*parinispanna*, *yongs grub*) to the imagined nature (*parikalpita*, *kun brtags*), the absolute to the relative, emptiness of self-nature to emptiness of other, and so forth.⁴³ This borrowing was certainly done on purpose, and would have called to mind the themes and tone of Sakya Pandita's treatise, especially considering the fact that it was one of his descendants, Lama Dampa Sönam Gyaltsen, who had requested Dolpopa to compose *The Fourth Council*.

One of the clearest extended statements of motivations and sentiments by Dolpopa is found at the end of *A Brief Analysis* (*Gshag 'byed bsdu pa*), which he sent to the ruler of the principality of Chang to explain his doctrinal views.⁴⁴ It is an extremely informative spiritual and literary autobiographical testament:

These investigations have been made by laying down a plumb line straight upon the true nature of reality just as it is, and are not contaminated with impurities such as prejudice, partiality, and presumptions. This is because I have taken as witnesses the opinions of the omniscient Blessed One, the Buddha, and the excellent lords on the tenth spiritual level, such as the Lords of the Three Spiritual Races,⁴⁵ Vajragarbha, and Maitreyanātha, as well as the great originators [of philosophical systems] and the excellent realized experts, such as noble Asaṅga, the great brahmin Saraha, and the great paṇḍita Nāropa. And because I have avoided

exaggeration and denigration, and have written after thoroughly mastering their intentions exactly as they are.

It may be thought, "You are arrogant in having realized their intentions exactly as they are, but aren't your ideas in disagreement with those of other Tibetan masters precisely because you haven't actually realized them?"

That is not the way it is. The causes for a lack of realization are certainly inferior intelligence, a lack of the oral instructions of an excellent [master], little study, no experience and realization in meditation, being filled with pride and arrogance, determining truth and falsehood on the basis of presumptions and quantity of talk, and so forth. But I first engaged in much study of the great scriptural traditions, and then engaged in the practice of the oral instructions of India and Tibet which are known to be profound, and the precise experience and realization of each of them actually arose.

Then, as a result of the entrance of a little of the blessing of having encountered the definitive meaning of the great root tantras, the oral instructions of glorious Kalāpa,⁴⁵ the uncommonly profound heart-advice of the Kalkins on the tenth spiritual level, I discovered many profound essential points which have not been discovered, have not been realized, and have not been mastered by egotistical scholars, most great meditators endowed with experience and realization, and most of those who are arrogant as great upholders of secret mantra. Because a fine realization burst forth from within, and because I have an exceptional certainty untainted by doubts, not only most great meditators endowed with experience and realization, and those who are arrogant as great upholders of secret mantra, but even the Buddha definitely could not turn me back from this.

It may also be thought, "All that certainty is from blurred and dim meditation, or from misunderstanding; there are no perfect scriptural quotations for proof."

There is no lack [of such proof], because there are a great many clear quotations, as well as reasoning and esoteric instructions, from those upon the twelfth spiritual level, those upon the tenth spiritual level, and excellent realized experts

such as Nāgārjuna and his spiritual sons, and the great paṇḍita Nāropa. Although that is the case, I have not written them here from fear of being overly verbose, but if you wish and are interested, I will write and offer them later.⁴⁷

Among these points [which I have written about], there are certainly several exceptional ones which are in disagreement with some that have been previously known in Tibet. But you have been accustomed to the previous philosophical system for a long time, so that the propensity for it has become firm, and many in Tibet adhere to that tradition. Therefore, although there is a difference of firm and unstable propensities for these previous and later philosophical systems, and a difference in the numbers of adherents, without giving in to the influence of those differences, please take as witness the scriptures of the Buddha and bodhisattvas, and then examine them with an attitude of unbiased honesty as to which [system] is true.⁴⁸

As this and many other passages make clear, there was certainly considerable opposition to Dolpopa's theories. Specifically, he felt that most people had already closed their minds to the teachings of definitive meaning. He often mentions the presumptions and prejudice inherent in the established traditions of his time as one of the greatest factors inhibiting the widespread acceptance of his ideas. He was presenting his case to a prejudiced jury. It is therefore curious that not a single contemporary text has survived in which hostile testimony against Dolpopa is preserved. It may well be that the full reaction to his doctrine did not find open expression until after his death.

3. The Zhentong Tradition after Dolpopa

Dolpopa was surrounded by a group of scholars as formidable as any in fourteenth-century Tibet. His most influential successors in the Jonang tradition were his senior disciples Nyaön Kunga Bal, Mati Panchen Jamyang Lodrö, and the great abbot Choley Namgyal. Major works by both Nyaön and Mati Panchen are extant, and demonstrate the extent to which they followed Dolpopa's example when dealing with crucial doctrinal questions. In particular, it was

[emptiness] having accepted that very meaning [of other-emptiness] and [simply] given it the name of “self-emptiness.” This is because the Followers of Other-Emptiness explain that the basis of negation, the dependent natures established by valid cognition, is empty of the object of negation, the imaginary natures not established by valid cognition. Then they accept as the final ultimate truth the emptiness in which those [dependent natures] are empty of those [imaginary natures], and state that if this emptiness were accepted as nonexistent, [such] would be the view of deprecation. [This is what they] accept, and [this is exactly] what you also accept.⁵⁵

Visions of Unity

The Golden Pañḍita Shakya Chokden’s
New Interpretation of
Yogācāra and Madhyamaka

Yaroslav Komarovski

With the help of the terminology of the three natures, Shakya Chokden demonstrates the similarity between the interpretive approaches of Tsongkhapa and Proponents of Other-Emptiness. In his unwillingness to take at face value the meaning of self-emptiness, Tsongkhapa develops an interpretation of emptiness similar to Yogācāra interpreters of the *Perfection of Wisdom* sūtras, who feel that the acceptance of all phenomena as being empty of themselves would entail the view of nihilism, that is, literal nonexistence of phenomena. Accepting that relative phenomena are established by valid cognition, Tsongkhapa is similar to those Yogācāras who assert that the dependent natures are established by valid cognition.⁵⁶ Accepting that such phenomena are empty of objects of negation that are not established by valid cognition, Tsongkhapa is again similar to Yogācāras who explain emptiness as the dependent natures being empty of the imaginary natures that are not established by valid cognition. Finally, although Tsongkhapa presents his interpretation as typifying the position of self-emptiness, in his assertion that phenomena are empty of objects of negation other than themselves, he again is similar to Yogācāras who assert that bases of negation, the dependent natures, are empty of objects of negation, the imaginary natures that are other than those bases of negation. This approach does not count as a valid interpretation of self-emptiness according to Shakya Chokden.

Other-Emptiness

When Shakya Chokden contrasts the Yogācāra position of other-emptiness with the Niḥsvabhāvavāda position of self-emptiness, he prefers to rely on the presentation of the three natures given in the system of Asaṅga:

SUNY
P R E S S

The bases that are empty are dependent natures: all knowing that has dualistic appearance of the apprehended and apprehender (*gzung 'dzin gnyis snang can gyi shes pa*). The objects of negation are the imaginary natures. They are of two types, due to the division into the apprehended (*gzung ba, grāliya*) and apprehender (*'dzin pa, grālhaka*). Each of these two, the apprehended and apprehender, also has two [subdivisions]: in terms of persons and in terms of phenomena . . . The way in which [phenomena] are empty is [as follows:] the bases of negation are empty of the objects of negation in terms of other-emptiness, not in terms of self-emptiness. This is because in relation to the bases of negation, i.e., the two types of dualistically appearing knowing (*gnyis snang gi shes pa*), the objects of negation, i.e., the two types of the apprehended and apprehender, are other entities (*gzhan gyi ngo bo*); they are not posited as the own entities (*rang gyi ngo bo*) of those [bases of negation].⁵⁷

From this perspective of other-emptiness, the dependent natures, i.e., consciousnesses with dualistic appearances, are taken as the bases of emptiness/bases of negation. The imaginary natures, i.e., all dualistic appearances of persons and phenomena appearing as objects and subjects apprehending those objects, are taken as the objects of negation. In other words, consciousnesses with dualistic appearances both project or appear as the imaginary natures and are empty of them at the same time. According to the Yogācāra system, the bases of negation—the dependent natures—are empty of the objects of negation—the imaginary natures—in terms of other-emptiness, not self-emptiness. This is because with respect to the dependent natures, the imaginary natures are other entities; they are not the own entities of the dependent natures.

This position is characteristic of both Satyākāravāda and Alīkāravāda, and Shakya Chokden makes extensive use of it in his discussion of the two systems, while acknowledging their differences in the identification of the three natures.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, it is important to note that in the above passage, he is not arguing that the dependent natures are empty of the imaginary natures simply because they are different from them. Rather, he emphasizes that their *entities* are different. This emphasis on the entities of the dependent and imaginary natures has a special significance in the Alīkāravāda system. As will be explained below (166), in that system as Shakya Chokden understands it, no dependent natures can be identified apart from

the imaginary and thoroughly established natures. Nevertheless, the entity of the dependent natures exists, and that entity is none other than the thoroughly established nature (166, 171). That real and truly existent entity is different from the unreal and nonexistent entities of the imaginary natures. This is why the possessors of that entity—the dependent natures—are empty of the imaginary natures in terms of other-emptiness, not self-emptiness.

Nevertheless, this is not the only interpretation of other-emptiness discussed by Shakya Chokden. He also addresses other interpretations of other-emptiness that originate from Indian Mahāyāna texts, which are improvised on by Tibetan thinkers. In the *Rain of Ambrosia*, he contrasts those interpretations with the approach outlined above:

There emerged two dissimilar [approaches] regarding the mode of identifying the subject-basis of other-emptiness (*gzhan stong gi gzhi chos can*). In the Yogācāra texts, the reality, [understood as] the bases of emptiness, the dependent natures, being empty of the objects of negation, the imaginary natures, is explained as the thoroughly established nature. In the *Sublime Continuum*⁵⁹ and the *Conquest over Objections about the [Three] Mother Scriptures*,⁶⁰ the reality, the thoroughly established nature, is explained as empty of the imaginary natures. [These] two also [stem] from [interpretive] differences: including all knowables into two, the imaginary and thoroughly established natures, or dividing them into three: [the imaginary, thoroughly established] and dependent natures. They are not contradictory.⁶¹

The first approach described in this passage is the same as the Yogācāra position mentioned above: the dependent natures are taken as the basis of emptiness, the imaginary natures are negated on that basis, and that negation is explained as the thoroughly established nature. According to the second approach, the thoroughly established nature itself is explained as being empty of the imaginary natures.

In this particular passage, Shakya Chokden simply acknowledges the existence of interpretive differences, and without criticism links them with the two ways of classifying phenomena: into the three and the two natures. Thereby, he accepts the two interpretations of other-emptiness both as legitimate and noncontradictory. In another section of the *Rain of Ambrosia*, he also admits that in the *Sublime Continuum* and its commentary by Asanga,⁶² the subject-basis of emptiness (*stong gzhi'i chos can*) is explained as the reality-limit (*yang dag pa'i mtha'*,

bhūṭakoti, i.e., ultimate reality), in contrast to other Yogācāra texts where the subject-basis of emptiness is explained as the dependent natures.⁶³ (Note that the *Sublime Continuum* and its commentary by Asaṅga do not utilize the terms “imaginary” and “thoroughly established natures.” Therefore, the reference to the two natures in the *Sublime Continuum* should be understood not in terms of those categories per se but rather in terms of the translation of the *Sublime Continuum*’s approach into those categories.)

It should be noted that in general Shakyā Chokden never criticizes the *Sublime Continuum*. Throughout his life, both in early and later writings, he showed tremendous respect for this text, and viewed it as a treatise of definitive meaning (*nges don, nīṭār-tha*).⁶⁴ I think that in this particular context the *Sublime Continuum* is spared criticism also because it makes no attempt to reinterpret or restructure the key Yogācāra interpretive tools of the three natures, as the *Conquest over Objections* does; rather, it simply does not address them.

Although the *Conquest over Objections* is spared criticism in the *Rain of Ambrosia*, Shakyā Chokden is more critical when he discusses it in the *Great Path of Ambrosia of Emptiness*. In the latter text, he actually acknowledges that the *Conquest over Objections* talks about three natures.⁶⁵ (I think the reason why he said in the *Rain of Ambrosia* that the *Conquest over Objections* addresses two natures is because the *Conquest over Objections* treats both dependent and the imaginary natures as the same in terms of being objects of negation.) He feels uncomfortable about this interpretive approach, because it does not agree with his understanding of the mainstream Yogācāra way of positing emptiness.

It is important to note that the problem Shakyā Chokden addresses in the *Great Path of Ambrosia of Emptiness* is not that the thoroughly established nature cannot be seen as empty of the other natures, but that it should not be taken as the basis of emptiness in the context of addressing the three natures. Otherwise, Shakyā Chokden himself argues that Aīkākāravāda asserts all conventional phenomena as self-empty. In the *Seventeen Wondrous Answers*, he describes the Aīkākāravāda identification of emptiness as follows: “having determined all relative truths as self-empty, one posits as remaining only the ultimate primordial mind (*don dam pa’i ye shes*).”⁶⁶ According to him, this approach stems from the explicit teachings (*dingos bstan*) of the third dharmacakra and the *Dharmas of Maitreya* interpreted by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu.⁶⁷

As I explain below (166), Shakyā Chokden argues that the dependent nature does not exist separately from the other two natures, although it is used as a temporary basis for determining emptiness.

According to him, when Yogācāra describes the final ultimate reality experienced in meditative equipoise (i.e., the final Aīkākāravāda view), it describes it as the non-dual primordial mind (which is the thoroughly established nature). It is empty of all other phenomena because no other phenomena exist. In other words, while taking the dependent natures as the bases of emptiness is the starting point of determining emptiness by reasoning in terms of other-emptiness, what one arrives at as a result of that process—and what one incorporates into meditative experience—is none other than the thoroughly established nature, the non-dual primordial mind.

In the *Great Path of Ambrosia of Emptiness*, Shakyā Chokden quotes and comments on a lengthy passage from the *Conquest over Objections* which deals with three types of form: the imaginary form (*kun brtags pa’i gzugs*; corresponds to the imaginary natures), the imputational form (*rnam par brtags pa’i gzugs*; corresponds to the dependent natures), and the reality-form (*chos nyid kyi gzugs*; corresponds to the thoroughly established nature).⁶⁸ His explanation is that there is no fault in interpreting the reality-form as being empty of the other two forms. Nevertheless, if one takes the reality-form as the basis of emptiness, that will contradict Yogācāra scriptures in general, and in particular it will contradict the textual system of Vasubandhu, the author of the *Conquest over Objections*. It has to be further analyzed, he says, whether the *Conquest over Objections*’s statement that the imputational form is empty of its entity agrees with the intent of Yogācāra scriptures or not. Because the *Conquest over Objections* states that the reality-form exists by its own entity, it is also incorrect to claim that it teaches the Nīḥsvabhāvavāda view. As a result, Shakyā Chokden decides that the mode of emptiness explained in the *Conquest over Objections* does not agree with either of the two systems of Madhyamaka.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, he stops short of criticizing the text itself. Instead, he argues that further analysis is required.⁷⁰

Shakyā Chokden does not agree with other scholars’ interpretations of the *Conquest over Objections*, and in the same text directs an explicit criticism at Dōlpopa in this regard. He reveals what he sees as Dōlpopa’s mistakes by juxtaposing Dōlpopa’s interpretation with the first approach to other-emptiness explained above. It is worth quoting this passage at length, because it demonstrates which arguments Shakyā Chokden uses to buttress his own view of other-emptiness, and which Indian Buddhist authorities he cites in support of his position:

Proponents of Other-Emptiness who emerged in the Land of Snows say:

This explanation of all relative compounded phenomena (*kun rdzob 'dus byas kyi dngos po*) in terms of self-emptiness and the uncompounded ultimate (*don dam 'dus ma byas*) in terms of other-emptiness is intended by the great Mādhyamika Vasubandhu because he gave such an explanation in the *Conquest over Objections about the [Three] Mother Scriptures*.

This explanation is not correct, because it does not agree with the root texts of the foremost venerable [Maitreya], and contradicts the modes of explanation of other-emptiness clearly taught in the unquestionable treatises of brothers Asaṅga [and Vasubandhu] and in the textual tradition of Dignāga as well as [his spiritual] son [Dharmakīrti]. How is it [incorrect]? In your case, when you explain the meaning of other-emptiness, you do not explain it as the dependent nature (the possessors of reality, *chos can, dharmīn*) being empty of the imaginary natures (the objects of negation). Rather, as the meaning of other-emptiness you accept the thoroughly established nature (reality, *chos nyid, dharmatā*), being empty of the dependent natures and the imaginary natures (the possessors of reality). Such an explanatory method does not exist in those textual systems [of Asaṅga and others].⁷¹

According to Shakya Chokden, Dölpopa's mistake lies in describing other-emptiness as the thoroughly established nature being empty of both the dependent natures and the imaginary natures. In contrast to Dölpopa, all other thinkers mentioned in the passage are presented as sharing the same other-emptiness view of the dependent natures being empty of the imaginary natures. This is true for Yogācāras Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, as well as for Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, whom Shakya Chokden brings together into the same group of Proponents of Other-Emptiness. That position is further reinforced when it is linked with the authoritative writings of Maitreya. Shakya Chokden continues:

What [explanatory method] exists [in those textual systems]?
[The following explanatory method] exists [in Maitreya's
Differentiation of the Middle and Extremes]:

Unreal ideation (*yang dag ma yin kun rtoḡ, abhūtāparikalpa*)
exists.

The two do not exist in it.⁷²

According to this passage, the dependent natures are described as subject-bases of emptiness; two types of the imaginary natures, the apprehended and apprehender, are described as objects of negation of which [subject-bases of emptiness] are empty; and primordial mind of non-duality of the apprehended and apprehender is described as the empty phenomenon (*stong pa'i dngos po*).⁷³

As I explain in the following chapters, the interpretation of ultimate reality as primordial mind is not a general Yogācāra position, but is more specifically the position of Alīkāravāda. The above-mentioned thinkers, therefore, share the same Alīkāravāda view according to Shakya Chokden.

A mere reference to a scriptural authority is not the strongest argumentative tool. Therefore, next he turns to reasoning:

[The thoroughly established nature, that is, primordial mind] is not posited as a subject-basis of emptiness, because there is no proof and there are factors damaging to it. There is no proof, because [valid] scriptures providing such explanation do not exist. The damaging factors are as follows: if the reasoning establishing emptiness had to establish the thoroughly established nature [taken as] the subject-basis of emptiness], as being empty of [both] the imaginary and dependent natures [taken as] negated phenomena, it would follow that at the time of ascertaining the subject-basis for dispute, the probandum (*bsgrub bya, sādhya*) would have been proved. Otherwise, there could exist a correct reason that establishes the probandum without [initially] ascertaining the subject-basis for dispute.⁷⁴

Here, Shakya Chokden appeals to the following reasoning: the basis of dispute has to be ascertained *before* the mechanism of a correct syllogism is triggered and its probandum is proved. For example, a sound—when it is taken as the subject-basis for dispute about whether a sound is permanent or impermanent—has to be ascertained prior to establishing the probandum “sound is impermanent.” If “impermanence sound” itself is taken as the subject-basis for dispute about sound being impermanent, the syllogism will be defective, because it will imply that the impermanence of a sound is or has already been

established by the time of ascertaining the subject-basis for dispute. (If the subject-basis for dispute is not ascertained, the syllogism also will be defective; therefore, that is not an option either.) The same problem is entailed if the thoroughly established nature—that in the opponent's view is understood as the thoroughly established nature empty of the other two natures—is taken as the subject-basis for dispute about whether the thoroughly established nature is empty of the other two natures or not: the probandum, "the thoroughly established nature is empty of the other two natures," will be ascertained at the same moment that the subject-basis for dispute is ascertained. The syllogism will simply prove what has already been ascertained, and therefore will be defective.

Shakya Chokden proceeds with criticizing the interpretation of the dependent natures as self-empty in the context of the three natures:

Also, there is no proof and there are factors damaging to the description of the dependent natures in terms of self-emptiness. There is no proof, because no such explanation is given in those scriptures [of Asaṅga, Maitreya, and others]. Damaging factors exist: if the entity of the dependent natures (*gzhan dhang gi ngo bo*) were not truly established, the entity of the thoroughly established nature, reality (*chos nyid yongs grub kyi ngo bo*), would not be truly existent. This is because thatness free from the duality of the apprehended and apprehender (*gzung 'dzin gnyis med kyi de kho na nyid*) is asserted [in valid scriptures presenting other-emptiness] as the entity of dualistically appearing knowing (*gnyis snang gi sles pa'i ngo bo*). That [thatness] is explained as the entity of that [dualistically appearing knowing] by the text [of Dharmakīrti's *Commentary on Valid Cognition*: "Thus,] that [emptiness of duality] is the thatness of that.⁷⁵

This informative passage once again focuses on the view of Alīkāravāda: although dualistically appearing minds are unreal and nonexistent, nevertheless they are not lacking their own entity or nature. This is because their own entity is not themselves, but the thoroughly established nature.⁷⁶ Therefore, to treat them as self-empty in this context would imply the nonexistence of their entity, which in turn would imply the nonexistence of the thoroughly established nature. This is why the dependent natures cannot be treated as self-empty in the context of the three natures.

I want to emphasize at this point that Shakya Chokden's view of other-emptiness dramatically differs from Dölpopa's. Far from agreeing with Dölpopa, he openly criticizes Dölpopa's interpretation of the *Conquest over Objections*, and allies himself with what he understands to be the mainstream Alīkāravāda interpretations. Therefore, to put Shakya Chokden together with Dölpopa into the same camp of Followers of Other-Emptiness makes no more sense than placing him into the camp of Followers of Self-Emptiness together with Tsongkhapa.⁷⁷ Instead, we should acknowledge that in his interpretation of self-emptiness and other-emptiness, Shakya Chokden clearly differentiates the two systems as well as different approaches to them. He supports his explanations with the writings of mainstream Niḥsvabhāvavāda and Yogācāra thinkers, while distancing himself from Tsongkhapa's and Dölpopa's interpretations of self-emptiness and other-emptiness, respectively. In fact, he often criticizes Tsongkhapa's and Dölpopa's views in the same text and section in order to highlight his own interpretation of self-emptiness and other-emptiness.⁷⁸

Before closing this section, I should reiterate that according to Shakya Chokden, the basis of emptiness not only need not be existent in the case of self-emptiness, but does not even have to be existent in the context of other-emptiness. This is because in the Niḥsvabhāvavāda system, as he understands it, all relative, conventional phenomena do not exist, and in the Alīkāravāda system too, dualistic consciousness, i.e., the dependent nature, does not exist.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, as has been previously explained, these nonexistent phenomena *do* serve as the bases of emptiness. This being said, Niḥsvabhāvavāda and Alīkāravāda differ in their approaches to those nonexistent bases of emptiness: the former describes them as self-empty, while the latter describes them as other-empty. Therefore, according to Proponents of Other-Emptiness, it is possible to be nonexistent and not to be self-empty at the same time. As Shakya Chokden explains in the *Great Path of Ambrosia of Emptiness*:

[T]he non-contradictory explanation of dependent [natures] as existent by nature and [at the same time] being truthless like an illusion should be understood as the key that opens the [treasury of] thatness of the texts of Proponents of Other-Emptiness.⁸⁰

According to Shakya Chokden, having a truly established entity or nature does not entail being itself truly established. This is similar

to the case when the emptiness of a pot is described as the ultimate reality of a pot, but the pot itself is not accepted as ultimate reality. As he puts it in the *Rain of Ambrosiā*:

The dependent natures being truly established is not a tenet of honorable Aṣaṅga, because in his texts those [dependent natures] were explained as [being] like an illusion. Those [dependent natures] do not become truly established [simply] because their entity was explained as truth. This is like the case of explaining the entity of a pot, etc., as reality [while not accepting a pot, etc., as reality].⁸¹

In summary, Shakya Chokden accepts only one interpretation of self-emptiness that derives from the works of Indian Niḥsvabhāvavādins: all phenomena being empty of themselves. On the other hand, he accepts two interpretations of other-emptiness. One is given in the *Sublime Continuum* and its commentary by Aṣaṅga; it addresses other-emptiness in the context of only two natures (i.e., the imaginary and thoroughly established natures). The other is given in texts of Aṣaṅga and Maitreya other than Maitreya's *Sublime Continuum* and its commentary by Aṣaṅga; it addresses other-emptiness in the context of the three natures (i.e., the dependent, imaginary, and thoroughly established natures). Shakya Chokden objects to the interpretation of the second type of other-emptiness in terms of the first type, which he attributes to Dölpopa's explanation that the thoroughly established nature is empty of both the dependent natures and the imaginary natures. He also objects to the concealed interpretation of self-emptiness in terms of other-emptiness, which he attributes to Tsongkhapa's explanation that phenomena established by valid cognition are empty of objects of negation other than themselves.

Emphasizing the self-emptiness/other-emptiness distinction, Shakya Chokden shifts focus from distinctions between other types of Madhyamaka, such as Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika, to the differences between Yogācāra and Niḥsvabhāvavāda. In his overall approach, differences between Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika lose their relevance as he himself explicitly acknowledges. In the next section I explain how he justifies his approach to those subdivisions of Madhyamaka, and what place they occupy in his system.

4. Bidding Farewell to the Prāsaṅgika/Svātantrika Division?

Shakya Chokden does not reject the categories of Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika, even commenting on their differences in various works,

Chapter 5

Explorations in Empty Luminosity

Shakya Chokden's Position on Primordial Mind

1. Facing the Reality of Primordial Mind

Primordial Mind and the Question of Existence

Whether we explore tantric teachings and meditative instructions, address the question of reality contested by Mahāyāna thinkers, or analyze ultimate truth directly experienced in meditative equipoise, we will notice that one of the key themes saturating these issues is the nature, meaning, and status of mind and its relation to other elements of Buddhist thought and practice.

In the Tibetan Buddhist world, the reality of mental phenomena was problematized by those who take the Niḥsvabhāvavāda stance, which rejects the reality of mind, and look down on the explanation of reality offered by Cīttamātra, the system which takes mind (*sems*, *citta*) as the main element of its ultimate view and the object of meditation on ultimate truth. As a result, practically all Tibetan thinkers developed different strategies for separating what they deemed to be ultimate reality and what they saw as the non-ultimate mind asserted in such "lower" tenets as Cīttamātra. This task was complicated by the fact that the majority of Buddhist thinkers also admit at least some mental elements to ultimate truth and/or its realization.

Dölpopa, Longchenpa, Shakya Chokden, and other thinkers of various traditions accept as ultimate truth the categories of primordial mind (*ye shes*, *jñāna*), cognition (*rig pa*, *vidyā*), fundamental mind

(*gniyug sems*), and so forth; the names and identifications vary, but the mental “flavor” is easily discernible. At the same time, those thinkers emphasize a fundamental difference between primordial mind and ordinary mentality. Even in the “anti-mental” descriptions of reality provided by Geluk thinkers who treat ultimate reality exclusively as a non-affirming negation—not only in the Nīḥsvabhāvavāda system, but in Yogācāra/Cittamātra as well!—mind is deemed necessary for realization of that ultimate reality. Although mind is not included in ultimate reality, according to the Geluk system mind is indispensable for the realization of ultimate reality because ultimate reality is an object that requires a subject in order to be known.²

Tibetan thinkers use different strategies for separating ordinary mentality and primordial mind on the level of both philosophical discourse and contemplative practice. For example, Longchenpa, Mipam, and other important Nyingma thinkers in minute detail explain differences between ordinary types of knowing and ultimate reality understood as cognition (*rig pa*). A big part of the practical instructions of the Great Perfection system too is aimed at differentiating the two in meditative experience and discovering the unique characteristics of the latter. Sakya thinkers tend to take clarity, cognition, and appearances in general as conventional truths, but take the union of clarity and emptiness, appearance and emptiness, and awareness and emptiness as ultimate truth. Such an approach is carried into meditative instructions as well, as evident in Shakya Chokden’s teacher Rongtön’s writings.³

We have seen that Shakya Chokden explains ultimate reality as primordial mind different from consciousness. Nevertheless, his explanation of primordial mind is unusual in many respects. First and foremost, he accepts the explanation of ultimate reality by Alikākāravāda, and insists that it is not only a valid type of ultimate reality, but it is that very reality which is explicitly accepted and/or meditatively experienced also by Nīḥsvabhāvavādins, and definitely asserted in Tantra. As a result, he comes up with the highly unusual ideas that will be discussed in this chapter: although primordial mind is ultimate reality, it is impermanent; although it is a self-cognition, it does not necessarily cognize itself; although grasping at its true existence has to be abandoned, it truly exists, and so forth.

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the notion of primordial mind in Shakya Chokden’s overall approach to Madhyamaka. As he puts it in the *Rain of Ambrosia*:

In brief, from among Mahāyāna followers, whoever’s system it is—that of [Alikākāravāda] Yogācāras, Nīḥsvabhāvavādins,

or followers of Vajrayāna—as long as they accept a definitive meaning that is the direct object of cognition (*dingos kyī rig bya*) of the view realizing the selflessness of phenomena, the entity of emptiness is necessarily identified as primordial mind.⁴

Shakya Chokden argues that whenever Mādhyamikas provide an identification of a genuine, non-metaphorical ultimate truth, they identify it exclusively as the non-dual primordial mind. Exploration of the nature of primordial mind, therefore, is the task of paramount importance. Furthermore, primordial mind is the only phenomenon accepted as existent by Madhyamaka—if any existence at all is accepted. Consequently, exploring the nature of primordial mind is tantamount to exploring the ultimate nature of existence.

According to Shakya Chokden, Alikākāravāda and Nīḥsvabhāvavāda are similar in not accepting the existence of any relative, conventional phenomena. As he puts it in the *Answers to Three Universally Known Questions from the ‘One Hundred and Eight Questions on the Thorough Differentiation of the Three Types of Vows’*:

Question: Does only the Nīḥsvabhāvavāda system [accept that] if something exists it necessarily has to be the dharma-sphere?

Answer: [Such is accepted] not only in that [system], but [also in] the final system of what is known as Alikākāravāda Cittamātra (*sems tsam rnam rdzun pa*). This is because in both the *Ornament of Mahāyāna Sūtras* and the *Differentiation of the Middle and Extremes* [Maitreya] taught:

Thus, except for the dharma-sphere
There are no phenomena.⁵

According to both Alikākāravāda and Nīḥsvabhāvavāda, to exist means to exist in reality and to exist as reality (the dharma-sphere and reality are synonymous). Where the two systems diverge is in their positions on the existence of primordial mind. When a system of Madhyamaka applies the explanatory approach of self-emptiness, it does not accept any existence, any reality, any phenomena, including primordial mind. When a system of Madhyamaka follows the explanatory approach of other-emptiness, it takes primordial mind as the only reality, and therefore the only existent thing. This is explained in the following

passage from the *Thorough Clarification of Definitive Meaning of the 'Five Dharmas of Maitreya'*, where Shakyā Chokden deals with the question of what the “middle” is according to the systems of Madhyamaka:

The modes of explaining Mahāyāna Madhyamaka contain two [approaches]: the explanatory mode by way of self-emptiness and the explanatory mode by way of other-emptiness. According to the first one, there is left no thing at all called “center” (*dbus ma*) in the remainder of negation of all extremes of proliferations. The term “middle” is a mere label attached to [that nothing], because knowables not empty of their own entities are impossible. According to the second one, the two—the apprehended and apprehender—do not exist, but the non-dual primordial mind exists. A phenomenon existing in remainder of such elimination of the two extremes of superimposition and deprecation is called “middle.”⁶

With the important exception of their views on primordial mind, both approaches are similar in their general rejection of the existence of any phenomena. Nevertheless, according to the first approach, not even a primordial mind is left in remainder of negation of extremes. According to the second approach, primordial mind itself is the only reality, the middle free from extremes which is left in remainder of their negation. When determining emptiness by reasoning, the first approach is followed by all Niḥsvabhāvavādins and partly by Dharmakīrti,⁷ while the second is employed by Alīkāravādins.

We find further details in the *Wish Fulfilling Meru*, where Shakyā Chokden addresses different ways of describing what the extremes are and how they are eliminated according to the two systems of Madhyamaka. As the passage demonstrates, the main difference between the ways of eliminating extremes by the two systems of Madhyamaka lies in whether primordial mind is negated together with all other phenomena or not. I am quoting the passage at length, because it shows clearly how Shakyā Chokden understands the meaning of existence and nonexistence:

There are two ways of eliminating the two extremes in [Madhyamaka,] the fourth tenet [system]: that of Yogācāra and that of Niḥsvabhāvavāda. Because according to the first [system] neither the apprehended- nor the apprehender-phenomena have ever existed from the beginning, as taught

in the *Dharmas of Maitreya*, it eliminates the extreme of existence. Also, because [according to that system, phenomena] are not made nonexistent either by pure reasoning or by other causes and conditions, it eliminates the extreme of nonexistence. Its explanation is as follows. If one accepts that a previously existent thing later became nonexistent, one abides in the extreme of nonexistence [as well as the extreme of existence. For example,] when previously existent wealth is later exhausted, worldly individuals accept that it is nonexistent. Thereby they abide in extremes of both eternalism and nihilism. “The middle” in this system is that which is free from the two extremes of the apprehended and apprehender, the self-illuminating self-cognition. Because no phenomena except the dharmasphere are accepted in this system, it is greatly distinguished from Cittamātra.⁸

Because according to the second [system], no knowables of the mode (*ji lta*, *yathā*) and multiplicity (*ji snyed*, *yāvat*)⁹ have ever existed from the beginning, it eliminates the extreme of existence. Because previously existent [things] are not made nonexistent either by reasoning or by the knowledge-seeing of āryas (*phags pa'i shes mthong*), it eliminates the extreme of nonexistence. Because nobody [and nothing] has ever existed, it eliminates the extreme of being both [existent and nonexistent]. The ground of dependence on which to depend (*gang la ltos pa'i ltos sa*), that is, “being both” is impossible. Hence the dependent phenomenon (*bltos chos*), that is, “not being both” also cannot be accepted. [According to this system,] if phenomena which are not dependently established (*ltos grub*, *apekṣyasamutpāda*) were accepted, they would not go beyond being truly established (*bden grub*).¹⁰

As this passage demonstrates, Alīkāravāda and Niḥsvabhāvavāda have different ways of explaining the nonexistence of phenomena, but their underlying arguments are the same. The extreme of existence is eliminated because no existence of phenomena to which this extreme could be attached is accepted. The extreme of nonexistence is eliminated by further reiterating that very lack of existence, and arguing that precisely because phenomena do not exist, they cannot become nonexistent either. Phenomena are free from the other two extremes, because the last two extremes in their turn are derived from the first two.

In a word, neither system accepts the existence of any subjective or objective phenomena, and both use this lack of existence as the foundation for eliminating all extremes. The main point of disagreement that sharply separates the two systems of Madhyamaka is their explanation of whether primordial mind is real and existent or unreal and nonexistent. Shakya Chokden elaborates on details of this difference in the *Meaningful to Behold*:

This is the system of the main [types of] Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika [to say that] because [primordial mind] does not exist in the face of that [reasoning analyzing the ultimate, such nonexistence] fills the role of nonexistence (*med pa'i go chod pa*). Nevertheless, [such] is not [accepted] in [the system of] Yogācāras.

Objection: Then it will follow that the relative [level] is more authoritative (*dbang btisan*).

Answer: No, because it is not ascertained that if [something] does not exist in the face of reasoning analyzing the ultimate, it [necessarily] does not exist as the ultimate.¹¹

The two systems of Madhyamaka have different opinions on the question of whether nonexistence in the face of reasoning fills the role of nonexistence. Both systems agree that the reasoning of Madhyamaka negates everything that stands before it. Nevertheless, sūtric works of Candrakīrti, Bhāviveka, and their followers (as well as Nāgārjuna in the *Collection of Reasonings*) do not provide any description of ultimate truth which is beyond the reach of that reasoning. Those works, therefore, teach no reality existing beyond the reach of reasoning that could counterbalance the nonexistence in the face of reasoning. Alīkāravādins, on the other hand, do provide a description of such reality, describing it as primordial mind which is beyond the reach of concepts, and therefore beyond the reach of reasoning. Although primordial mind does not exist in the face of reasoning, it does ultimately exist, and it exists as the ultimate.

In this context, the following subtle distinction should be made. According to the other-emptiness reasoning used by Alīkāravāda, primordial mind is left in remainder of negation. Nevertheless, as the above passage shows, Alīkāravādins also accept that primordial mind does not exist in the face of reasoning analyzing the ultimate. Therefore, being left in remainder of negation does not necessarily

imply existence in the face of reasoning, and the nonexistence in the face of reasoning does not necessarily imply not being left in remainder of negation.

Note also that the nonexistence in the face of reasoning does not necessarily entail being an object of negation by that reasoning. As I explained earlier (124, 128), Shakya Chokden argues that although according to the Niḥsvabhāvavāda system of self-emptiness the object of negation of which phenomena are empty is the same as the basis of negation, in the Yogācāra system of other-emptiness the basis of negation and the object of negation are different. Therefore, in contrast to Niḥsvabhāvavāda, the general Yogācāra position is that although primordial mind does not exist in the face of reasoning, it is not an object of negation by that reasoning.¹²

Shakya Chokden makes a statement similar to the one in the previous passage in the *Great Path Compressing the Two Chariot Ways into One*, where he argues that according to Haribhadra too, the non-existence of primordial mind in the face of reasoning does not entail its nonexistence. He writes:

[In general, there are two approaches to this issue: the assertion] that because something is not established in the face of reasoning (*rigs ngor*), [such non-establishment] fills the role of non-establishment in the way of being as well; [the assertion] that although something is not established in that [face of reasoning], nevertheless, because it is established in the face of meditative equipoise (*manyam gzhas gi ngor*), [such establishment] fills the role of establishment [in the mode of being]. These assertions [belong to] the separate systems of Sautrāntika Mādhyamika and Mādhyamika Utilizing Worldly Renown [on the one hand] and Yogācāra Mādhyamika [on the other].¹³

The above distinction, once again, derives from Shakya Chokden's view that the sūtric writings of Candrakīrti, Bhāviveka, and their followers do not provide an identification of ultimate truth experienced in the meditative equipoise of Mahāyāna āryas, which Yogācāra Mādhyamikas on both Niḥsvabhāvavāda and Alīkāravāda sides identify as the non-dual primordial mind.

The nonexistence of primordial mind in the face of reasoning does not fill the role of nonexistence according to both types of Yogācāra Madhyamaka. It is safe to argue, therefore, that the overall position

of Shakya Chokden is that whenever primordial mind is asserted as ultimate truth, its nonexistence in the face of reasoning is not accepted as filling the role of nonexistence.

But if primordial mind does not withstand analysis by reasoning, how can it ultimately exist? If it does ultimately exist, does it follow that it withstands analysis?

The Question of Withstanding Analysis

Shakya Chokden's position is that according to both systems of Madhyamaka the non-metaphorical ultimate can never be reached by analysis or reasoning. It is beyond the scope of reasoning both in terms of what is *determined* by reasoning and what is *negated* by reasoning. The reasoning of Madhyamaka determines ultimate reality through negation, be it an affirming or non-affirming negation. Therefore, similar to everything determined by reasoning not being the actual non-metaphorical ultimate, everything negated by reasoning cannot be the actual ultimate either.

Although Shakya Chokden's position on this issue is clear, nevertheless, when directly dealing with the question whether primordial mind withstands analysis by reasoning (*rigs pas dpyad bzod*), he provides slightly different answers—answers that might sound contradictory if not properly understood. In the following passage from the *Rain of Ambrosia*, linking the description of primordial mind in sūtric and tantric writings, he says:

Question: Is it accepted that [primordial mind] withstands analysis by reasoning?

Answer: No, because in the face of reasoning analyzing the ultimate (*don dam dpyod byed kyi rigs pa*), it is not accepted that [primordial mind] is established as any extreme of one, many, etc.

Objection: Then it contradicts [the fact that primordial mind] is indestructible (*gzhom du med pa*).

Answer: No, it does not, because there is no contradiction between being destructible by conceptuality and not being destructible in the face of primordial mind.¹⁴

As this passage shows, Shakya Chokden sees no problem in accepting that primordial mind does not withstand analysis by reasoning.

THREE TEXTS
ON
MADHYAMAKA

by
Shakya Chokden

Translated by
Komarovski Iaroslav

LIBRARY OF TIBETAN WORKS & ARCHIVES

Part Two

Drop of Nectar of Definitive Meaning

*Entering the Gates to the Essential Points of the
Two Truths*

Swastiprajābhya!

Respectfully I make prostrations,
Having offered a garland of Kumuda [flowers]¹⁶⁸
Blossomed in the ocean of [my] heart
Where the reflection of a fearless young moon¹⁶⁹ dwells!

Having first prostrated myself, with the help of Candra's treatises I'm going to open the two gates to enter the great mansion of definitive meaning. What are these two? They are the two gates, one to enter [it by] action through acceptance of the false truth, and another to enter [it by] the view through acceptance of the ultimate truth.

I. The Way of Entering the Great Mansion of Definitive Meaning through Acceptance of the False Truth.

[The way] is acceptance [of things] as [they are] known in the world [or by worldly ones]. The term "worldly ones" is not applied only to ordinary individuals. Rather, [in this case] it means all innate minds grasping at signs due to ignorance until the predisposition for ignorance is eliminated. When an explanation is made emphasizing these very minds, which accept the first truth, it is done as follows:

There are two types of appearances [arising] in the mental field of worldly ones—wrong appearances and correct appearances. The first type is appearances of consciousness deceived by an immediate cause. They are such appearances of mistaken sense consciousness as [visions of] falling hair and two moons [in the case of eye disorders], and superimpositions of mistaken mental consciousnesses deceived by wrong tenets—superimpositions such as [the ideas of] "self" and production from the four extremes [of self, other, both and neither].

The second type is appearances of innate consciousness caused by ignorance¹⁷⁰ without being deceived by an immediate cause. These are the five types of external objects appearing to sense consciousnesses. This type also includes appearances of mental consciousness, such as the "mere I," a sprout established by nature and production by nature, [which are] objects grasped through the mode of apprehension of the two types of innate self-grasping¹⁷¹.

These wrong and correct [appearances] are respectively called "false truth from the point of view of the world" and "ultimate truth [from the point of view of the world]." The first of these two is not accepted as existent even by the world itself, because while not

existing it [still] appears in a wrong way due to [the immediate causes of] mistake. The second type of appearances is accepted as existent according to common knowledge [of the world] because all instances of these appearances are the ultimate truth for that knowledge]. That very approach was intended by the auto-commentary on *Two Truths* [by Jānagarbha] when the following words of a sūtra were quoted: "That which is made ultimate by some [individuals] is accepted as false by others. That same person who is the mother of someone is viewed as the wife by another."

From the standpoint of this explanation, the two types of "self" imputed by tenets are not posited as existent even in the world[ly mind], because worldly ones also accept them as a false truth. But the two types of "self" imputed by innate ignorance have to be accepted as existent from the point of view of the world itself, because they are accepted as ultimate truth by worldly ones.

What this explanation proves is as follows: That which posits the ultimate truth of worldly ones is innate ignorance. That which posits the ultimate truth of āryas is awareness of primordial mind¹⁷². Both ultimate truth of the world and that which is posited as truth by common knowledge [of the world]¹⁷³ are called in āryas' conventions "false truth of the world," because both are similar in being true within the framework of [worldly] minds and similar in not being true within the framework of awareness of primordial mind. Thus, there is no difference in existence and non-existence of these two conventionally.

In brief, the reasoning is as follows: If something is named 'correct false truth' in āryas' conventions and accepted as ultimate truth by worldly ones, it has to exist in the world. For example, a chariot. The two types of self, which are objects grasped through the mode of apprehension of the two types of innate self-grasping, are also named 'correct false truth' in āryas' conventions and accepted as ultimate truth by worldly ones. [Thus, they exist in the world.]

Then, who accepts the view that 'chariot exists but self doesn't exist'? It is approved by Buddhist Proponents of Phenomenal Existence. It is not approved by Madhyamaka's own tradition since in that tradition both of them are equally [viewed as] not being existent.

Those inhabitants of the Snow Land who don't know this approach in which the mode of presenting self, chariot and so forth by Buddhist tenets supercedes [the mode of doing it by] common knowledge of the world say, 'Whatever is accepted by the worldly

ones is Madhyamaka tradition. Presenting the conventional truth of the world, they say: 'Self exists, but [it] does not [exist in] a true [way].' They also say: 'Self, which is the basis of karma and its results, exists, but self of person does not exist.'¹⁷⁴ [All] these statements clearly show to the world that either [their author] didn't take even the slightest pains to look with an eye of intelligence at the garland of white light of Candra's perfect elucidations; or with a brush of crooked discrimination he took dark ink stirred by evil ideas and colored Candra's face black.

II. The Way of Entering the Great Mansion of Definitive Meaning through Acceptance of the Ultimate Truth

This section has two divisions: 1) how to practice at the time of severing conceptual elaborations by the view, and; 2) how to proceed at the time of applying conventions by knowledgeable-expressions of āryas.

A. HOW TO PRACTICE AT THE TIME OF SEVERING CONCEPTUAL ELABORATIONS BY THE VIEW

This has two steps. First, when conceptual elaborations that grasp at truth are being severed, one ceases partial conceptual elaborations and practices concordant ultimate truth. After that, when conceptual elaborations that grasp at truthlessness are being severed, one ceases all masses of conceptual elaborations and practices final definitive meaning¹⁷⁵.

B. HOW TO PROCEED AT THE TIME OF APPLYING CONVENTIONS BY KNOWLEDGE-EXPRESSIONS OF ĀRYAS

The way of applying conventions [by āryas] is of two types. One emphasizes the negation of imputations of worldly minds, while the other emphasizes the negation of imputations of yogis' minds.

On the level of first [reasoning], all the types of correct false truth explained above are posited as wrong false truth, because while non-existing they appear due to ignorance. Why are they non-existent? They are non-existent because they are not found under investigation by the reasoning of āryas¹⁷⁶ and because they appear due to ignorance only. Since other types of correct false truth [beside those explained above] are not accepted on this level, they are posited as false truth. They are named 'false truth of the world'.

Ultimate truth [posited] on this level is a sprout empty of truth, [a vase] empty of nature, etc. These [types of ultimate truth] are accepted as existent according to the conventions of āryas, because they are established by valid cognition approved by āryas.

On the level of second reasoning, all the types of ultimate truth explained above have to be interpreted as false truth, because they serve as the objects of sounds and concepts¹⁷⁷. Although this is so, nevertheless they are not accepted as wrong false [truth], because they are not posited by the power of ignorance. They are named 'false truth of the yogis' and 'correct false truth.' When Bhāvaviveka said, "it is not appropriate for the learned ones to scale the great building of the true [meaning] without the ladder of correct false truth," and Candra said, "if one asks whether the ultimate also is conventional truth, [the answer will be] 'yes, it is,'" they also intended that very meaning [which was just explained].

If false truth on this level is like that, what then is ultimate truth [here]? The term 'ultimate truth is beyond all expressions' is used. Nevertheless, one cannot express it by such words as 'the basis of definition of ultimate truth is this [or that]'. On this level, one has safely entered that which is the great mansion of definitive meaning.

Thus there are quickly thrown open

The two great gates-

Smooth path leading

To the mansion of glorious Madhyamaka.

This "Drop of Nectar of Definitive Meaning, - Entering the Gates of the Essentials of the Two Truths" was written in the middle of Yeru in Tsan by Jampe! Gawe Shenen ('jam dpaldga ba'i bshes gnyen), who, born in a land of Central [Tibet] rich in forests, enjoys the tradition of Madhyamaka treatises with the eyes of discrimination.

Mangalam!

159. On the level of conventional presentation, when false truth is emphasized, it is not correct to use ultimate reasoning. Shakyā Chokden mentions this debate in order to show that the idea behind it is not to prove conventional existence (like Tsongkhapa does) but to explain that there are two levels of presentation and it is not correct to refute one when another is emphasized.
160. There are various ways of counting the Five Bodies. One of them is: the Wisdom Body of Reality, the Natural Body, the Unchangeable Vajra Body, the Body of Perfect Utility and the Emanation Body.
161. Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇi are Buddhas in the forms of Bodhisattvas representing respectively enlightened wisdom, compassion and power.
162. The crown is the place where the Chakra of Great Bliss is located.
163. As it is mentioned by the author at the beginning, the composition of this text was requested by [Karmapa,] the lord of enlightened activities of the Supreme Victor [Buddha]. He is the Seventh Karmapa, Chodrak Gyamtso.
164. An epithet of the god Vishnu whose ten manifestations are known as fish, tortoise, boar, etc.
165. Inner oceans are located between the mount Meru and the four continents which surround it.
166. Rāhu is the demon who has only a huge head, not a body. He once swallowed the sun. In mythology it is said that he keeps swallowing the sun during solar eclipses.
167. According to legends the sun is carried on a chariot in the sky.
168. A water lily which opens at the appearance of the moon.
169. 'Candra' is the name of both the moon and Candrakīrti.
170. See footnote 49.
171. As inhabitants of the desire realm, we have six types of consciousness: five sensual and one mental. The first five are eye, ear, nose, tongue and body consciousnesses. These can never be conceptual. Mental consciousness is of two types: conceptual and non-conceptual. Both conceptual and non-conceptual consciousnesses can be either valid or wrong consciousnesses. Non-mistaken non-conceptual consciousness is direct perception. The respective objects of the five sense consciousnesses are: forms, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile objects. Direct objects of conceptual mental consciousness are various conceptual images. While direct perception simply reflects its objects like a mirror, conceptual mind apprehends its objects in various ways, called 'modes of apprehension', which are either concordant or discordant with what is accepted to be reality. For example, if someone conceptually apprehends a text of Shakyā Chokden as a text of Shakyā Chokden, his mode of apprehension will be correct. But if he or she apprehends it as a tale of Mickey Mouse, his or her mode of apprehension will be wrong. What an object is apprehended to be through the mode of apprehension

is called 'an object of the mode of apprehension.' In the case of direct perception, it is like a "reflection" of its grasped object, but in the case of conceptual mind it differs depending on the mode of apprehension. Everybody agrees that in such superimpositions as Creator God, etc., made by wrong tenets (which are called 'immediate causes of mistake'), the mode of apprehension is wrong and its objects are called 'wrong false truth'. But what is unique to Shakyā Chokden's approach is that for him the mode of apprehension by innate types of self-grasping is correct from the point of view of the world, and thus all its objects (such as 'mere I', 'truly established I', etc.,) are correct false truth. Likewise, innate self-grasping won't be a wrong mind from the point of view of the world, according to his view. Innate types of mind are those to which individuals have been accustomed during beginningless lifetimes, as opposed to the minds deceived by immediate causes.

172. I.e. direct cognition of ultimate truth.
173. These two are actually synonyms, the idea behind it being that what is accepted by worldly mind is accepted by it as true and ultimate. That which is not accepted by worldly mind as true is not accepted at all. Shakyā Chokden discusses this question here in order to avoid an assumption that something can be accepted as truth but not ultimate truth by worldly mind (as well as by āryas, since the latter accept false truth for the sake of beneficial communication with the world, not from their own point of view).
174. This is the view of Tsongkhapa.
175. There are two types of ultimate truth: real and concordant (with real ultimate truth). Concordant ultimate truth is conceptual images created through partial negation of concepts. Real ultimate truth is free from any concepts.
176. Here refers to Madhyamaka reasoning.
177. That is they can be conceptually conceived and expressed by words. Real ultimate truth is unthinkable and non-expressible. The fact that the term 'ultimate truth' is used does not mean that ultimate truth is expressed. What is expressed is just a conceptual idea, but this idea does not have a corresponding object which can be reached either through conceptual thinking or through direct perception by worldly mind.
178. The goddess of wisdom and learning.
179. Six ornaments beautifying Jambudvīpa (the Southern Continent, one of the four continents surrounding Meru, where we live, according to Buddhist cosmology) are the Indian Buddhist masters: Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, Dignāga and Dharmakīrti. Here the four charioteers of Madhyamaka [of Proponents of Entitylessness] are Śāntideva, Buddhapālita, Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti.
180. Method of the Proponents of Entitylessness.
181. Nāgārjuna's *Root Wisdom*.

such as Nāgārjuna and his spiritual sons, and the great paṇḍita Nāropa. Although that is the case, I have not written them here from fear of being overly verbose, but if you wish and are interested, I will write and offer them later.⁴⁷

Among these points [which I have written about], there are certainly several exceptional ones which are in disagreement with some that have been previously known in Tibet. But you have been accustomed to the previous philosophical system for a long time, so that the propensity for it has become firm, and many in Tibet adhere to that tradition. Therefore, although there is a difference of firm and unstable propensities for these previous and later philosophical systems, and a difference in the numbers of adherents, without giving in to the influence of those differences, please take as witness the scriptures of the Buddha and bodhisattvas, and then examine them with an attitude of unbiased honesty as to which [system] is true.⁴⁸

As this and many other passages make clear, there was certainly considerable opposition to Dolpopa's theories. Specifically, he felt that most people had already closed their minds to the teachings of definitive meaning. He often mentions the presumptions and prejudice inherent in the established traditions of his time as one of the greatest factors inhibiting the widespread acceptance of his ideas. He was presenting his case to a prejudiced jury. It is therefore curious that not a single contemporary text has survived in which hostile testimony against Dolpopa is preserved. It may well be that the full reaction to his doctrine did not find open expression until after his death.

3. The Zhentong Tradition after Dolpopa

Dolpopa was surrounded by a group of scholars as formidable as any in fourteenth-century Tibet. His most influential successors in the Jonang tradition were his senior disciples Nyaön Kunga Bal, Mati Panchen Jamyang Lodrö, and the great abbot Choley Namgyal. Major works by both Nyaön and Mati Panchen are extant, and demonstrate the extent to which they followed Dolpopa's example when dealing with crucial doctrinal questions. In particular, it was



The Buddha from Dolpo

A Study of the Life and Thought of
the Tibetan Master Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltsen

Cyrus Stearns

SUNY series in
Buddhist Studies

Matthew Kapstein, editor

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS

apparently the teachings of Nyaön that provoked polemic responses and negative reactions.⁴⁹

The best known and most influential early opponent of the Jonang tradition was the Sakya scholar Rendawa Zhönu Lodrö (1348-1413). Scholarly tradition generally credits Rendawa for establishing the Prāsaṅgika form of Madhyamaka philosophy in Tibet.⁵⁰ He became one of the most important teachers of the great Tsongkapa Lozang Trakpa (1357-1419), but was viewed by the Jonang tradition as a vicious opponent of the teachings of definitive meaning (*nitārtha*, *nges don*) which had been spread so successfully by Dolpopa. For example, in the pseudo-prophecy, which was attributed to Dolpopa as a last testament but which was surely composed much later by a Jonang follower and added to his biography, there is a very strong condemnation of Rendawa. There he is described as an evil demon who would spread the nihilistic view (*med par lta ba*). Moreover, he would refute the doctrine of the Buddha-nature as the ultimate ground, denigrate the Six-branch Yoga as the ultimate path, and deny the existence of the ultimate result as a separation from all taints. He would also criticize the *Kālacakra mūla tantra* because it did not begin with the words "Thus have I heard," as do other sūtras and tantras, and would make various criticisms of the *Condensed Kālacakra tantra*. Finally, he would gather together copies of the *Vimalaprabhā* and have them thrown into rivers.⁵¹

These are very serious allegations, but in all fairness it seems that they are also tainted with a considerable degree of hysteria.⁵² Rendawa's biography specifically points out that he was famous in Tibet for having said that the *Kālacakra tantra* was not Dharma, but that this was incorrect. While he did see internal contradictions in a literal reading of the *Kālacakra*, he did not dismiss it as a non-Buddhist teaching (*chos min*). This is made clear in a statement by Rendawa himself at the end of *The Jewel Rosary* (*Nor bu'i phreng ba*), the text in which he voiced his objections to specific points in the *Kālacakra tantra*:

Nevertheless, whether or not [the *Kālacakra*] was composed by a Noble One, it is easy to see that it also has many fine explanations,

And therefore I have not denigrated this totally by saying

"It is not an entryway for those who wish liberation."⁵³

That Rendawa's main quarrel was not actually with the content of the *Kālacakra tantra* itself, but with the prevalent practice of understanding its words literally (*sgra ji bzhin pa*), is specified in *My Own Reply to the Jewel Rosary* (*Nor bu'i phreng ba'i rang lan*), a text in which he specifically defends the *Kālacakra tantra* against some of his own earlier objections:

Nowadays arrogant scholars in the land of glacial mountain ranges have become passionately attached to the literal meaning of the words in the *Kālacakra* and its commentary, which present the profound by means of implicit language.

After seeing the spread of many perverse distinctions which contradict the collection of pure sūtras and tantras, I have written this by means of objection and analysis, as though straightening a crooked stick.⁵⁴

Rendawa is indeed the most famous (or infamous) critic of the *Kālacakra* tradition in Tibet.⁵⁵ But he had first studied with some of Dolpopa's greatest disciples, such as Nyaön Kunga Bal and Mati Panchen, and had been extremely impressed with the Jonang philosophical system. He then decided to investigate thoroughly the scriptures upon which the Jonang teachers based their doctrine, such as the *Kālacakra tantra*, the *Laṅkāvatāra sūtra*, the *Uttaratantra*, the *Dharmadhātu stotra*, and so forth. He analyzed these scriptures three times. After the first reading he was certain that the Jonang position was correct. On the second reading he became uncertain as to whether it was correct or incorrect. After the third reading he was sure that the Jonang interpretations were incorrect.⁵⁶ Following this Rendawa went to Sakya and reported to another of his teachers, the great abbot Sangye Phel, that he had determined that the Jonang doctrine was erroneous, and was encouraged in this conclusion. Rendawa then apparently embarked on a crusade to discredit the Jonang tradition and to call into question the internal contradictions he perceived in a literal reading of the *Kālacakra tantra*. First he sent a message to his teacher Nyaön, telling him what he had decided. Nyaön was very displeased at this turn about in Rendawa's view. Nevertheless, Rendawa felt that because of Nyaön's great intellectual powers, and specifically his consummate knowledge of logical reasoning, he could be convinced that the Jonang view was wrong if Rendawa could demonstrate this

through logic and scriptural quotations. He was sure that once Nyaön was converted, all the other members of the Jonang school would change their views.⁵⁷ Nyaön is certainly portrayed here as the leading proponent of Dolpopa's tradition.

However, when Rendawa went to Tsechen monastery to speak to Nyaön, his old teacher indicated in many ways that he was displeased with him, and Rendawa recognized that there was no point in broaching the subject. Instead, he returned to Sakya and composed *The Jewel Rosary* (*Nor bu'i phreng ba*), his famous critique of the *Kālacakra*.⁵⁸ In front of a huge assembly presided over by Drung Zhitokpa at Sakya, Rendawa then debated against a certain Karmapa Gönzhö on the question of internal contradictions in the *Kālacakra tantra*. Then he was invited to Jonang itself, where he debated on the status of the Buddha-nature. All of this would have been happening before the year 1379, when Nyaön passed away. According to Rendawa's biography, he was successful in converting many Jonang monks, caused others to doubt their views, and prevented still others from joining the Jonang tradition.⁵⁹ In short, he does seem to have led a strong reactionary movement against the Jonang philosophical system less than fifteen years after the death of Dolpopa.

Nevertheless, it now seems clear that Rendawa's attitude was considerably more ambivalent than the later Tibetan historical sources would have us believe. In the latter part of his life Rendawa lived in semiseclusion at a hermitage in the region of Kangbuley, where he composed his most substantial work on the *Kālacakra*, entitled *A Jewel Lamp Illuminating the Definitive Meaning of the Glorious Kālacakra* (*Dpal dus kyi 'khor lo'i nges don gsal bar byed pa rin po che'i sgron me*).⁶⁰ Unlike his two earlier polemic works, the first of which was certainly written while Rendawa was not yet thirty years of age, this fascinating treatise is a thorough and positive analysis of the meditation practices of the *Kālacakra*. The work is obviously an attempt to extract the profound essence of the *Kālacakra* teachings, while correcting some errors of interpretation made by others. In light of the historical material presented above and Rendawa's reputation as an opponent of the Jonang tradition and a critic of the *Kālacakra*, it is nothing less than a major shock to find the following passage in this final work:

According to the tradition of this [*Kālacakra*] *tantra* the classification of the two truths is like this: all the phenomena

of the incidental stains that arise from the delusive circumstances of ignorance are the relative truth, because they obscure the perception of reality and are reference points for the totally afflicting emotions. Furthermore, because it is not established as the object of a perfect gnosis, it is empty of self-nature [*rang stong*], a nihilistic emptiness [*chad stong*], and an inanimate emptiness [*bems po'i stong pa nyid*].

All the primordial phenomena of the true nature of mind, natural radiant light, are the absolute truth. And that is not the case because it has been proven able to withstand analysis by logical reasoning. . . . It is the absolute because it is the object of a nonconceptual perception. It is empty of other [*gzhan stong*] because the incidental stains are absent, and it is not a nihilistic emptiness [*chad stong*] and an inanimate emptiness [*bems stong*] because it is experienced through a specific self-cognizing intrinsic awareness. . . .

In regard to that, the emptiness of self-nature [*rang stong*] falls into the extreme of nihilism, and therefore its realization is not the perfect path of liberation; only the emptiness of other [*gzhan stong*], the true nature of mind, radiant light, an immutable interior intrinsic awareness experienced through the force of meditation and through a specific self-cognizing intrinsic awareness is accepted as the perfect path.⁶¹

Can it be that Rendawa actually came to accept that the definitive meaning of the *Kālacakra* was compatible with the Zhentong view held by the Jonang tradition? And yet, at other points in this important text he continues strongly to condemn the view of a permanent and eternal absolute reality, which he equates with the teachings of the Vedic scriptures.⁶² Without a more careful study of Rendawa's works it is very difficult to reach a final conclusion about how he was apparently able to admit the validity of the Zhentong in the context of the definitive view of the *Kālacakra*, but reject the various other aspects of the theory, such as the permanent and eternal status of the Buddha-nature. Whatever the case, it is certain that later generations of Tibetan scholars continued to view Rendawa as a determined enemy of both the Jonang tradition and the teachings of the *Kālacakra*, despite the obvious evidence to the contrary in his final work on the subject.⁶³

In spite of the doctrinal backlash against the Jonang tradition in the late fourteenth century, Dolpopa's legacy remained powerful for many decades in the province of Tsang before other influences gained the upper hand. Jonang Tāranātha later remarked that the prophecy about Dolpopa found in the *Mahāberī sūtra* (*Rnga bo che mdo*)⁶⁴ was correct in that the stream of the practice of the Six-branch Yoga which he spread throughout Tibet, and the teaching of the *Sūtras on the Buddha-nature*, the *Uttaratantra*, and other scriptures of the Third Turning of the Dharma Wheel which proclaimed the Buddha-nature, remained strong in all teaching institutes for more than eighty years. After that point, the teaching of those scriptures was not as influential as before, due to the appearance of many who were obsessed with the provisional meaning (*neyārtha*, *drang don*) and were concerned with having the highest view, and gaining reputation, power, and large entourages.⁶⁵ This is quite clearly a negative reference to the rise of the Geluk tradition founded by Lord Tsongkapa, whose main disciples Khedrup Gelek Balzang (1385-1438) and Gyaltsab Darma Rinchen (1364-1431) led the attack against the Jonang tradition in the fifteenth century. But, Tāranātha continued, even in his own time the practice of the Six-branch Yoga and the tradition of the teachings about the Buddha-nature had still managed to survive.⁶⁶

From the point of view of the Jonang tradition itself, information about this lineage and the teachings of the Zhentong and other related topics is very scarce from the time of Dolpopa's immediate disciples until the period of Jonang Kunga Drolchok (1507-1566). In fact, from the late fourteenth century until Tāranātha began to revive the tradition around the beginning of the seventeenth century, there are no extant writings by Jonang masters which are concerned with issues originally raised by Dolpopa. For that matter, the few available writings of Kunga Drolchok are all that have survived from the Jonang school for a period of almost 150 years, and none of his works even mention the Zhentong.⁶⁷

Therefore there is a period of more than two hundred years in which almost all available information about the Jonang tradition is found in polemic passages from members of other traditions, nearly universally hostile, with the notable exception of the Sakya master Serdok Panchen Shakya Chokden (1428-1507). As far as can be known from the presently available sources, Shakya Chokden was the most influential advocate of the Zhentong in the fifteenth

and early sixteenth centuries. This impression is strengthened by Tāranātha, who composed a fascinating text comparing the views of Dolpopa and Shakya Chokden on twenty-one profound points of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna doctrine.⁶⁸ In the late eighteenth century the Geluk critic Thukan Lozang Chögyi Nyima does not mention any Zhentong masters after Dolpopa's direct disciples until he singles out Shakya Chokden with particular venom. This role as an important upholder of the Zhentong view is all the more remarkable when it is remembered that Shakya Chokden was, with the possible exception of his contemporary rival Goram Sönam Senge (1429-1489), the greatest Sakya scholar of his time.⁶⁹

Where did Shakya Chokden get the Zhentong teachings? And how did he manage to remain a staunch Sakya master while upholding this view? There is not total agreement about the source of the Zhentong received by Shakya Chokden. One of his main teachers was the Sakya master Rongdön Sheja Kunrik (1367-1449). In his survey of the recently recovered writings of Shakya Chokden, the modern Tibetan scholar Dhongthog Rinpoche states that Shakya Chokden followed the example of his teacher Rongdön in professing the Zhentong in secret, and refuting the exegetical tradition of Lord Tsongkapa through logical reasoning.⁷⁰ Although this is not the place to examine the thought of Rongdön, there is probably some truth to Dhongthog Rinpoche's statement. For example, a eulogy to Dolpopa composed by Rongdön has survived, which at least indicates that this Sakya teacher had great respect for Dolpopa and his views.⁷¹

In the Kagyü tradition, however, the seventh Karmapa, Chötrak Gyantso (1454-1506), is credited as having inspired Shakya Chokden to accept the Zhentong point of view. As was mentioned above, the third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, is sometimes named as an influence on Dolpopa's initial development of the Zhentong doctrine. Although at the present stage of research the dynamics of how the Zhentong came to be accepted by many members of the Kagyü tradition, especially in the Karma Kamtsang branch, is not well understood, it is certain that it was a powerful force within this lineage, probably from the time of the third Karmapa.⁷²

In the earliest available source on the life of Shakya Chokden, written by Jonang Kunga Drolchok, it is stated that he met the seventh Karmapa, Chötrak Gyantso, on two occasions. These meetings can be dated to the year 1502. The most significant event was

the second meeting, at the Rinpung court of Dönyö Dorje, at that time the most powerful ruler in Tibet. According to the Kagyü historian Bawo Tsukla Trengwa (1504–1566), who was writing between the years 1545 and 1564, from twenty to thirty thousand people are said to have gathered from throughout Tsang province to welcome the Karmapa upon his arrival in Rinpung. Shakya Chokden stayed with the Karmapa for about one month. During this period he received many of the Kagyü hierarch's uncommon profound instructions, which greatly enhanced his experience of renunciation and realization in meditation, and caused him to accept the Karmapa as his main spiritual master. A late history of the Karma Kagyü tradition elaborates further, stating that the Karmapa accorded Shakya Chokden the incredible honor of sitting upon a throne of equal height in the midst of the assembly, and that they spent the month in discussion of the most profound topics. On this occasion the Karmapa said that he and Shakya Chokden were of the same mind (*thugs rgyud gcig pa*). A passage later in the same work finally mentions the fact that in his writings Shakya Chokden maintained, as did the Karmapa, that the ultimate view of the two great traditions of the Mahāyāna was the Zhentong view of the absolute as only empty of other relative phenomena.⁷³ Although Shakya Chokden was already seventy-three or seventy-four years old, this event is often considered to have been the deciding factor in his acceptance of the Zhentong.⁷⁴ It seems more likely that Shakya Chokden had upheld the Zhentong view for a long time, and that this lengthy discussion with the Karmapa was more of a validation and enrichment of his realization than a complete change of view; otherwise it would have to be accepted that all of his works dealing with the questions of an emptiness of self-nature (*rang stong*) and an emptiness of other (*gzhan stong*) were composed in the remaining five years of his life.

The works of Shakya Chokden were later banned in Tibet during the middle of the seventeenth century. Bigoted supporters of the Geluk tradition, who held political power, sealed the printery where the blocks for Shakya Chokden's works were kept, and ordered copies of his works to be confiscated.⁷⁵ What was perhaps a unique copy survived in Bhutan, and was recently used to publish the now-available *Collected Works*. The banning of his works no doubt had a lasting effect on the later doctrinal development of the Sakya tradition.

Shakya Chokden's works often focus on a theme of reconciliation and synthesis between traditions that have become polarized over doctrinal issues. His brand of Zhentong differed in many respects from that of Dolpopa, although they agreed about the ultimate import of the view.⁷⁶ In one brief work Shakya Chokden compares the views of Dolpopa and Budön, both of whom he considers to be Sakya, and comes to the startling conclusion that in the ultimate sense there is no basis for disagreement between the Jonang and Zhalu traditions on the subject of the emptiness of self-nature (*rang stong*) and the emptiness of other (*gzhan stong*), because in the context of the definitive meaning of the tantras, Budön's tradition also maintained the view of the emptiness of other (*gzhan stong*).⁷⁷

The theme of synthesis, or at least maintaining that there is no contradiction between these two points of view, was also the approach of the seventh Karmapa, Chötrak Gyantso, as recorded by his disciple Karma Trinlepa (1456–1539). The text which best exemplifies this is Karma Trinlepa's brief verse response to some written questions he had received. This text, which must surely be the one referred to much later by Belo Tsewang Kunyab as "the brief treatise which illustrates that there is no contradiction between an emptiness of self-nature and an emptiness of other," specifically summarizes the view of the seventh Karmapa on this topic. As several modern writers have already noted, the eighth Karmapa, Migyö Dorje (1507–1554), also wrote a text on the Zhentong view, although later in his life he changed his mind, and wrote refutations of Dolpopa and Shakya Chokden.⁷⁸

Another figure also wrote a very interesting brief text attempting to bring the views of the emptiness of self-nature (*rang stong*) and the emptiness of other (*gzhan stong*) into harmony. This is the sixteenth- to seventeenth-century yogin Shongchen Denpey Gyaltzen, who was responsible for codifying the teachings on Severance (Gcod) which had been passed down in an oral transmission from the great adept Tangtong Gyalpo (1361–1485), who claimed to be the rebirth of Dolpopa. Shongchen's text is a versified presentation of the essential points involved in the philosophical system of the Great Madhyamaka.⁷⁹

The picture of the Sakya position in regard to the Jonang doctrine of the Zhentong and related questions is extremely complex from the late fifteenth century through the late sixteenth century. With the exception of Shakya Chokden and Gorampa, there are no

extant writings by Sakya masters of the period specifically devoted to these issues. There are, however, a number of brief passages in biographies and in some minor texts that give indications of the situation. Important information is found in the biographies of Gorum Kunga Lekpa (1477–1544), who was the Jonang throneholder for many years as well as a leading exponent of the Sakya teachings of the Path and Result (Lam 'bras); the great Tsarchen Losel Gyantso (1502–1566), who was the most highly regarded of all the masters of the Path and Result in the sixteenth century and who received many teachings from Gorumpa; Jonang Kunga Drolchok, who should definitely be considered representative of a major lineage of Sakya explication and practice; and Jamyang Khyentse Wangchuk (1524–1568), who studied with Gorumpa, Tsarchen, and Kunga Drolchok.

The biography of Gorumpa is one of the major sources for information about the situation at Jonang from the late fifteenth century to the middle of the sixteenth century. In this work it is obvious that the tradition was still strong, and that Dolpopa's major treatises, such as *The Ocean of Definitive Meaning*, the basic text and the autocommentary of *The Fourth Council*, and *A General Commentary on the Doctrine* were still being transmitted and studied at Jonang. In 1516 Gorumpa ascended the teaching throne at Jonang, and held the leadership position until 1527. During this time, and during the tenure of his hand-picked successor Namkha Balzang, who held the position from 1527 to 1543, Dolpopa's teachings of definitive meaning were preserved without any corruption.⁸⁰ Gorumpa taught not only the Jonang specialties, but also many tantric instructions of the Sakya school, such as the Path and Result. During these years Gorumpa was clearly a very prominent example of what must have been a not uncommon situation—the practice and study of both Jonang and Sakya teachings without the existence of any serious obstacles to such an approach. The followers of the Jonang school were still considered to be in the Sakya tradition, but with a special emphasis on the practice of the Six-branch Yoga and the peculiar teachings which had been passed down from Dolpopa.

Jonang Kunga Drolchok was certainly the best known leader of the Jonang tradition in the sixteenth century and left the most lasting legacy. In reading Kunga Drolchok's extensive autobiographies, the *One Hundred Instructions of Jonang* (*Jo nang khrid*

brgya), and his other miscellaneous writings, three things are immediately apparent. He was very much a product of the Sakya tradition, which he upheld through practice and teaching, he was an excellent model of a completely unbiased upholder of nonsectarian (*ris med*) sentiments, and there is extremely little evidence that he felt any special allegiance to the Jonang tradition, which he led, over that of others that he also taught and practiced.

The three main lineages of tantric practice which seem to have been the most important for Kunga Drolchok were the Sakya teachings of the Path and Result, the esoteric instructions of the Shangpa Kagyü school, and the Jonang tradition of the Six-branch Yoga.⁸¹ He constantly bestowed these teachings throughout his life. In the present context, what is most striking is the total lack of any aggressive attempt to spread the Zhentong teachings of Dolpopa. Kunga Drolchok was much more interested in creating an atmosphere of tolerance for all lineages of explication and practice than furthering that of only one. This is probably indicative of the situation in which the Jonang tradition now found itself.

Due to the great influence of the Geluk sect, which was very antagonistic toward the Jonang views, the mainstream of Sakya scholars had increasingly distanced themselves from the doctrinal position of the Jonang school, even though there seems to have been no such gulf between the two traditions in regard to practice. There is considerable evidence in both the writings of Shakya Chokden and Kunga Drolchok that many representatives of the Sakya school during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had been deeply influenced by the unique views of Lord Tsongkapa, whose supporters had continued to increase in number. This may have happened in large part because many Sakya scholars following the time of Rendawa had rejected the theories of Dolpopa, and perhaps gone to the other extreme and allied themselves with the new Geluk school, founded by Rendawa's disciple Lord Tsongkapa, whose views were very questionable in light of the ancient teachings of the original Sakya masters.⁸² Shakya Chokden and Kunga Drolchok referred to this trend among some followers of the Sakya school as the "lately arisen Sakya tradition" (*phyis byung sa skya pa*), and to a tension between the "new and old Sakya traditions" (*sa skya pa gsar rnying*), especially in regard to the teachings of the Path and Result.⁸³ They viewed this as an extremely serious corruption of the teachings of the original Sakya masters, whose ultimate inten-

tions they felt were more in agreement with those of the Jonang tradition. Kunga Drolchok saw these adherents to a "new Sakya" movement as wolves in sheep's clothing who were destroying the true Sakya teachings. In short, they were Geluk followers masquerading as members of the Sakya tradition.⁸⁴ On the other hand, it may also be the case that some Sakya followers were attracted toward the Zhentong orientation precisely in order to counteract the dominant Geluk influence in Tibetan spiritual matters of that time.

One of Kunga Drolchok's great strengths was an exceptional ability to focus on the specific teachings of a given lineage, and not let its views be influenced by those of any other tradition, even those of the Jonang school which he represented.⁸⁵ If he was writing about the Sakya teachings of the Path and Result, he would carefully distinguish its view from that of traditions that had different approaches, and when discussing the Jonang teachings of the Six-branch Yoga he kept precisely to Dolpopa's interpretation as the ultimate authority.⁸⁶ In the latter context he once referred to himself as Dolpopa, the embodiment of the buddhas of the past, present, and future, once again returned to sit upon his teaching throne and preserve his tradition:

As the physical embodiment of the three regal masters, and the single protector of maternal living beings in the three worlds,

Wasn't Sherab Gyaltzen the name of the splendid Dolpopa, the Buddha of the Three Times?

Sitting upon that lord's Dharma throne, and maintaining that lord's tradition, am I not the yogin Rangdrol, the Lord Buddha from Dolpo returned once again?⁸⁷

Also, when teaching instructions in a lineage that came from Dolpopa, Kunga Drolchok did not hesitate to use the terminology characteristic of his great predecessor.⁸⁸

During this period Jonang itself was flourishing. Tsarchen Losel Gyantso, considered the greatest Sakya master of tantra in the sixteenth century, received the Jonang instructions of the Six-branch Yoga from Gorumpa, as well as many teachings of the Sakya Path and Result. In 1539 Tsarchen visited Jonang, and in what is remi-

niscient of Dolpopa's initial experience there, looked up at the stone meditation huts on the mountainside and was filled with awe at the tradition of continuous meditation retreat that had been maintained there. Two years later he revisited Jonang and was warmly greeted by his elder friend and teacher, Kunga Drolchok.⁸⁹ Generally speaking, there were clearly very cordial relations between the Sakya and Jonang sects at this time.

Jamyang Khyentse Wangchuk, whose instruction manuals for major tantric practices in the Sakya tradition are authoritative to the present day, studied with Gorumpa as a youth, and then later with Tsarchen and Kunga Drolchok. In particular, from Gorumpa he received the full transmission of the Jonang teachings of Dolpopa, as well as the Sakya teachings of the Path and Result, and other esoteric instructions. Then he became the principal Dharma heir of Tsarchen, and was later the abbot of Zhalu monastery. It is very clear from his autobiography that he was deeply committed to meditation practice, of both the Jonang and Sakya variety, in contrast to scholastic studies. On one occasion he expressed his deep wish to go into isolated retreat far from everyone, and practice the (Sakya) Naro Khachöma for the creation stage meditation (*bskyed rim*) and the (Jonang) Six-branch Yoga for the perfection stage (*rdzogs rim*).⁹⁰ This is indeed remarkable for a master who would later ascend Budön's teaching throne at Zhalu.

One revealing episode occurred when Khyentse Wangchuk visited the Kagyü monastery of Ralung in 1550. He listened quietly one day as a group of scholars were discussing points of doctrine and practice, and heard one of them declare that Dolpopa had maintained that a permanent entity existed (*rtag pa'i dngos po yod*), and that it was the Buddha-nature. No one disputed this. Khyentse Wangchuk thought to himself that while Dolpopa certainly did accept that the Buddha-nature was permanent, he did not accept that it was an entity (*dngos po*).⁹¹ In all his writings Dolpopa had said that the ground of emptiness was naturally noncomposite radiant light (*stong gzhi rang bzhiin 'od gsal 'dus ma byas*), and while one could object to this, it was not something which could be proven or refuted through vain argumentation. In any case, Khyentse Wangchuk commented, Budön had said the same thing!⁹² Once again the impression is that there was really no serious disagreement between the ultimate intention of the greatest masters; only between later interpreters who did not fully comprehend their doctrines.

Unlike the works of Kunga Drolchok, in which evidence of Dolpopa's theories is very scarce, the writings of Kunga Drolchok's reincarnation, Jonang Tāranātha, are replete with the teachings of the Zhentong and related themes. In the history of the Jonang tradition Tāranātha is second in importance only to Dolpopa himself. He was responsible for the short-lived renaissance of the school as a whole in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and the widespread revitalization of the Zhentong theory in particular. Like Kunga Drolchok, Tāranātha also practiced and taught a wide variety of tantric teachings from different lineages, and was nonsectarian (*ris med*) in his approach to realization. He was also one of the last great Tibetan translators of Sanskrit tantric texts.⁸³ Tāranātha was respectful of all forms of authentic Buddhism, including the tradition of Budön, and that of the Geluk, which were antagonistic toward the Jonang school.⁸⁴ He also emphasized the practice of the Sakya teachings of the Path and Result and the esoteric instructions of the Shangpa Kagyü, as had Kunga Drolchok, but he focused on the explication of the Kālacakra and the practice of the Six-branch Yoga as the most profound of all the teachings given by the Buddha. It is especially clear throughout his writings that he considered Dolpopa to be the ultimate authority in matters of doctrine and practice.

Tāranātha's autobiography provides unique access to the actual condition of the Jonang tradition from the point of view of its leader. He took upon himself the responsibility of causing Dolpopa's insights to once again reach a wide audience, and was determined to revive what he saw as a priceless transmission lineage in danger of being lost. For example, in the early 1590s Tāranātha stated that it had been many years since the complete instructions of the Six-branch Yoga had been given at Jonang. In addition, although the instruction manual of Dolpopa's Dharma heir Choley Namgyal was still being used at Jonang to teach the Six-branch Yoga as it had been transmitted from Dolpopa, there were very few who understood the philosophical system of Dolpopa and his spiritual sons. Of even more concern was the fact that some of the previous leaders of Jonang, such as Lord Orgyan Dzongpa, had given initiations and instructions according to the Jonang tradition, but then criticized and refuted Dolpopa's adamant proclamations of the ultimate view of Zhentong, which was the secret teaching of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. As a result, many unfortunate things

had occurred. Even though Tāranātha personally disavowed any ability to refute another system, on this occasion he felt the necessity to defend the original views of Dolpopa through refutation of erroneous opinions, and to establish the correct interpretations according to his lineage.⁸⁵

In the year 1604, after a decade of great effort to revive the original teachings of the Jonang sect, all of Tāranātha's work was threatened by serious political conflict between the regions of Chang and Tsang. The monastery of Jonang itself was in immediate danger of being attacked by hostile armies. While meditating at Dolpopa's great stūpa Tāranātha became very despondent, and seeing all of his efforts about to be wiped out and the tradition itself perhaps destroyed, he felt only like going into retreat to practice far away from all the troubles created by deluded and impassioned individuals. At this point Dolpopa himself appeared to Tāranātha in a vision, encouraged him to continue as before, and assured him that his efforts would not be fruitless. The next night Tāranātha prayed to Dolpopa, and experienced another vision, of a bodhisattva who spoke a quatrain of verse to him. As a result of these events Tāranātha himself stated that he gained realization of the true intentions of Dolpopa as expressed in his Zhentong doctrine, and all his uncertainties and doubts were completely removed. He felt that a great key had been placed in his hands with which to open the doors of all the Buddha's teachings.⁸⁶ As an expression of his realization he then composed the versified text entitled *An Ornament of the Zhentong Middle Way (Gzhan stong dbu ma'i rgyan)*, one of his most important works devoted solely to the explication of the Zhentong view, and a companion text of quotations from scripture in support of the ideas therein.⁸⁷ Describing the same vision of Dolpopa in another of his autobiographical writings, Tāranātha mentions that he received several prophecies from him, and from that time on met him many times, both actually and in dreams. And he comments, "This is the reason I am now an expert in the great Omniscient Dolpopa's view, and preserve his true intentions."⁸⁸

Throughout Tāranātha's life he often encountered resistance and opposition to the Jonang doctrine of the Zhentong. For example, he once spent considerable energy trying to explain the Zhentong view to the ruler of Chang, the abbot of Ngaming monastery, and a group of scholars who had gathered at Trompa Lhatse.

There was some interest, but absolutely no comprehension of the actual nature and significance of the teachings he gave. The main cause for the scholars' inability to understand was that they identified the Zhentong doctrine with the tradition of the Cittamātra which did not accept the validity of a cognitive image (*sems tsam rnam rdzun pa*). They were completely unable to comprehend the great differences between the Zhentong and the Cittamātra.⁹⁹ Even great masters such as the Zhamar hierarch of the Kagyü school, with whom Tāranātha communicated in about 1620, had mistaken assumptions about the Jonang views.¹⁰⁰

Following the death of Tāranātha in 1635, his successor Kunga Rinchen Gyantso led the Jonang tradition for the next fifteen years.¹⁰¹ Then a series of events occurred which were crucial for the future of the Jonang tradition, but which have not yet been clearly explained. It has generally been stated in Western works on Tibetan history that the suppression of the Jonang sect and the conversion of their monasteries to the Geluk school came about in 1658.¹⁰² This is only partially correct. The political situation of the seventeenth century was extremely complex, and to the future misfortune of the Jonang school Tāranātha was one of the main spiritual advisors to the rulers of Tsang province during their struggle against the Geluk powers of Central Tibet for political supremacy. Some modern authors have blamed Tāranātha's role for the downfall of the Jonang tradition.¹⁰³ In light of the following information, this also seems unlikely. Although the details are still quite sketchy, a somewhat more complete picture of the situation may now be drawn.

In 1642, seven years after the death of Tāranātha, an alliance of Mongol armies led by Gushri Khan finally defeated the Tsang rulers and enthroned the fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lozang Gyantso (1617–1682), as the supreme political ruler of all Tibet. In his autobiography, the Great Fifth himself briefly touches upon the fate of the Jonang sect. At the instigation of a certain Jamyang Trulku, a Geluk teaching institute (*bshad grwa*) was established at Dakden Tamchö Ling, the monastery built by Tāranātha near the original site of Jonang.¹⁰⁴ The philosophical system (*grub mtha'*) of the monastery was thus converted from Jonang to Geluk in the Iron-Tiger (*lcags stag*) year (1650).¹⁰⁵ This may then be understood as the point at which the Zhentong doctrine was banned at Jonang by order of the victorious Geluk authorities. The year 1650 also

matches the end of the tenure of Tāranātha's successor Kunga Rinchen Gyantso, who then went to live for the latter part of his life at the monastery of Sangak Riwo Dechen.¹⁰⁶

It was originally the prompting of the Jamyang Trulku that provided the pretext for the Fifth Dalai Lama to intervene at the Jonang establishment of Dakden Tamchö Ling. Who was this figure? Fortunately, much earlier in his autobiography the Dalai Lama provides the necessary information to identify him. Jamyang Trulku was the son of the Khalha Tushetyu king.¹⁰⁷ Now the situation becomes much more interesting. Jamyang Trulku was the son of the Mongol Khalha Tushiyetu Khan, Gönpö Dorje, and the grandson of Erke Mergen Khan. Better known by the names Yeshe Dorje and Lozang Denpey Gyaltzen (1635–1723), Jamyang Trulku had actually been recognized by the Fifth Dalai Lama, the first Panchen Lama Lozang Chögyi Gyaltzen (1567–1662), and the Tibetan State Oracle (*la mo chos skyong*) as the rebirth of Tāranātha himself, and the first of the series of Mongol incarnations known as the Khalka Jetsun Tamba.¹⁰⁸ It is of further interest that he was generally referred to as Jamyang Trulku, "the emanation of Jamyang," because he was also believed to be the rebirth (*sku skye*) of Jamyang Chöje (1357–1419), the founder of the great Geluk monastery of Drepung. After that he was said to have appeared as Tāranātha's reincarnation (*yang srid*).¹⁰⁹ Of course, the earlier life as Jamyang Chöje was understandably emphasized by the Geluk authorities in order to establish a profound prior connection with the Geluk tradition, and indeed with Lord Tsongkapa himself. However, the 156-year gap between the death of Jamyang Chöje and the birth of Tāranātha was not explained, and there is no mention of Jonang Kunga Drolchok, Tāranātha's predecessor, in the incarnation line of Jamyang Trulku, the Khalka Jetsun Tamba. Clearly, the reasons for his recognition as the reincarnation of Tāranātha were political, enabling the Geluk establishment to eliminate the possibility of a Tāranātha rebirth as the new leader of the Jonang tradition. Although the Jonang school itself certainly did not accept this enforced recognition of its great master as a new Geluk teacher who demanded the conversion of Jonang monastery into a Geluk establishment, they had no choice in a country now ruled by Geluk political administration and Mongolian military might.

In the biography of the Khalka Jetsun Tamba there is some interesting material presented to rationalize his recognition as

Tāranātha's reincarnation. According to one source, just before Tāranātha passed away his Jonang disciples and patrons prayed for him to reincarnate for the purpose of spreading his Jonang doctrine. In this source he is quoted as having given the following reply:

Be satisfied with just this much expansion of our Jonang doctrine. Through the force of supplications by the Genden [i.e., Geluk] protectors, and the force of previous prayers, I will now spread the doctrine of Lord Tsongkapa in a barbarian borderland.¹¹⁰

Tāranātha's own extensive autobiographical writings, as well as his voluminous religious works, are filled with evidence of his devotion to Dolpopa and the special teachings of definitive meaning which characterized the Jonang tradition. It seems highly unlikely that he would have made such a statement, or chosen to be reborn in the very tradition which became the instrument for the destruction of Dolpopa's Jonang school as a viable independent tradition. Not surprisingly, this statement is not recorded in the Jonang accounts of Tāranātha's last days.¹¹¹

In addition to the alleged final statement by Tāranātha, a passage from one of his own secret autobiographies was also cited by Geluk authors as proof that he had intended to take birth in the Geluk tradition. Tāranātha himself describes a vision he had as a young man:

At Yamdrog a man who had an aura of blessing, and who was said to be Budön, put a yellow scholar's hat [on my head], and said, "Now you should wear only this."

This was also the placing of the true crown. And that is the reason I now wear a yellow hat with long ear-flaps.¹¹²

Budön Rinchen Drup was one of the most important spiritual ancestors for the Geluk transmission lineages, especially that of the Kālacakra. Tāranātha's vision does not necessarily lend itself to the Geluk interpretation. Tāranātha had great respect for Budön, and had received the transmission of his Kālacakra teachings. His autobiographies also record visions of a number of other great teachers, both Indian and Tibetan. A yellow scholar's hat (*paṇ zhuwa ser*

po) was earlier worn by Budön, and later became a trademark of the Geluk tradition. But Budön and the Geluk teachers after him were by no means the only ones to wear yellow ceremonial teaching hats in Tibet. Dolpopa himself had worn a yellow hat, and it is clear in the account of the vision that Tāranātha wore a yellow hat while he was still obviously a Jonang teacher.¹¹³ As mentioned above, the Sakya master Jamgön Amey Zhap claimed that Dolpopa himself repented of the Zhentong view toward the end of his life, and the Geluk teacher Thukan Lozang Chögyi Nyima would make the same spurious claim in regard to Shakya Chokden.¹¹⁴ A final and more effective ploy by the enemies of Jonang was to simply accomplish through political power the actual recognition of the rebirth of Tāranātha as a Geluk teacher.

It now seems clear that arrangements were made for the fifteen-year-old incarnation, who had received a strict Geluk education in Mongolia from disciples of the Fifth Dalai Lama, to request the Great Fifth to establish the institute at Dakden, providing the opportunity for the conversion of Tāranātha's monastery into a Geluk center. Later in 1650 the young Khalka Jetsun traveled to Tashi Lhunpo monastery, and received novice vows and a number of teachings from the first Panchen Lama.¹¹⁵ At this point the Panchen Lama was urgently asked to go to Dakden, undoubtedly for the purpose of accomplishing the conversion into a Geluk monastery. There the Panchen Lama gave a number of initiations for the major tantric lineages followed by the Geluk tradition, and the textual transmissions for many of the ritual texts required for the liturgical practices of that school. He also gave teachings to the nuns at nearby Jonang during the same visit.¹¹⁶ It is significant that the Khalkha Jetsun himself did not visit Jonang or Dakden at the same time, as would certainly have been expected if he were accepted there as Tāranātha's rebirth.

According to the Fifth Dalai Lama's own account, Tāranātha's monastery of Dakden Phuntsok Ling was taken over by the Geluk tradition in 1650, but the monks who had been there from before did not actually change their views and practices, and even the newly arrived ones were predisposed toward the original teachings of the Jonang sect. The Dalai Lama used the example of brass coated with gold to refer to them as Jonang with only a Geluk veneer. As a result, the Geluk authorities expelled them to other monasteries, made harsher regulations concerning the Geluk conversion, and gave

the monastery the new name of Genden Phuntsok Ling. This was all done in 1658.¹¹⁷

From this time the Jonang tradition was suppressed as an independent school in Central and Western Tibet. Nevertheless, the teachings of the Zhentong and the Kālacakra according to the Jonang lineage was continued even in those areas, although the far eastern Amdo monastery of Dzamtang and its affiliates now became the sole remaining centers which were openly Jonang.¹¹⁸

The Jonang teachings of the Zhentong view and the Kālacakra instructions have continued to be transmitted and practiced up to the present day. However, their survival in mainstream Tibetan religion has not been due to the presence of the Dzamtang enclave of Jonang followers in the relative isolation of Amdo, but to the influence of several great Nyingma and Kagyü masters from the Kham region of eastern Tibet who came to accept and actively teach Dolpopa's controversial views.

The Nyingma master Katok Rikzin Tsewang Norbu (1698–1755) was responsible for bringing about a sort of renaissance of the Jonang teachings of the Zhentong and the Kālacakra by introducing them to some of the leading Kagyü teachers of his time. In one of his versified autobiographical accounts, Tsewang Norbu notes that even as a child he felt great faith whenever he heard the names of Dolpopa and his immediate disciples.¹¹⁹ His natural affinity for the Zhentong view and the Kālacakra teachings became understandable later when the master from whom he received the transmission of the Jonang teachings recognized him as the rebirth of Dolpopa's disciple Mati Panchen Lodrö Gyaltsen, one of the pair of translators responsible for the Jonang translation of the *Kālacakra tantra* and the *Vimalaprabhā*.¹²⁰

In 1726, as he was passing through Tsang province in route to the Kathmandu valley in Nepal, Tsewang Norbu first made an effort to obtain the Jonang teachings from the great yogin Kunzang Wangpo, one of whose teachers had been a direct disciple of Tāranātha. Kunzang Wangpo was in strict retreat at the hermitage of Rulag Drepung, now renamed Genden Khachō due to its enforced change into a Geluk establishment, and Tsewang Norbu was not even able to see him, although he spent three days trying. He was very impressed with this master's serious meditation practice, and became even more determined to receive the Jonang transmissions from him.¹²¹

On his return to Tibet toward the end of 1728, Tsewang Norbu again approached Kunzang Wangpo, and this time succeeded in receiving the entire transmission of the Jonang teachings. Kunzang Wangpo bestowed upon him the instructions of the view of the Zhentong approach to the realization of the Great Madhyamaka (*gzhan stong dbu ma chen poi lta khrid*), the full Kālacakra initiations, as well as the complete teachings of the Six-branch Yoga, and many nonsectarian (*ris med*) teachings. He also received *The One Hundred Instructions of Jonang* (*jo nang khrid brya*) compiled by Kunga Drolchok, and the textual transmissions for the collected works (*gsung 'bum*) of both Dolpopa and Tāranātha. From this information it can be seen that although the Jonang institutions had been converted to the Geluk tradition, the original teachings from Dolpopa were still taught and practiced in those same monasteries even in the middle of the eighteenth century. The fifth Dalai Lama's earlier attempts to stamp out the Jonang teachings had been successful only on the surface, as had indeed been the case in the initial phases of the conversion operation discussed above. Contrary to the general impression, the teaching transmissions had survived not only in the far eastern region of Amdo but in the original Tsang areas near Jonang. In fact, this picture becomes even clearer when it is taken into account that Tsewang Norbu himself went to Jonang in 1734, ascended the teaching throne previously occupied by Dolpopa and Tāranātha, and gave many initiations, textual transmissions, and esoteric instructions of the original Jonang teachings to a large gathering.¹²² At least during this period the Geluk authorities were obviously not exerting great efforts to prevent the teachings of the Jonang tradition from being spread or revived even in Tsang.

Tsewang Norbu later spread these teachings in Central Tibet, where he gave a number of Jonang transmissions to the thirteenth Karmapa, Dūdül Dorje (1733–1797), and the tenth Zhamar, Chödru Gyantso (1742–1792).¹²³ But Tsewang Norbu's most significant role in terms of the continuation of the Jonang lineages was as a teacher of the great Situ Panchen Chögyi Jungney (1770–1774). Situ Panchen had already been to Dakden and Jonang in 1723, several years before Tsewang Norbu's first visit. From the description in Situ's autobiography, it was an important event. From his account it is known that Tāranātha's silver stūpa reliquary at Dakden had already been destroyed long before. According to Situ this had been

done when the Geluk conversion had been ordered by the Fifth Dalai Lama at the instigation of his teacher Mönropa. Situ noted that although Dakden was now a Geluk institute, there were some old monks who had not given up the original Jonang tradition.¹²⁴ He made attempts to obtain copies of Jonang works, but they had been placed under seal by the order of the central government.¹²⁵ Situ felt great sadness at what had so quickly befallen Tāranātha's center, and lamented the degenerate times. But when he went to Jonang itself the next day he found about seven hundred Jonang nuns there who had not changed their tradition to that of the Geluk.¹²⁶

Twenty-five years later, in 1748, Tsewang Norbu and Situ spent time together in the Kathmandu valley of Nepal. Although Situ had clearly been very interested in the Jonang tradition for many years, it was his teacher Tsewang Norbu who now insisted that he accept the Zhentong view, which he taught him in great detail, apparently at the great stūpa of Bodhnāth.¹²⁷ Situ relates that Tsewang Norbu ordered him to uphold the profound view of the Zhentong, and that the acceptance of this view would create an auspicious pattern of events (*rten 'brel*) which would lead to Situ's longevity, and the vast spread of his activities.¹²⁸ Situ further mentions that there were several different brands of Zhentong, among which he adhered most closely to that of the Seventh Lord and Zilungpa, which was somewhat different than that of Dolpopa.¹²⁹ In the end it would be Situ, more than anyone, who would create the environment for the widespread acceptance of the Zhentong theories in the next century. As Smith already mentioned in 1970, "It was Si-tu who had blended the seemingly irreconcilable *gzhan stong* and Mahāmudrā positions and spread them throughout the Dkar-brgyud-pa traditions of Khams."¹³⁰

The eventual result of this revival initiated by Tsewang Norbu and Situ Panchen was the crucial role of the Zhentong and other Jonang teachings in the phenomenal nonsectarian (*ris med*) movement of the nineteenth century in Kham.¹³¹ This movement included such great masters as Dza Baltrul (1808–1887), Jamgön Kongdrul (1813–1899), Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (1820–1892),¹³² and later Mipham Gyantso (1846–1912).¹³³ From among them, Jamgön Kongdrul was the most assertive in his advocacy of the Zhentong viewpoint, which he fully incorporated into his own immensely influential works.¹³⁴ Kongdrul was also extremely devoted

to the Six-branch Yoga of the Kālacakra, in which he carefully followed the tradition of Dolpopa and Tāranātha.¹³⁵

The Zhentong teachings and the Jonang practice of the Six-branch Yoga have thus come down to the present day in large part through the transmission lineages of Kongdrul, Khyentse, and Mipham. It is this tradition which has reached a widespread audience, whereas the Jonang tradition proper, which has been preserved in the Amdo monastery of Dzamtang and its affiliated establishments, has remained quite isolated.

From the turn of the twentieth century until the present day the Zhentong tradition has been maintained by several of Tibet's greatest teachers, all from eastern Tibet, and all followers of the lineages taught by Kongdrul, Khyentse, and Mipham. Jamyang Chögyi Lodrö (1896–1959), the great heir to the nonsectarian movement, was sympathetic to the Zhentong view, and wrote a guryuyoga text focused upon Dolpopa.¹³⁶ The Nyingma master Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Rabsel Dawa (1910–1991), the most important disciple of Jamyang Chögyi Lodrö, was very partial to the Zhentong, as were the Kagyü master Kalu Rinpoche, Rangjung Kunkyab (1905–1989), and the Nyingma master Dudjom Rinpoche, Jikdral Yeshe Dorje (1904–1987).¹³⁷ Nowadays most Kagyü and Nyingma teachers follow the lines of explication and practice passed down by these three masters. As a result, among those Kagyü and Nyingma teachers who accept the Zhentong view, the Zhentong interpretations of Kongdrul and Mipham in particular are now the most widespread.¹³⁸ Outside of the Jonang tradition now centered in Dzamtang, none of Dolpopa's own treatises are still being transmitted. Not even the minimal reading transmission (*lung*) of the writings of Dolpopa himself seems to be current among present-day leading representatives of the Kagyü and Nyingma brands of the Zhentong.¹³⁹ When the Zhentong is taught by these teachers, the different works of Kongdrul and Mipham, which vary a great deal from the original teachings of Dolpopa, are the treatises of choice.¹⁴⁰ What is now taught as the Zhentong view in the Kagyü and Nyingma traditions represents a synthesis that has developed over the centuries, primarily in order to enable Dolpopa's most vital insights to be incorporated into the already established doctrines of the Great Seal and the Great Perfection. In the following chapter some of the most essential aspects of Dolpopa's own doctrine will be presented as a preface to the translations of his works that appear in part 2.

LUMINOUS HEART

The Third Karmapa on Consciousness, Wisdom, and Buddha Nature

Translated and introduced by Karl Brunnhöfzl



Appendix II: The Treatise on Pointing Out the Tathāgata Heart

I pay homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas.

It is said: “Though beginningless, it entails an end—
What is naturally pure and consists of permanent dharmas
Is not seen, since it is obscured by a beginningless cocoon,
Just as in the example of a golden statue being obscured.

The dhātu of time without beginning
Is the matrix of all phenomena.
Because it exists, all beings
And also nirvāṇa are obtained.”

A passage in the tantras says:
“Sentient beings are buddhas indeed.
However, they are obscured by adventitious stains.
If these are removed, they are buddhas.”

Here, “beginningless” [means that]
There is absolutely nothing before that.
The time is this very moment,
How could it come via somewhere else?
The basic element is without creator,
But since it bears its own characteristic, it is called that way.

The dharmas are explained as appearing
As both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa,
Which is called “the ground of the latent tendencies of
ignorance.”

The movement of the formations of correct and false imagination

SNOW LION PUBLICATIONS
ITHACA, NEW YORK

Is the producing cause.
This causal condition is explained as the ālaya.

The matrix is the Heart of the victors.
False imagination
Rests on the purity of mind.
This purity exists in that way.
Though it exists, through ignorant imagination,
It is not seen, and therefore is saṃsāra.
When that is eliminated, it is nirvāṇa,
Which is conventionally called “end.”

Beginning and end depend on nothing but imagination.
Through windlike formation,
Karma and afflictions are created.
Through these, skandhas, dhātus, and āyatana—
All dualistically appearing phenomena—are displayed.

The one who adopts and rejects these is mistakenness.
Through rejecting [mind’s] own appearances, where should they
cease?
Through adopting [mind’s] own appearances, what should come
about?
Is clinging to duality not delusive?

Understanding this is indeed said to be the remedy,
But the thought of nonduality is not real [either],
For the lack of thought [just] turns into a thought.
You thought about emptiness, dissecting form and so on into
parts,
Are you not mistaken yourself?
Nevertheless, this was taught in order to stop the clinging to
reality.

All is neither real nor delusive—
Held to be like [a reflection of] the moon in water by the learned.
Just this ordinary mind
Is called “dharmadhātu” and “Heart of the victors.”
It is neither to be improved by the noble ones
Nor made worse by sentient beings.

It may no doubt be expressed through many conventional terms,
But its actual reality is not understood through expressions.

As for the unimpeded play of this,
The sixty-four qualities
Are a coarse [classification]—each one
Is said to [consist of] tens of millions.

Knowing what is the case and what is not the case, karma
And maturation, knowing constitutions, faculties,
And inclinations, the paths that lead everywhere,
The dhyānas, the divine eye,
Recollecting places [of rebirth], and peace—these are the ten
powers.

The four fearlessnesses based on these
Are enlightened realization of all phenomena, teaching the
obstacles,

Teaching the path and cessation, [all] being indisputable.

Due to that cause, the eighteen [unique qualities] are
unmistakenness, lack of chatter,
Undeclining awareness, constant meditative equipoise,
Lacking the plethora of discriminating notions,
Lacking unexamining indifference;
No decline in striving, vigor, recollection,
Samādhi, prajñā,
And the vision of the wisdom of liberation;
Activities being preceded by wisdom,
And being unobscured with regard to time.
Being endowed with these thirty-two is the dharmakāya.

At present, we oppose them.
Since we lack certainty about what is, just as it is,
We produce the imaginary, construing what is nonexistent as
existent.

The conceptuality produced by this is the other-dependent.
Through not knowing the perfect,
We are agitated by our own doing.
Alas, in those who realize these qualities of the dharmakāya

To be what is real, this is the knowledge of reality.
 [Even] their present little power is reality—
 Casting away this knowledge, we fabricate what is unreal
 And are carried away by the agitation of pursuing it.

Understand now what is, just as it is,
 And you attain power in it.
 In this, there is nothing to be removed
 And not the slightest to be added.
 Actual reality is to be seen as it really is—
 Whoever sees actual reality is released.
 The basic element is empty of what is adventitious,
 Which has the characteristic of being separable.
 But it is not empty of the unsurpassable dharma,
 Which have the characteristic of being inseparable.

In this, the nature of the two rūpakāyas
 Is the thirty-two major and the minor marks.
 The attained qualities are your own body.
 This body is not created by a self, Cha, Īśvara,
 Brahmā, real external particles,
 Or hidden [objects].
 Through the refinement of the impure transmutations
 Of apprehender and apprehended of the five gates,
 At that point, the conventional term “attainment” is applied.

Therefore, nāḍis, vāyus, and tilakas,
 When pure, are the pure rūpakāyas.
 Unpurified, they are the impure rūpakāyas.

For example, in an encrusted blue beryl,
 Its qualities do not shine forth.
 Through cleansing it with a woven cloth and an alkaline solution,
 Cleansing it with acid and a towel,
 And cleansing it with pure water and [cotton] from Kāśī,
 It becomes pure—the gem that is the source [fulfilling all] needs
 and desires.

Likewise, in order to cleanse the blue beryl of mind
 From the three encrustations—

Afflictive and cognitive [obscurations], and those of meditative
 absorption—

It is purified on [the paths of] accumulation and preparation,
 The seven impure bhūmis, and the three pure bhūmis.

Through false imagination
 Meeting pure imagination,
 There is freedom from imagination, just like two wooden sticks
 are burned.

This is the freedom from the fourfold clinging to characteristics—
 The conceptions about what is to be relinquished, remedies,
 suchness, and fruition.

At that point, in those who have the kāya of space,
 The flowers of the major marks will blossom.
 Impure, impure and pure,
 And utterly pure, in due order,
 Are expressed as the three phases
 Of sentient beings, bodhisattvas, and Tathāgatas.
 But buddhahood is nothing newly arisen—
 Being the same before as after,
 It is the changeless buddha heart.
 It is the freedom from stains that is expressed as change.

Those who engage in poor views
 Think that the buddha qualities are without cause
 Or not [in] ourselves, but produced
 Through external causes and conditions.
 How are these different from non-Buddhist [views on]
 permanence and extinction?

The appearing of momentarily arising and ceasing formations
 Is comparable to impure formations.
 If it were not like this,
 The continuum of the enlightened activity of the rūpakāyas
 would be interrupted.
 However, this is not expressed by the name “formations,”
 [But] by “discriminating wisdom.”

What has the nature of the great elements and so on,
 And is associated with apprehension, displays its powerful
 essence.
 As for both mistakeness and unmistakeness,
 There is no difference as far as appearance goes.
 The difference is whether there is clinging to duality or not.
 If it were not like this,
 How could the enlightened activity of the victors engage
 [anything]?

Giving the examples of a wish-fulfilling jewel and such
 Explains the display of thoughtfree power,
 But not that this is solely [an appearance in] the mind streams of
 others.

If it were, wisdom would become the mind streams of others,
 [But] if that is accepted, wisdom would be mistakeness.

If it is asserted that [wisdom] grasps at its own appearances,
 Then also a mirror would possess conceptions
 Of grasping at what appears [in it].

The variety of the mistakeness of sentient beings
 Appears as the object of wisdom,
 But wisdom is not tainted by mistakeness.
 For example, in space, the arising and ceasing
 Of the great elements appears, but space
 Is not tainted and is without arising and ceasing.

Likewise, the wisdom of the victors
 Engages sentient beings, but is untainted.
 This is not expressed by the name “mistakeness” –
 It is called “all-accomplishing [wisdom].”

Mentation resting pure of the three obscurations
 Is equality, which is peace.
 Because it is endowed with great love and compassion,
 The sambhoga[kāya] and so forth appear for those [to be guided].
 This is stated in order to refute some [people’s claim]
 Of becoming like [arhats of] the hinayāna, once buddhahood is
 attained.

Wisdom is permanent in three ways –
 Being permanent by nature is the dharmakāya,
 Being permanent in terms of continuity is the sambhogakāya,
 And being so in terms of an uninterrupted series is the
 nirmāṇakāya.

Related to these, there are three impermanent phenomena –
 Mentally fabricated emptiness is not permanent,
 The moving conceptual mind is not permanent,
 And the conditioned six collections are not permanent.
 However, in these, there is threefold permanence.
 The three impermanent phenomena are the stains,
 While threefold permanence is wisdom as such.

It is not comparable to the self of the tīrthikas,
 Since that is imputed by mind, while [the buddha heart] is not.
 It is not comparable to the peace of śrāvakas and
 pratyekabuddhas,
 For it displays all the qualities of the rūpakāyas.
 These are not comparable to the bodies of sentient beings,
 Since they are not produced by contaminated conditions.

[Buddhas] will not regress,
 Since what is has become manifest, just as it is.
 The stains never rise [again],
 Since there is freedom from any imagination of difference.
 Therefore, this mind as such – buddhahood –
 Exists right now, but we don’t know it.
 At the time of realization,
 Just as with the subsiding of heat in iron
 And blurred vision in the eyes,
 The mind and wisdom of a buddha
 Are not said to be existent or nonexistent.

Since there is no arising ultimately,
 In terms of true reality, there is no liberation either.
 Buddhas are just as space,
 And sentient beings have the same characteristic.
 Since the here and the hereafter are unarisen,
 There is no natural nirvāṇa either.

Therefore, conditioned formations are empty,
The sphere of omniscient wisdom.

Since it is subtle, it is not an object of study.
Since it is the ultimate, it is not one of reflection.
Since it is the profound nature of phenomena,
It is not one of mundane meditations and so forth.

It is the sphere of personally experienced wisdom.
Confidence in the self-arisen gives rise to the ultimate.
Alas, since they do not realize this way of being,
Childish beings roam the ocean of saṃsāra.

Through the power of the great sage,
Mañjuśrīghoṣa, Maitreya, and Avalokiteśvara,
This was written by Rangjung Dorje.

May all beings know this buddha heart
Perfectly and without error!

This completes the determination of the buddha heart,
The essence of the vajrayāna.

Śubham (auspiciousness).



*Karma Trinlépa's Explanation of the Sugata Heart*⁷⁹⁰

THE GLORIOUS GURU RANGJUNG DORJE holds that the Sugata heart is the nature of dhātu and wisdom being inseparable, just ordinary mind, which is free from being real or delusive, like [a reflection of] the moon in water, and beyond identification and characteristics. For, *The Treatise Called Pointing Out the Tathāgata Heart*, composed by this lord, says:

All is neither real nor delusive—
Held to be like [a reflection of] the moon in water by the learned.
Just this ordinary mind
Is called “dharmadhātu” and “Heart of the victors.”⁷⁹¹

Here, “dhātu” refers to the naturally luminous dharmadhātu. Therefore, the meaning of “dharmadhātu” is understood as follows. Since both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are not really established as something different from their own side, the entirety of what appears as dualistic phenomena, such as saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, factors to be relinquished and remedies, apprehender and apprehended, or objects of expression and means of expression, is of equal taste with the essence of nonduality, the great primordial indestructible sphere.⁷⁹² This is called “dharmadhātu,” which is stated in the commentary on the *Dharmadhātustava* composed by this lord [Rangjung Dorje]:

As for dharmas, there are the two modes of being of factors to be relinquished and remedies. As for the dhātu of these, it is the suchness that cannot be analyzed as something different and in which there is no distinction between apprehender and apprehended, or objects of expression and means of expression. What is this nature is the essence of buddhahood.⁷⁹³

This passage appears based on its scriptural source, which is the following statement in the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*:

The defining characteristic of the nature of phenomena is suchness, which is without a difference between apprehender and apprehended, or objects of designation and what designates them.⁷⁹⁴

As for the meaning of “natural luminosity,” I have already explained elsewhere that nature, essence, actual mode of being, and so on are synonyms. “Luminosity” is [the dharmadhātu’s] own light, which is beyond identification and characteristics. Therefore, the gist of this is that, within this actual mode of being [of mind’s nature], various creative displays of its own unimpeded radiance appear, but that this is free from [all] reference points of being “this” and not “that.” The [term] “dhātu” in “the nature of dhātu and wisdom being inseparable” has already been explained [above]. As for “wisdom,” since [the Sanskrit word] *jñāna* refers to wisdom, consciousness, and realization, in this context, the meaning of wisdom is understood as personally experienced awareness. Therefore, it is expressed as wisdom in terms of lucidity, illumination, and awareness. Thus, the meaning of “the nature of dhātu and wisdom being inseparable” is understood as the personally experienced awareness of [mind] being profound and lucid in a nondual way. As the *Commentary on the Two-Part [Hevajratra]* composed by this lord [Rangjung Dorje] says:

As for wisdom, all phenomena are mind, mind is self-awareness, self-awareness is bliss, and bliss is freedom from reference points. If sealed in this way, there are the threefold sealing, the threefold consolation, and the four kāyas. This is the wisdom that realizes the true reality of entities.

and

When all phenomena are realized to be the mind’s manifestations,⁷⁹⁵ thoughts about outer referents are relinquished. When the mind is realized to be self-awareness, thoughts about red and white are relinquished. When self-awareness is realized to be bliss, thoughts of suffering and indifference are relinquished. When bliss is realized as freedom from reference points, thoughts of clinging to entities are relinquished.

The meaning of “free from being real or delusive, like [a reflection of] the moon in water, and beyond identification and characteristics” is easy to understand.

“Ordinary mind” is natural consciousness—this very present [moment of] mind unaltered by contrivance, scheming, and so on. . . . Though this [buddha] heart is neither confined nor biased, its remedial side may well be expressed through the term “virtue.” From [the state of] sentient beings up through buddhahood, it lacks any distinctions of good and bad, and is beyond conventional terms, speech, and expression, but it represents a continuous stream since [time] without beginning. Its essence is unchanging, and it bears the nature of being a cause, but [at the same time] it abounds with many qualities. Though ground and fruition are inseparable, it appears as being pure or impure, respectively.

Now, to explain the meaning of this a bit further, the essence of dhātu and wisdom being inseparable lacks any confinement (such as permanence or extinction) and bias (such as factors to be relinquished and remedies). Therefore, it is established as the all-pervading sovereign. For, [Rangjung Dorjé’s] text says:

The cause is beginningless mind as such.

Though it is neither confined nor biased, . . .

It is referred to as “virtue,” because it is beyond the characteristics of non-virtue. But since it is not of the nature of karma, it is not a [real] entity that is virtuous. It is said to be the remedy that purifies the ālaya-consciousness, because it is the seed of the dharmakāya of all buddhas. Though it pervades all mundane states, it is the outflow of the pure dharmadhātu. Therefore, it is asserted that it has the nature of being the cause for realizing the dharmas of the noble ones. The *Mahāyānasamgraha*, which is quoted in [Rangjung Dorjé’s] autocommentary, says:

The small, medium, and great latent tendencies for listening are to be regarded as the seeds of the dharmakāya. Since they are the remedy for the ālaya-consciousness, they are not of the nature of the ālaya-consciousness. [In the sense of being a remedy,] they are something mundane, but since they are the natural outflow of the supramundane—the utterly pure dharmadhātu—they are the seeds of supramundane mind.⁷⁹⁶

Though these [seeds] have not become manifest [in sentient beings], just as they are, through merely focusing on them, saṃsāra is relinquished and they are united with enlightenment. [The *Mahāvāyānasamgraha* continues:]

Although this supramundane mind has not originated yet, they are the remedy for being entangled [in saṃsāra] through the afflictions, the remedy for migrating in the lower realms, and the remedy that makes all wrongdoing vanish. They are what is in complete concordance with meeting buddhas and bodhisattvas.

The *Ratnāvalī* says:

In those of little merit, not even doubt
About this dharma arises.
Even the arising of doubt about this,
Will tear [saṃsāric] existence into shreds.⁷⁹⁷

Since the essence of naturally luminous mind as such—the dharmadhātu—is emptiness, it is unchanging throughout all states. Therefore, the ground (the suchness of sentient beings), the path (the suchness of bodhisattvas), and the fruition (the suchness of buddhas) cannot be divided as different things by virtue of being better or worse, higher or lower, and so on. As *Pointing Out the [Tathāgata] Heart* says:

It is neither to be improved by the noble ones
Nor made worse by sentient beings.⁷⁹⁸

As for realizing this, just as it is, it is solely an object of buddha wisdom—it is inconceivable even for bodhisattvas on the ten bhūmis. Therefore, it is beyond terms and thinking, and though it may be expressed through many words and conventional terms, it is inexpressible. The [same] text says:

It may no doubt be expressed through many conventional terms,
But its actual reality is not understood through expressions.⁷⁹⁹

Before this natural purity, there are absolutely no buddhas or sentient beings who did not arise from it. Since it is not established as any real substance and is of the nature of dependent origination, there is no beginning in terms of a first arising or in terms of any real substance. The [text] says:

Here, “beginningless” [means that]
There is absolutely nothing before that.⁸⁰⁰

In the basic element (the Sugata heart), there is no other creator of previously nonexistent new buddha qualities, but it primordially abides in a way of being inseparable from all these qualities, thus bearing the defining characteristic of its essence not changing into anything else. Therefore, it is presented in the sense of basic element or cause. The [text] says:

The basic element is without creator,
But since it bears its own characteristic, it is called that way.⁸⁰¹

Within the creative display of the unimpeded radiance of this [buddha] heart, being indivisible [from it], there dwell the tens of millions times sixty-four inseparable qualities (summarized as [the qualities of] freedom and maturation). The [text] says:

As for the unimpeded play of this,
The sixty-four qualities
Are a coarse [classification]—each one
Is said to [consist of] tens of millions.⁸⁰²

The dharmas that are these qualities are called “stainless qualities” at the time of buddhahood, and “stained qualities” during the phase of sentient beings. The [text] says:

Therefore, nāḍis, vāyus, and tilakas,
When pure, are the pure rūpakāyas.
Unpurified, they are the impure rūpakāyas.⁸⁰³

Throughout, the autocommentary also says many times that [these qualities] are obscured during the phase of sentient beings and unobscured during the phase of buddhas.

Once this naturally pure ground is purified through being skilled in the means to purify the stains, at the time of being liberated from characteristics, the samādhi of the dharmakāya that pervades [all of] space is manifested. Thus, while not moving away from this space-like kāya that is free from being identifiable, the welfare of beings is spontaneously promoted through the rūpakāyas, which are ornamented with the major and minor marks. Therefore, the phase of its not being pure of even a fraction of stains is [called] “sentient

being.” The phase of just some parts of these stains having become pure, but not all of them without exception, though one is in the process of purifying them, is [called] “bodhisattva.” The phase of [these stains] having become utterly pure is called “buddhalood.” The [text] says:

At that point, in those who have the kāya of space,
The flowers of the major marks will blossom.
Impure, impure and pure,
And utterly pure, in due order,
Are expressed as the three phases
Of sentient beings, bodhisattvas, and Tathāgatas.⁸⁰⁴

When this buddha heart is enveloped by the cocoon of ignorance, from the perspective of being a cause, it is called “disposition,” which is twofold—the naturally abiding disposition and the unfolding disposition. The first is naturally pure mind as such, inseparable from the sixty-four buddha qualities, that is, the dharmadhātu whose nature is luminous emptiness. Though its essence is indifferentiable, [the *Abhisamayālamkāra*] states:

But by virtue of the divisions of the phenomena founded on it,
Its divisions are expressed.⁸⁰⁵

Accordingly, the classification of noble persons (śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas) is made by virtue of the gradual process of how, right within the disposition (which is the cause for [itself] becoming pure of stains), [certain] parts of its complete purity are realized. Though naturally pure mind is not tainted by the stains of consciousness, the presentation of eight consciousnesses is given by individually distinguishing them through false imagination.

The second [disposition] is the stainless own essence of the eight collections of consciousness, which abides as the nature of the four wisdoms and is inseparable from naturally luminous mind as such (the dharmadhātu, emptiness), because this is the disposition that is the cause for unfolding the two rūpakāyas. This means that, through accomplishing the immaculate dharmas, the stains of not recognizing the eight consciousnesses’ own essence are overcome, due to which all eight collections are liberated as self-awareness. Once this happens, it is designated by the expression, “the eight collections of consciousness have changed state into the four wisdoms.” As an appearance for others, these [wisdoms] appear as the rūpakāyas. In brief, these two dispositions are [just] the divisions of their unity. Lord Daō Shōnnu says:

Connate mind as such is the dharmakāya.
Connate appearances are the light of the dharmakāya.

Accordingly, the unborn fundamental nature of mind as such with stains is the naturally abiding disposition, and its unimpeded radiance is the unfolding disposition. Therefore, this is called the “stained unity of the two kāyas.” Completely pure of stains, the unborn fundamental nature of mind as such appears as the dharmakāya (one’s own welfare) and its unimpeded radiance as the rūpakāyas (the welfare of others). Therefore, this is expressed as the “stainfree unity of the two kāyas.” For, the autocommentary says:

Some may think that the unfolding disposition arises newly, but this is not the case. To present the naturally abiding disposition—the dharmadhātu—as the eight consciousnesses, such as the ālaya-consciousness, is a presentation and classification in terms of false imagination. Likewise, [the unfolding disposition]—the very own stainless essence of these eight collections [of consciousness]—exists as the nature of the four wisdoms, which is the presentation in terms of correct imagination. By virtue of previous stains having been overcome through the immaculate dharmas that are grounded in buddha enlightenment, the mistakeness of the eight collections does not exist [anymore later]. Therefore, this is coined as the phrase “the wisdom of the fundamental change of state.” For this reason, the *Madhyāntavibhāga* says:

Purity is asserted to be like the purity
Of the element of water, gold, and space.⁸⁰⁶

Accordingly, [mind] without stains should be regarded as being wisdom and [mind] with stains to be consciousness.⁸⁰⁷

Also Lord Rōlbé Dorje states:

The light rays of this Heart
Exist as what is called “the unfolding disposition.”

and

It is held that these four [wisdoms] are the nature
With stains and the unfolding disposition,

And that these two [dispositions]
Dwell in all beings primordially.

Now, [certain] qualms shall be eliminated. Some say, “Mind⁸⁰⁸ is presented from the perspective of its being lucid and aware of objects. Matter, mind, and nonassociated formations are all three subdivisions of conditioned phenomena. Mind is what evaluates its specific objects to be evaluated. For all these reasons, ordinary mind is not the Sugata heart, because this Heart is explained to be unconditioned and spontaneously present.” It is established through scripture that there is a common locus between awareness and the basic element, since the *Uttaratantra* says:

The great sage with his omniscient eye,
Seeing this honeylike basic element of awareness, . . .⁸⁰⁹

and

Likewise, this honeylike uncontaminated consciousness that exists
in living creatures . . .⁸¹⁰

This basic element of awareness is not produced by a cause in the beginning, not established as any nature whatsoever in the middle, and not changed through any condition in the end. Therefore, it is unconditioned, since [the *Uttaratantra*] says [on buddhahood:]

It is unconditioned, since its nature
Is to be without beginning, middle, or end.⁸¹¹

Furthermore, do you people assert buddha wisdom to be conditioned, or do you assert that it is not lucid and aware of objects? In the first case, you claim that the dharmakāya is conditioned, which is the talk of those who have not learned the terms of the definitive meaning. In the second case, omniscient wisdom is deprecated. Also, the statement “Matter, mind, and nonassociated formations are subdivisions of conditioned phenomena” just means to follow the talk of the proponents of [real] entities, but you would have to come up with a source within the scriptures of definitive meaning, such as the vajrayāna, that explains things in this way. Saying, “[Mind] is conditioned, because it evaluates its specific objects to be evaluated” means to be ignorant about the connection between the reason and the subject—completely perfect buddhahood directly knows all phenomena, but it is not asserted to be conditioned.

Some people came up with the conventional term “conditioned naturally abiding disposition” for this naturally luminous mind. But “naturally abiding” and “being conditioned by causes and conditions” are nothing but contradictory. Therefore, a naturally abiding disposition that entails arising and ceasing is an object of ridicule. Some others say, “The dhātu is unconditioned, but wisdom is conditioned, so a nature of these two being inseparable is impossible.” In that case, they should be asked whether they assert that primordial wisdom and connate wisdom are conditioned too. Yet others say, “If this Heart had the sixty-four qualities from the very beginning, the qualities of perfect buddhahood would exist in the mind streams of sentient beings, and in that case, does the buddha wisdom in the mind stream of a hell being experience the sufferings of hell?” Such is indeed said, but it is precisely for this reason that we speak about [wisdom or luminous mind] by making the distinction that it is stained during the phase of sentient beings and stainless in the state of a buddha. In other words, perfect buddhahood and its powers and so on do not exist in the mind streams of sentient beings. This is definitely how it is, but it will be understood through saying again and again, “*Stained* buddhahood and its powers and so on exist [in their mind streams].”

Again, some say, “The naturally abiding disposition being a continuous stream since beginningless [time] is the intention of all the words [of the buddha]. Therefore, it is tenable, but this statement that the unfolding disposition is not newly arisen is not something one should listen to. If you wonder why, it is because this [disposition] is explained as the new accomplishment of roots of virtue, as in [*Uttaratantra* I.149c] ‘the supreme of what is accomplished.’ Furthermore, if the fact that the unfolding disposition abides as a continuum since beginningless [time] applies to all sentient beings, how could [the following verse in] the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* be adduced:

Some are solely devoted to wrongdoing,
Some have completely destroyed the immaculate dharmas,
Some lack the virtue conducive to liberation,
Some have inferior immaculate [dharmas], and [some] lack the
cause.⁷⁸¹²

Therefore, this shall be explained a bit. In a treasure below the earth, the qualities of all one may wish or need exist right from the start. Likewise, the naturally abiding disposition is the naturally luminous dharmadhātu (mind as such), in which all buddha qualities dwell primordially in an inseparable way. Its having become pure of stains is called “having attained one’s own welfare, the dharmakāya.” From the very time of the fruit of a palm tree or a

mango fruit dwelling inside their respective skins, they have the disposition that is the cause for the unfolding of the leaves of a palm tree and the core of a mango, which will then [actually] unfold through [additional conditions,] such as water, manure, warmth, and moisture. Likewise, the unfolding disposition is the essence of the eight collections [of consciousness], which abides as the nature of the four wisdoms and is inseparable from naturally luminous mind as such, the empty dharmadhātu. Through accomplishing the roots of virtue, it seems as if it increases and then enlightened activity unfolds. This is called “having attained the welfare of others, the two rūpakāyas,” since the *Mahāyānottaratantra* says:

Like a treasure and a fruit tree,
The disposition is to be known as twofold—
Naturally abiding without beginning
And the supreme of what is accomplished.
It is held that the three buddhakāyas
Are attained by virtue of these two dispositions—
The first kāya through the first one,
And the latter two through the second one.⁸¹³

Therefore, though the naturally abiding disposition exists right from the beginning, without its essence ever changing, the dharmakāya will be attained through purifying the stains. Likewise, also the unfolding disposition exists indeed right from the beginning, but through accomplishing the roots of virtue, the supreme of enlightened activities—the twofold rūpakāya—will unfold. This is why [the *Uttaratantra*] speaks of “the supreme of what is accomplished.”

In brief, from the perspective of its looking as if enlightened activity unfolds through accomplishing the roots of virtue, [the Buddha] spoke of “the unfolding disposition.” However, the accomplishing of the roots of virtue itself is not the unfolding disposition. The equivalent [Sanskrit] term for “disposition” is “dhātu,”⁸¹⁴ which refers to disposition, basic element, cause, nature, expanse, and so on. Therefore, since the accomplishing of the roots of virtue itself is not this expanse (dhātu), it is not the unfolding expanse. But if [some people] assert that the accomplishing of the roots of virtue is the unfolding disposition, then, by the same token, it would follow that the gathering of the accumulation of wisdom is the naturally abiding disposition. If they accept this, they thereby also claim a common locus between the naturally abiding disposition and the unfolding disposition. Consequently,

they cannot steer clear of the three circles.⁸¹⁵ Also, in the context of the nine examples and their nine meanings [in the *Uttaratantra*], what is taught in the example of a fruit is the unfolding disposition:

Just as seeds and sprouts that exist in fruits, such as mangos and palm fruits,
And have this indestructible property [of growing into a tree],
Through coming together with ploughed earth, water and so on,
Gradually become the entity of a majestic tree, . . .⁸¹⁶

Here, one needs to examine [and thus understand] that the seed of a palm tree and the unfolding disposition are correlated as being the example and its meaning. In terms of being correlated as example and meaning, the same goes for [the seed’s] unfolding through ploughed earth, water, and so on, and the unfolding of enlightened activity through accomplishing the roots of virtue. With this meaning in mind, the *Dharmadhātustava* says that confidence and so forth are what unfold the basic element, but it does not say that these are the actual basic element.⁸¹⁷ The intention of this must be understood. Also the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* does not speak about a cut-off unfolding disposition, since it is not a text of the Vijñapti[vādins]. Therefore, having in mind that [some beings] may temporarily lack the conditions that awaken the unfolding disposition, [this text] says [above], “Some lack the virtue conducive to liberation.” Having in mind that [some] may lack the conditions that awaken the naturally abiding disposition, it says, “Some have inferior immaculate [dharma].” Thus, the claim of a common locus between the disposition and what is conditioned at the time of the ground, as well as the claim of a common locus between buddhahood and what is conditioned at the time of the fruition should be known to arise from the eyes that look at the definitive meaning by being blinded through the blurred vision of clinging to dialectics.

KENNARD LIPMAN

NĪTĀRTHA, NEYĀRTHA, AND TATHĀGATAGARBHA
IN TIBET*

D. S. Ruegg, in his *La Théorie du Tathāgatagarbha et du Gotra* and other works,¹ has mentioned the need for further study of the various Tibetan exegetical traditions involved in the controversies surrounding the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine. He has relied extensively on the exegesis developed by *dGe-lugs-pa* scholars. This paper is an initial attempt to address this need voiced by Ruegg, by presenting the views of a *bKa'-brgyud-pa* and two *rNying-ma-pa* scholars. In particular, the focus will be on elucidating how they applied the interpretive devices of *nītartha* (*nges-don*, certain, definitive meaning) and *neyārtha* (*drang-don*, indirect meaning which is to be established) to texts dealing with the *tathāgatagarbha*.² One of the basic philosophical problems the Tibetans faced in this regard was the relationship between the concepts of *śūnyatā* and *tathāgatagarbha* emphasized in the second and third "turnings of the wheel of Dharma" (*dharmacakra-pravartana*) respectively.

Padma dkar-po (1527–1592), the great '*Brug-pa bka'-brgyud* scholar, in his *Chos-'khor rim-pa gsum-gi dogs-gcod*, criticized the majority of previous scholars who, ". . . took the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtras* as the basis for the second 'turning' spoken of in the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*, while taking the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* and others as the [basis for the] third 'turning'."³ On the basis of this erroneous notion, according to Padma-dkar-po, those who thought of themselves as *rang-stong-pas* (those who took *śūnya* as a reflexive concept)⁴ held the second 'turning' to be *nītartha* and the third *neyārtha*, while those calling themselves *gzhan-stong-pas* (those who took *śūnya* as primarily non-reflexive, denoting an ontological region devoid of relativity)⁵ put forward the reverse interpretation, i.e., the second 'turning' was *neyārtha* and the third *nītartha*. This error, said Padma dkar-po, was based on a more fundamental presupposition: that each 'turning' must be based on a unique set of texts. For him both the second and third 'turnings' were based "primarily" (*gtso-bo*) on the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtras*: the second 'turning', which is *neyārtha*, was in accord with the *Cittamātra* doctrine, which can be summed up in the theory of the *triniḥsvābhava*. The third, which is *nītartha*, was in accord with the *Madhyamaka* teaching, as set forth in such *sāstras* as the *Mūlamādhyamikakārik*

Journal of Indian Philosophy 8 (1980) 87–95. 0022–1791/80/0081–0087 \$00.90
Copyright © 1980 by D. Reidel Publishing Co., Dordrecht, Holland, and Boston, U.S.A.

and the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, and as embodied in the *sūtras* which teach the *tathāgatagarbha* (*snying-po'i mdo*).

In support of his position, Padma dkar-po shows, for example, that the *Samḍhinirmocanasūtra* teaches both *Cittamātra* and *Mādhyamaka* doctrines, and thus cannot be made the basis for claiming that the third 'turning' is strictly a *Cittamātra* teaching of certain, definitive meaning. Furthermore, he held that the *Cittamātra* teaching on the subject is in contradiction with the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of the *snying-po'i mdo*, which teach that there is but one *gotra* (*rigs*, spiritual lineage or affinity).⁶ Thus, despite his reversal of the usual order of the 'turnings', and his cautions on equating 'turnings' unequivocally with basic texts (which enable him, however, to account for *Cittamātra* interpretations of the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtras*, as well as to bring *Samḍhinirmocanasūtra* VII, 30⁷ into accord with a *Madhyamaka* interpretation), Padma dkar-po's presentation remains quite orthodox by Tibetan standards.

Two *rNying-ma-pa* leaders of the nineteenth-century non-sectarian (*ris-med*) movement of Eastern Tibet, Kong-sprul blos-gros mtha'-yas (1813–1899), in his so-called 'Indo-Tibetan Encyclopedia' (*Shes-bya kun-khyab*) and his commentary on the *Ratnagotravibhāga*; and Mi-pham rgya-mtsho (1846–1912), in his commentary on the same work and in his *bDe-gshegs snying-po'i stong-thun chen-mo senge nga-ro*, presented similar views. Basically, they both held that the second and third 'turnings' were *nītartha*, although the third was nonetheless "higher" (*lhag-pa*) or "ultimate" (*mthar-thug*). Kong-sprul's presentation, however, had been strongly influenced by the *gzhan-stong-pa* approach,⁸ while the influence of the *rDzogs-chen* philosophy of Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa (1308–1364) was clearly evident in Mi-pham.

Kong-sprul states, in his *Shes-bya kun-khyab*, that the second 'turning', as explicated by the *Madhyamaka*, is of "definitive meaning which is contextually dependent or conditional" (*gnas-skabs kyi nges-don*), in that it focuses on opinionatedness (*lta-ba, dṛṣṭi*) so as to cut off ingrained "semantic structurning" (*spros-pa, prapañca*) whose sense-relations always operate in extremes (*mtha', anta*).⁹ The third 'turning', as explicated by what he calls the *Yogācāra* (*rnal-'byor spyod-pa*) or *Yogācāra-Madhyamaka* (*rnal-'byor spyod-pa'i dbu-ma*), is of "ultimately definitive meaning" (*mthar-thug-gi nges-don*), in that it clearly sets forth "pristine cognitiveness itself as a unique experience, the presence of Being which is absolutely real" (*don-dam-pa'i gnas-lugs so-so rang-rig-pa'i ye-shes nyid*).¹⁰ This *Yogācāra* trend of thought,

in Kong-sprul's usage, which began with Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, is to be distinguished from the *Cittamātra* (*Vijñaptimātra*) trend initiated by these two Indian masters, as well as from the later *Svātantrika-Yogācāra-Mādhyamika*. For example, in the introduction to his commentary on the *Uttaratantrasāstra*, Kong-sprul states that Vasubandhu's commentary on the *Prajñāpāramitā*, the *gnod-'joms*, as well as his commentary on the *Dharmadharmatā-vibhāga*, belonged to the "siddhānta of the *Madhyamaka* which is of definitive meaning" (*nges-don dbu-ma'i grub-mtha*), but that this exegetical lineage did not survive.¹¹

Mi-pham rgya-mtsho's major concern was to show the harmony, or more precisely, the unity (*zung-'jug, yuganaddha*), of the *sūnyatā* teaching of the second 'turning' and the *tathāgatagarbha* teaching of the third. This he accomplished through the *rDzogs-chen* conceptions of the facticity and actuality of Being (*ngo-bo, rang-bzhin*).¹² The facticity of the *tathāgatagarbha* is 'open' (*stong-pa, sūnya*), while its actuality is the intrinsic possession (*ye-ltan*) of Buddha-capabilities (*yon-tan, guṇa*) of the *Buddhakāya* and its corresponding cognitiveness (*sku dang ye-shes*).¹³ Mi-pham's approach will become clear by considering his commentary on *Uttaratantra* I, 155,¹⁴ which states that the *dhātu* (*khams*, spiritual make-up), which is a synonym for *tathāgatagarbha*, is "devoid of" (*sūnya, stong-pa*) incidental obscurations, but not "devoid of" (*asūnya, mi-stong-pa*) Buddha-capabilities. The first two *padās* refer to facticity and the second two to actuality, according to Mi-pham, and in view of this interpretation one can put concisely Mi-pham's objection to both the usual *rang-stong-pa* and *gzhan-stong-pa* approaches. The *gzhan-stong-pas* err in regarding the facticity of the *tathāgatagarbha* as being something ontically ultimate (*bden-grub*) and not devoid of Buddha-capabilities (*mi-stong*); while the *rang-stong-pas* err when they regard the actuality, as well as facticity, of the *tathāgatagarbha*, as "void" (*stong*). For Mi-pham, however, the actuality of the *tathāgatagarbha* is the luminous presence (*gsal-ba*) in utter spontaneity (*lhun-grub*) of intrinsic Buddha-capabilities; this spontaneous presence, however, should not be confused with something eternally present-at-hand (*rtag-pa, nitya*). For example, Mi-pham criticizes the position (that of the *dGe-lugs-pa*?) that *sūnyatā* as the mere "non-existence in truth of the *citta*" (*sems bden-grub med*) can serve as the basic cause-factor (*rgyu, hetu*) of Buddhahood.¹⁵ This position leads, for Mi-pham, to a contradiction of the principle of the unity of facticity, as open, and actuality, as luminous, mentioned above, in that it entails *sūnyatā*

without its inseparable, spontaneously present, luminous actuality: the intrinsic Buddha-capabilities. In their anxiousness to avoid having the *tathāgatagarbha* construed as the *dharmakāya* existing in-truth (*bden-grub*) at the level of ground, the *dGe-lugs-pa* may have risked throwing the baby out with the bath-water.¹⁶ Several generations before rGyal-tshab and mKhas-grub-rje, the two chief disciples of Tsong-kha-pa who gave the *dGe-lugs-pa* interpretation its definitive form, Klong-chen rab 'byams-pa had already pointed out some of the pitfalls in such an interpretation, while also retaining some similarities with it, thus not incurring the faults of the *Jo-nang-pa* and Bu-ston interpretations which the *dGe-lugs-pa* would criticize.¹⁷

Klong-chen-pa's approach is nicely summed up in the following quotation from his autocommentary on the *Sems-nyid ngal-gso*:¹⁸

'At the time of the status of a sentient being, although the non-thematicness of experience (*sems-kyi chos-nyid*) possesses the complete capabilities of the *dharmakāya* through its modality of openness and the capabilities of the *rūpakāya* through its modality of presence, since it has been obscured by impurities on account of which it does not shine forth directly, it is called 'spiritual affinity' or 'existential make-up' (*rigs, khams*). Although, at the time of status of a Buddha, it is free from all impurities, it is called 'Enlightenment' (*byang-chub*), merely from the presence or absence in its completeness of the potency (*nus-pa*) of experience-as-such (*sems-nyid*) in its facticity, one cannot claim that the capabilities which are at first non-existent at the time of the status of a sentient being, are afterwards newly produced, since (experience-as-such) does not change into some other status.'

Although the *rNying-ma-pas* and the *dGe-lugs-pas* agree that the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine is a *Madhyamaka* teaching of the third 'turning' which is of certain meaning, there is a source of contention here in the proper interpretation of the *Madhyamaka* understanding of *śūnyatā*. In this regard, Mi-pham, Kong-sprul, and Klong-chen-pa often warned against a negativistic (*phyang-chad*) interpretation of *śūnyatā* taught in the second 'turning' as a mere 'absolute negation' (*med-dgag, prasajya-pratiṣedha*). Such a negativistic interpretation creates problems in dealing with the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of the third 'turning'. According to Mi-pham,¹⁹ the second 'turning' has merely emphasized facticity as 'open', and the third has emphasized actuality as intrinsic possession of Buddha-capabilities. Problems only arise due to a one-sided emphasis on either facet, resulting in either negativism or substantialistic ontologizing. For Mi-pham the third 'turning' is only "higher" (*lhag-pa*) in regard to its pointing out the inseparability of facticity and actuality in regard to the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine. It is difficult at this time

to properly assess the *rNying-ma-pa* critique, as they do not mention their opponents by name, as, for instance, Go-ram-pa bsod-nams senge (1429–148) did on this matter of 'negativism'.²⁰

Another problem in assessing the *rNying-ma-pa* contribution is that, while the *dGe-lugs-pa*, for example, base their interpretation of *śūnyatā* on the texts primarily by Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti which explicate the sūtras of the second 'turning', the *rNying-ma-pa* range farther afield, to include what they call the *Yogācāra-Madhyamaka* trend, as indicated above, on up to the *Mantrayāna* doctrine of the *rDzogs-chen*.²¹ The *dGe-lugs-pa*, on the other hand, did not mix *tantra* into their *sūtra* discourse. This issue is particularly relevant here, in that a major source of contention on the issue of *tathāgatagarbha* interpretation, the *Jo-nang-pas*, were generally regarded by their opponents as being unreproachable as Tantric yogins, who nevertheless erred in the way in which they brought their realization (*sgrub*) into the realm of philosophical explication (*bshad*). While this may have been true of the *Jo-nang-pas*, further research is needed to determine whether the *rNying-ma-pas*, some of whom have been *gzhan-stong-pas* (like Kong-sprul) and some of whom have not (like Mi-pham), were liable to similar criticisms.

In conclusion, I would venture that philosophical problems concerning the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine will continue for contemporary scholars, as they did for the Buddhist tradition itself, as long as an undue emphasis is placed on the 'negative' aspect of *śūnyatā*, which is *both* a 'being-devoid-of' and an 'openness'.²² Several scholars have remarked (May and Conze, for example) that the main thrust of the *Madhyamaka* is ontological and not epistemological, but they did not bring out the nature of this ontology.²³ The *Madhyamaka* is certainly a critique of ontologies which tend to absolutize particular existents or beings. But this critique does not leave us with a collection of emptied-out phenomena (internal and external) – but rather fulfilled, in the open and luminous clearing of Being (-as-such) and its working "in" and "through" us as *tathāgatagarbha*.

University of Calgary, Canada

NOTES

* This is an amended and annotated version of a paper delivered at the 188th annual meeting of the American Oriental Society, Toronto, April, 1978.

¹ See Ruegg, D. S., *La Théorie du Tathāgatarbha et du Gotra* (Paris, 1969), pp. 55–66; *Le Traité sur le Tathāgathagarbha de Bu-ston* (Paris, 1973), Introduction; 'On the dGe lugs pa Theory of the Tathāgatarbha', in *Pratidanām* (La Haye, 1968), pp. 500–509.

² On *nītartha* and *neyārtha*, see Lamotte, É., 'La critique d'interprétation dans le bouddhisme', *Annuaire de l'Institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales et slaves* (Bruxelles), IX (1949), 341–361; Ruegg, *La Théorie*, p. 55ff. Kajiyama puts it nicely in discussing *nītartha* and *neyārtha* as the third of the four "reliances" (*rton-pa, prati-sarana*), i.e., rely, ". . . on a sūtra teaching explicitly what it aims at (*nītartha*), but not on a sūtra the teaching of which implies a hidden intention (*neyārtha*) . . ." (Kajiyama, Y., 'Later Mādhyamikas on Epistemology and Meditation', in Kiyota, M., ed., *Mahāyāna Buddhist Meditation* [Honolulu, 1978], pp. 116–17.) Still, this represents only the formal aspect of the distinction, which is also a doctrinal one: *neyārtha* relates to the *samvṛti*, *nītartha* to the *paramārtha*.

³ PK, p. 336.

⁴ By 'reflexive' here we mean that *sūnya* does not indicate that one entity is 'devoid of' another, that something is absent in a given locus. *Sūnyatā* indeed means *niḥsvabhāvatā*, although it is just this negative which is a source of contention, as we shall see, even though all *rang-stong-pas* in Tibet agreed it was a case of *med-dgag* (*prasajya-pratiśedha*), non-implicative negation. To take *svabhāva* as the nature, or essence, of an entity, and then to negate this 'nature' and call this the understanding of *sūnyatā*, is to remain within the limits of a purely conceptual analysis, however valuable this may be.

⁵ The *gzhān-stong-pa*, making use of the Yogācāra theory of the *trisvabhāva*, held the *pariṇiṣpanna* to be devoid of both the *parikalpita* and the *paratantra*. This was attacked by the *rang-stong-pa* as being in contradiction with the Indian doctrine; however, on this point see Ruegg, D. S.; 'The Uses of the Four Positions of the *Catuskoṭi* and the Problem of the Description of Reality in Mahāyāna Buddhism', *JIP*, 5 (1977), p. 67, n. 126. Cf. also notes 16 and 22 below.

⁶ PK, p. 338.

⁷ See Lamotte, É., trans., *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* (Paris, 1935), pp. 85, 206–7. This is the definitive statement of that *sūtra* on the three 'turnings'.

⁸ Cf. his presentation of the development of the Madhyamaka in Tibet in *Encyc.*, I, 451, 7–459, 1. Kong-sprul's major works on *gzhān-stong*, however, are to be found in his *Thun-mong ma-yin-pa'i mdzod*, which has yet to be republished. See Gene Smith's Introduction to *Encyc.*, p. 69.

⁹ *Encyc.*, Part III, f. 24, 3.

¹⁰ *Encyc.*, Part III, f. 24, 3–4. On *prapañca*, see May, Jacques, *Candrakīrti Prasannapadā Madhyamakavṛtti* (Paris, 1959), p. 175, n. 562; and Bhikkhu Nānananda's *Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought* (Kandy, 1971). *Madhyamaka-kārikā* XVIII, 5 is central to an understanding of *prapañca*, where it is said to found *vikalpa*, dichotomous conceptualization; as well as Candrakīrti's commentary on XVIII, 9, which glosses *prapañca* as *vāk* (Vaidya ed., p. 159). There, he tells us that the reason for this is that *prapañca* conjures up, proliferates (*prapañcayati, spro-bar byed-pa*) meanings (*artha, don*). Such hints have suggested 'semantic structuring' to us, but a contemporary poet, George Quasha, seem to have captured it best as "the linguistic unconscious of easy conceptualization." On sense-relations in modern semantics, see John Lyons' excellent survey, *Semantics 1* (Cambridge, 1977), chapter 9.

¹¹ RG, f. 7b, 4–6.

¹² On *ngo-bo* and *rang-bzhin*, see Guenther, H. V., *Kindly Bent to Ease Us, Part One: Mind* (Emeryville, Calif., 1975), pp. 223–4; *Kindly Bent to Ease Us, Part Three: Wonderment* (Emeryville, Calif., 1976), pp. 5ff.; and *Tibetan Buddhism in Western Perspective* (Emeryville, Calif., 1977), pp. 119, 124–5, 156, 176, 212.

¹³ This idea appears throughout the *DS*, first occurring on ff. 564, 4–565, 1.

¹⁴ *RGM*, f. 433, 6ff.; *DS*, f. 576, 6ff. The difference between the usage of *śūnya* here and in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature (and the works of Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, etc., which are said to explicate it), lies in what Tibetan scholasticism called the *stong-gzhi*, “the basis for (the understanding) of *śūnya*.” In the *Uttaratantraśāstra*, the *stong-gzhi* is the *khams (dhātu)*, while in the *Prajñāpāramitā* it is any *dharma*, or entity, in its ontical givenness or ‘nature’.

¹⁵ *DS*, f. 568, 1ff.

¹⁶ See Ruegg’s article mentioned in note 1 for a concise statement of their approach.

¹⁷ See the treatment of *tathāgatagarbha* in his *Theg-pa mtha’-dag gi don gsal-bar byed-pa grub-pa’i mtha’ rin-po-che’i mdzod* (Gangtok, Sikkim, n.d.), p. 161, 4ff. and the following note.

¹⁸ *rDzogs-pa chen-po sems-nyid ngal-gso’i ’grel-pa shing-rta chen-po* (Gangtok, Sikkim, n.d.), p. 312, 4–6. Klong chen-pa’s most extensive treatment of the *tathāgatagarbha* is to be found in this work, p. 310 ff., by way of commentary on the verse numbered “BIIc” in Guenther’s translation, p. 65 (*Kindly Bent, Part One*). Klong-chen-pa makes the same distinction which the dGe-lugs-pa were later to emphasize in criticizing the theories of Bu-ston and the Jo-nang-pa, i.e., we speak of *tathāgatagarbha* or *gotra* as long as one is bound up with the adventitious *kleśa*, but when these have been removed, we can speak of *tathāgata*. Cf. also *Kindly Bent, Part One*, pp. 52–3.

¹⁹ *RGM*, f. 381, 4ff.

²⁰ *TS*, p. 2ff. Here Tsong-kha-pa is placed under the *chad-mtha’ la dbu-ma smra-ba* (“Nihilistic Mādhyamika”).

²¹ In his controversial commentary on the *Madhyamakālamkāra* of Śāntarakṣita, for example, Mi-pham explicitly links the philosophical perspective (*lta-ba, dr̥ṣṭi*) of Candrakīrti with the *rDzogs-chen*:

The intent of Candrakīrti (is) the profound perspective in which the deceptiveness of conventionality subsides in the continuum of Being (*dbyings-su yal-ba*), because all presence is pure in exactly its own place (*rang-sar*). (This) is similar to the setting forth of the initially pure (*ka-dag*) in the works of the *rDzogs chen*.

(*Collected Writings of ’Jam-mgon ’Ju Mi-pham rgya-mtsho*, Vol. 12 [Gangtok, 1976], f. 46, 3–4.)

²² It is interesting to note that the *gzhan-stong-pa* seized on the *difference* between these two aspects, relegating the *rang-stong (śūnya* as ‘being-devoid-of’) to the *samvṛti* and the *gzhan-stong (śūnya* as an ontological region) to the *paramārtha*. See *TS*, pp. 1–2.

²³ This is closely related to the understanding of *prapañca* discussed in note 10, for *prapañca* clearly has an ontological function. Not only do we ‘have’ and ‘use’ language, but we have been “habituated to *samsāra* since beginningless time” because of *prapañca*, as Candrakīrti tells us in his commentary to *Madhyamakakārikā* XVIII, 5 (Vaidya ed., p. 150).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ABBREVIATIONS

- DS *bDe-gshegs snying-po'i stong-thun chen-mo senge nga-ro* of Mi-pham rgya-mtsho, in *Collected Writings of Jam-mgon 'Ju Mi-pham rgya-mtsho*, Vol. 3, Gangtok, 1973.
- Encyc. *Kongtrul's Encyclopedia of Indo-Tibetan Culture*, Parts I–III, ed. by Lokesh Chandra, New Delhi, 1970.
- PK *Chos-khor rim-pa gsum gi dogs-gcod* of Padma dkar-po, in *Collected Works of Kun-mKhyen Padma dkar-po*, Vol. 7, Darjeeling, 1973.
- RG *Theg-pa chen-po rgyud bla-ma'i bstan-bcos snying po'i don mngon-sum lam gyi bshad srol dang sbyar ba'i rnam-par 'grel-pa phyir mi-ldog-pa senge nga-ro* of Kong-sprul blo-gros mtha'-yas, Gangtok, n.d.
- RMG *Theg-pa chen-po rgyud bla-ma'i bstan-bcos kyi mchan-'grel* of Mi-pham rgya-mtsho, in *Collected Writings of Jam-mgon 'Ju Mi-pham rgya-mtsho*, Vol. 3, Gangtok, 1973.
- TS *lTa-ba'i shan-'byed theg-mchog gnad kyi zla-zer* of Go-ram-pa bsod-nams senge, in *The Complete Works of the Great Masters of the Sa Skya Sect of Tibetan Buddhism*, Vol. 13, comp. by Bsod-nams rgya-mtsho, Tokyo, 1969.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Guenther, H. V.: 1975, *Kindly Bent to Ease Us. Part One: Mind*. Emeryville, Calif.: Dharma Press.
- Guenther, H. V.: 1976, *Kindly Bent to Ease Us. Part Three: Wonderment*. Emeryville, Calif.: Dharma Press.
- Guenther, H. V.: 1977, *Tibetan Buddhism in Western Perspective*. Emeryville, Calif.: Dharma Press.
- Kajiya, Yuichi: 1978, 'Later Mādhyamikas on Epistemology and Meditation', in Kiyota, M. (Editor). *Mahāyāna Buddhist Meditation*. Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press.
- Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa. *Theg-pa mtha'-dag gi don gsal-bar byed-pa grub-mtha' rin-po-che'i mdzod*. Gangtok, Sikkim: Dodrup Chen Rinpoche.
- Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa. *rDzogs-pa chen-po sems-nyid ngal gso'i 'grel-pa shing-rta chen-po*. Gangtok, Sikkim: Dodrup Chen Rinpoche.
- Lamotte, Étienne: 1935, *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*. Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve.
- Lamotte, Étienne: 1949, 'La critique d'interprétation dans le bouddhisme', *Annuaire de l'Institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales et slaves. Bruxelles.*, IX: 341–361.
- Lyons, John: 1977, *Semantics 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- May, Jacques: 1959, *Candrakīrti Prasannapadā Madhyamaka-vṛtti*. Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve.
- Mi-pham rgya-mtsho: *dBu-ma rgyan rnam-bshad*, in *Collected Writings of Jam-mgon 'Ju Mi-pham rgya-mtsho*, Vol. 12. Gangtok, Sikkim, 1976.
- Nāṇananda, Bhikkhu: 1971, *Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Ruegg, D. Seyfort: 1968, 'On the dGe lugs pa Theory of the Tathāgatagarbha', in *Pratīdanām*. La Haye.

- Ruegg, D. Seyfort: 1969, *La Théorie du Tathāgatagarbha et du Gotra*. Paris: École Française D'Extrême Orient.
- Ruegg, D. Seyfort: 1973, *Le Traité sur le Tathāgatagarbha du Bu ston*. Paris: École Française D'Extrême Orient.
- Ruegg, D. Seyfort: 1977, 'The Uses of the Four Positions of the *Catuṣkoṭi* and the Problem of the Description of Reality in Mahāyāna Buddhism', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 5: 1–71.
- Vaidya, P. L.: 1960, Editor. *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna*, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts, No. 10. Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute.

The Treasury of Knowledge

Book Six, Part Three:

Frameworks of Buddhist Philosophy

*A Systematic Presentation of
the Cause-Based Philosophical Vehicles*

Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Tayé

KALU RINPOCHÉ TRANSLATION GROUP
under the direction of Venerable Bokar Rinpoché

This volume
translated, introduced, and annotated by
Elizabeth M. Callahan

Snow Lion Publications
Ithaca, New York
Boulder, Colorado

Snow Lion Publications
P.O. Box 6483
Ithaca, New York 14851 USA
607-273-8519
www.snowlionpub.com

Copyright © 2007 Kalu Rinpoché
All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced by any
means without prior written permission from the publisher.

Printed in Canada on acid-free recycled paper.

ISBN 978-1-55939-277-8

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Koñ-sprul Blo-gros-mtha'-yas, 1813-1899.

[Ses bya mtha' yas pa'i rgya mtsho. English. Selections]

The treasury of knowledge : Book six, part three, frameworks of
Buddhist philosophy, a systematic presentation of the cause-based
philosophical vehicles / Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Tayé ; Kalu Rinpoché
Translation Group under the direction of Bokar Rinpoché ; this volume
translated, introduced, and annotated by Elizabeth M. Callahan.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-1-55939-277-8 (alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 1-55939-277-0 (alk. paper)

1. Buddhism—Doctrines. 2. Buddhist sects. 3. Buddhism—China
—Tibet—Doctrines. I. Callahan, Elizabeth M. II. Title.

BQ4140 . K672513 2007
294.3'420423—dc22

2007010391

whereas the view of the *Highest Continuum* is that there is one *yāna* ultimately, a *bhūmi* with the habitual tendencies of ignorance, and birth through undefiled karma. These are ways for the common [disciples] to cut through conceptual elaborations and the uncommon [to become certain] about the ultimate.

11. SHENTONG-MADHYAMAKA

i¹" The Explanation of the Shentong-Madhyamaka System [II.B.2.a.ii.bb.2].
b'.vi'.bb'.1'.b"ii"]

aa" An Overview of the [Shentong] System

bb" A Detailed Explanation of [the Shentong] System

(1) The Way the Two Truths Are Ascertained

(2) The Way [Shentong] Is Free from the Chittamātras' Defects

(3) An Explanation of the Ways that Rangtong and Shentong Differ and Other Points

cc" Additional Topics: Recommendations

[This chapter, a continuation of the extensive explanation of the characteristics of the Madhyamaka schools, presents] the second division: the explanation of the Shentong-Madhyamaka system. This is discussed in three parts: an overview of the [Shentong] system;⁸⁰⁶ a detailed explanation of [the Shentong] system; and additional topics: recommendations.

An Overview of the [Shentong] System [aa"]

Maitreya's thought was explained by Asaṅga and his brother.

The two systems of Yogācāra and Certainty about the Ultimate

do not differ in terms of the essence of their views.

However, in the system of the first Dharma Treatises there are three *yānas* [ultimately];

The Dharma Treatises of the exalted Maitreya⁸⁰⁷ were explained by Asaṅga and his brother [Vasubandhu].⁸⁰⁸ The general philosophical tenet system of these [texts] was taught in detail by many excellent disciple lineages, such as [those originating with] Dignāga and Śhīramati.⁸⁰⁹ The uncommon philosophical tenet system [of Maitreya's texts] remained with supreme disciples, who transmitted it orally. In Tibet, this [uncommon explanation] was transmitted by the lotsāwas Zu Gawé Dorjé⁸¹⁰ and Tsen Kawoché⁸¹¹ and was first established as a system of standard texts (*yig cha'i srol*) by the mahāsiddha Yumo [Mikyö Dorjé]⁸¹² and others. The uncommon key points of this view were elucidated in the teachings of the lord of victors Rangjung Dorjé,⁸¹³ the omniscient [Longchen] Drimé Özer,⁸¹⁴ and others, who also clearly maintained that this [view] was the final definitive meaning. In particular, the omniscient dharma lord Dolpopa the Great⁸¹⁵ proclaimed the lion's roar of "Shentong-Madhyamaka." Later, Serdok Pañchen [Shākya Chokden],⁸¹⁶ the exalted Tāranātha,⁸¹⁷ and others clarified the uncommon key points of this system of philosophical tenets. [These are the masters who] appeared as the founders and promulgators of this great chariot-system.

The exegetical systems associated with those [treatises] differ in such a variety of ways that they could be [categorized] into subtler and broader subschools. Silung Pañchen [Shākya Chokden]'s explanation is that principally there are two exegetical styles found in [Maitreya's Treatises]:⁸¹⁸

- (1) the exegetical style of the first three Dharma Treatises of Maitreya, which may be referred to as that of the Yogācāra-Mādhyamikas, or
- (2) the exegetical style of the *Highest Continuum*, which belongs to the Mādhyamikas with Certainty about the Ultimate (*don dam nam par nges pa'i dbu ma pa*).

These two systems do not differ greatly in terms of the essence of their views, however, they do differ in the following specific ways:

- (1) The system of the first Dharma Treatises of Maitreya explains that ultimately there are three yānas, and it does not make some points that are part of the presentation⁸¹⁹ found in the *Highest Continuum*.
- (2) The thought of the *Highest Continuum* is expressed in the explanations that ultimately there is one yāna, that there is a bhūmi on which the habitual tendency of ignorance is present, and that birth can take place through undefiled karma.⁸²⁰

We should understand that these [two systems] are exegetical styles that are respectively (1) the means for common disciples to cut through conceptual elaborations by means of study and reflection;⁸²¹ and (2) the way for uncommon disciples to become definitively certain about the ultimate by means of meditation.

The majority of Tibetans say that [the first Dharma Treatises of Maitreya] are not Madhyamaka texts because they teach that ultimately there are three yānas. However, the masters who hold the positions [of the first Dharma Treatises] say that the explanation that shrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas do not enter the Mahāyāna path after having attained nirvāna without remainder is itself not enough justification to say that [these texts] are not to be considered Madhyamaka: being considered Madhyamaka is [determined] on the basis of the view. Their point is that [the first Dharma Treatises of Maitreya are Madhyamaka] because [they teach] the following special features of the Madhyamaka, as specified by the lord of scholars Kamalashīla and others:

- (1) all knowable objects are of one taste, emptiness;
- (2) all sentient beings are pervaded by the element of *sugatagarbha*;⁸²² and
- (3) all beings are capable of the awakening [of a buddha].

The great omniscient one of Jonang [Dolpopa] states:⁸²³

The five Dharma Treatises of Maitreya do not contain different views. The *Ornament of Clear Realization* does not explain the Rangtong view. None of these [texts] explain that ultimately there are three yānas and a cut-off potential.

Thus he does not subdivide Shentong-Madhyamaka into higher and lower [schools].

There are Tibetans who say that the Madhyamaka system of three of the Treatises of Maitreya is [in fact] the False Image system of the Chittamātra.⁸²⁴ However, in general Tibetans make free use of the conventions “Real Images” and “False Images,”⁸²⁵ which [they always consider] to belong to the Chittamātra [system]. [They make their categorization] simply [because] there are two types [of statements] that appear in these treatises: the images appearing as objects for cognition (which is [itself] appearing as referents) are real or they are false; [however, neither statement constitutes grounds for these texts to be considered as belonging to either Chittamātra subschool].

The following passage from [Serdok] Panchen Shākya Chokden is of particular relevance:⁸²⁶

Those who assert that the view of the *Highest Continuum* is the Chittamātra view have no scriptures or reasonings to prove that, for the following reasons: In [the *Highest Continuum*’s] own system there are no scriptural quotations or reasonings that validate [such a categorization]. If they [instead] draw on scriptures and reasonings from other systems to prove [their point] and confute [other positions], they will never find a Mādhyamika who maintains the flawless Madhyamaka view.

If [the fact that] the exalted Maitreya and Asaṅga have explained that [the *Highest Continuum*] is Madhyamaka is not enough proof [for them], they will never find a valid authority for these teachings.

Bhāvaviveka and Kamalashīla prove that Nāgārjuna’s scriptural tradition is Madhyamaka by using the argument that he was a noble being and was prophesied by the Sugata. Such [arguments] apply in this [case since both Maitreya and Asaṅga were noble beings and were prophesied by the Buddha].

If [the *Highest Continuum*] is not considered Madhyamaka because it explains that the consummate [nature] is ultimate reality, how could the many earlier and later Tibetans⁸²⁷ who assert that ultimate reality is emptiness in its aspect of a nonimplicative negation be considered Mādhyamikas?

Thus, Maitreya's and Asaṅga's own system does not explain that there are teachings [of the Buddha] or treatises that reveal a Madhyamaka view that is not found in the Madhyamaka taught in the last Dharma Treatise of Maitreya [the *Highest Continuum*]. This can be understood by reading not only the root texts of Maitreya but also the four Synopses⁸²⁸ and the two Compendia,⁸²⁹ because this system states:

It is explained clearly that sūtras teaching that all phenomena have no inherent nature (*nīḥsvabhāva*, *ngo bo nyid med pa*) are not to be taken literally. Anyone who accepts such [statements] as literal is a propounder of nihilism.

A Detailed Explanation of [the Shentong] System [bb"]

This discussion has three parts: the way the two truths are ascertained;⁸³⁰ the way [Shentong] is free from the Chittamātras' defects; and an explanation of the ways that Rangtong and Shentong differ and other points.

The Way the Two Truths Are Ascertained [(1)]

First, imagination of what is unreal exists conventionally. Percept and perceiver are simply imputed by mind and do not exist.

Primordial wisdom, free from conceptual elaborations, [exists] in the sense that it is the dharmatā of that [consciousness]; and within that [dharmatā], adventitious, removable stains exist.

The *Differentiation of the Middle and the Extremes* states:⁸³¹

Imagination of what is unreal exists; within it, duality does not exist. Emptiness exists within it, and it exists within that [emptiness].

Thus all is explained as not empty and not non-empty.

Since [imagination] exists, [duality] does not exist, and [imagination of what is unreal] exists [within emptiness, and emptiness within it], this is the middle path.⁸³²

First, [the following is presented] from the perspective of cutting through conceptual elaborations concerning conventional [reality].⁸³³ The mere imagination of what is unreal—cognition, which manifests as the variety of appearances—exists on a conventional [level]. The percepts and perceivers appearing to that [cognition] do not exist even conventionally, because they are simply imputed by the mind. Thus, conventional reality is free from the two extremes:

- It is free from the extreme of nonexistence, or nihilism, because the mere existence of imagination is accepted on the conventional level.
- It is free from the extreme of permanence, or existence, because it transcends superimposed, mutually dependent phenomena, such as percepts and perceivers.⁸³⁴

Primordial wisdom, emptiness free from conceptual elaborations, really exists (*bden par yod*) within that consciousness—i.e., within the imagination of what is unreal—in the sense that it is its dharmatā [its reality]. In the phase with stains, consciousness, “that which bears reality,”⁸³⁵ exists within dharmatā as adventitious, removable stains; it is stains, [or] factors to be abandoned, which are of an unreal nature. Thus, ultimate reality is free from the two extremes:

- It transcends the extreme of nonexistence, or nihilism, because emptiness truly exists (*bden grub*).
- It transcends the extreme of existence, or permanence, because all phenomena comprising the duality of percept and perceiver (such as imagination) do not truly exist (*bden med*).

Conventional [phenomena] are simply delusive appearances, empty of any nature.

Dharmatā is unchanging, not empty of a nature.

That being the case, the conventional [phenomena of] percepts and perceivers are simply the manifestations of delusive appearances—they are not things that exist by way of their own natures. Thus, they are empty of

any nature of their own. [Looking at this in the context of] a dichotomy between self and other, it is also not possible that a knowable object exists with a nature that is other [than its own]. Thus, since [conventional phenomena] are empty in all regards, they are not non-empty.

Primordial wisdom, which is dharmatā, exists originally by way of its own nature and never changes; therefore, it is *not* empty of a nature of its own, and it always exists.

[THE THREE CHARACTERISTICS]

The imagined is nonexistent; the dependent exists conventionally.

The consummate does not exist conventionally but does exist ultimately.

You might wonder, did the sūtras not teach that even the dharmadhātu is empty? Generally speaking, it is empty, or emptiness, but that does not necessitate that it is empty of its own nature. Primordial wisdom [the dharmadhātu] is called “emptiness” because it is empty of all characteristics that are other than itself, that is, it is empty of all conceptual elaborations of percepts and perceivers.

Now [I will discuss] the three characteristics (*trilakṣaṇa*, *mśhan nyid gsum*): the imagined (*parikalpita*, *kun brtags*), dependent (*paratantra*, *gzhan dbang*), and consummate (*pariniṣpanna*, *yongs grub*).

Imagined [characteristics] are

- all non-entities (such as space);
- what appears as an object, such as a form manifesting to thought;
- the linking of names and their referents, where a name is taken to be its referent or a referent is mistakenly taken to be its name; and
- all perceived objects that are superimposed conceptually: outer and inner; end and middle; large and small; good and bad; directions; time; and so forth.

The dependent [characteristic] is mere consciousness that manifests as the entities of percept and perceiver, because it is an appearance that is governed by something other than itself, i.e., the habitual tendencies of ignorance.

The consummate [characteristic] is reflexive awareness, self-illuminating and free from conceptual elaborations. Synonyms for it are dharmatā, dharmadhātu, thussen, and the ultimate.

The dependent and imagined [characteristics] are equal in that they do not really exist (*bden par med*); equal in being delusive appearances; and equal in being conventionalities and false. It is necessary, however, to distinguish them in terms of their respective characteristics: imagined [characteristics] do not exist even on a conventional [level], whereas the dependent do exist conventionally. The consummate [characteristic] does not exist conventionally and does exist ultimately (*don dam du yod pa*), thus it really exists.

These three [characteristics] are imputedly existent, substantially existent, and existent without conceptual elaborations.

They are the emptiness of the nonexistent, the emptiness of the existent, and the ultimate emptiness.

They are the inherent absence of characteristics, the inherent absence of arising, and the ultimate inherent absence.

The three characteristics [are discussed in the following three ways].

[THREE MODES OF EXISTENCE]

Imagined [characteristics] are imputedly existent (*brags pas yod pa*). Dependent [characteristics] are substantially existent (*rdzas su yod pa*). The consummate [characteristic] does not exist in [either of] those two [ways]—it exists without conceptual elaborations (*spros med du yod pa*).

[THREE MODES OF EMPTINESS]

Imagined [characteristics] are “the emptiness of the nonexistent” (*med pa’i stong nyid*). Dependent [characteristics] are “the emptiness of the existent” (*yod pa’i stong nyid*). The consummate [characteristic] is “ultimate emptiness” (*don dam stong nyid*).⁸³⁶ The exalted [Maitreya in the *Ornament of the Mahāyāna Sūtras*] says:⁸³⁷

Those who know the emptiness of the nonexistent, the emptiness of the existent, and natural emptiness are said to “know emptiness.”

[THREE MODES OF INHERENT ABSENCE]

Imagined [characteristics] are the inherent absence of characteristics (*mtshan nyid ngo bo nyid med pa*).⁸³⁸ Dependent [characteristics] are the inherent absence of arising (*skye ba ngo bo nyid med pa*).⁸³⁹ The consummate [nature] is the ultimate inherent absence (*don dam ngo bo nyid med pa*).⁸⁴⁰ [Vasubandhu's *Thirty Verses*] say:⁸⁴¹

Thinking of the three types of inherent absence
of the three kinds of natures,
it is taught that all phenomena have no nature.

[THE CONSUMMATE NATURE]

Consequently, [Shentong Proponents] assert that all knowable objects are pervaded by emptiness.

They state that the consummate, in terms of its own nature, is not connected to conventional phenomena; it precludes the triad of definition, definiendum, and illustration; it is free from conceptual elaborations, permanent, partless, and omnipresent.

Their presentations of all other [topics] accord with the Chittamātra.

Consequently, this system asserts that all knowable objects are pervaded by emptiness and inherent absence. You may ask, “If the consummate [nature] is truly existent, does it exist as something that arises, abides, and ceases? Does it come or go? Change or disappear? Does it have spatial or temporal dimensions? Is it singular or is it a plurality?” It is none of those. If something were to have those [characteristics], it would follow that it does not really exist. This [consummate nature] has no connection to any such conventional phenomena: it is not something that arises, abides, and ceases, comes or goes. It is not singular nor is it a plurality; it is neither a cause nor a result. In terms of its own nature, it precludes the triad of definition, definiendum, and illustration. Since it is free from all conceptual elaborations, such as being something with spatial or temporal dimensions, [the consummate nature] is inherently permanent. Because it cannot be divided into discrete pieces, it is partless. Since it is the dharmatā of all phenomena, it is said to be omnipresent and all-pervading.⁸⁴²

[Shentong Proponents'] presentations of other [topics related to] ground, path, and result⁸⁴³ are said for the most part to be in accord with the Chittamātra [system].

The Way [Shentong] Is Free from the Chittamātras' Defects [(2)]

The Proponents of False Images state that the entity of consciousness truly exists and that it is an object of mind. This [Shentong system] asserts that primordial wisdom truly exists; and yet, because it is not a conditioned phenomenon, [their assertions about] the ultimate are free from the mistakes of the Realists.

The system known in Tibet as False Image Chittamātra states that the entity of the ālaya consciousness is truly existent; and consciousness, therefore, is an object of the intellect. Thus, they are [considered by others to be] Realists. This [Shentong] system asserts that the entity of primordial wisdom—which transcends consciousness and is free from all conceptual elaborations—truly exists. However, because this primordial wisdom beyond conceptual elaborations is not a conditioned phenomenon, they say that [their assertions about] ultimate reality are free from all the mistakes of the Realists.

An Explanation of the Ways that Rangtong and Shentong Differ and Other Points [(3)]

The Rangtong and Shentong [systems] do not differ over the way that conventional [phenomena] are empty, nor do they disagree that the extremes of conceptual elaborations cease during meditative equipoise. They differ over whether, as a convention, dharmatā exists during subsequent attainment or not, and over whether primordial wisdom is truly established at the end of analysis or not.

[The Shentong system] asserts that [if] ultimate reality were simply a nonimplicative negation, whereby its nature is not established, it would be an inanimate emptiness. [Shentong Proponents] present [ultimate reality] as being primordial wisdom empty of dualism, as being reflexive awareness.

This is asserted to be the profound view linking the Sūtra and Mantra [systems] .

The two Madhyamaka [systems] renowned as Shentong and Rangtong do not differ in the way they determine all conventional phenomena to be empty, nor do they disagree that the extremes of conceptual elaborations cease during meditative equipoise. Nevertheless, they do differ in terms of the way they use conventional cognitive and verbal expressions during the subsequent state of attainment,⁸⁴⁴ which is when philosophical tenets are distinguished. Simply as a conventional position, [Shentong Proponents] say that dharmatā or thussen exists, and [Rangtong Proponents] say that it does not exist. They also differ in their views of whether nonidual primordial wisdom is truly established or not at the time of final analysis by means of reasonings that analyze for ultimacy.

Shentong Proponents, therefore, assert that imagined and dependent [characteristics] are conventionalities, and the consummate [characteristic] is ultimate reality. They also maintain that to view [ultimate reality] as being simply a nonimplicative negation, whereby its reality is not established, is [to regard ultimate reality as] an inanimate emptiness.⁸⁴⁵ That is the way conventionalities are empty, but it is not the abiding nature of ultimate emptiness. Concisely put, that [ultimate] is primordial wisdom empty of the duality of percept and perceiver; it is intuitive reflexive awareness (*so rang rig pa*). They state that since this way of presenting [the ultimate] is in complete harmony with the thought of the great tantras, it is the profound view linking the Sūtra and Mantra [systems], the pinnacle of Madhyamaka systems.

Now [we will look at] the summary of the essential points in the elimination of the extremes imputed by others [to the Shentong system] as presented by the exalted Tāranātha [in his *Essence of Shentong*]:⁸⁴⁶

There are those who quote the following passage from the *Descent into Lankā Sūtra*:⁸⁴⁷

[Mahāmātī] asked, “If sugatagarbha were to exist with its major and minor marks, would it not be similar to the self of [non-Buddhist] tīrthikas?”⁸⁴⁸ [The Buddha] replied, “It is not similar because it is emptiness.”

They say, “Sugatagarbha, therefore, does not really exist. If it had the major and minor marks and the like, this would be a tīrthika’s system. The space-like complete absence of any existence is called sugatagarbha.”

Such claims [limit] emptiness to mean the absence of reality and identify it as just the complete and utter absence of any existence. [Such ideas] belong to a flawed intellect that is attached to its inferior philosophical tenets. The sūtra states, as the reason why [sugatagarbha] is not similar to the tīrthikas’ [self], that [sugatagarbha] is emptiness, but it does not say that [the reason it is not similar to the tīrthikas’ self] is that it lacks the major and minor marks. Those who claim that sugatagarbha with its clearly evident and perfect major and minor marks is explained to be the provisional meaning are simply deceiving the world with their lies.

The statement that the assertion of [sugata]garbha as permanent belongs to the tīrthikas’ systems again amounts to nothing more than a refutation of the sūtras on [sugata]garbha. It is not feasible to assert that the meaning of permanence [here] is the permanence of being continuous, because samsāra and all percepts and perceivers are the mere permanence of being continuous. Also, if the mere permanence of being continuous were sufficient [to qualify as] permanence, all conditioned phenomena would be permanent.

Some think, “[Sugatagarbha] is impermanent since first it has stains and later it becomes stainless.” From the perspective of the dharmadhātu, it does not have stains at first, nor does it later become stainless. Nevertheless, the mode of having stains and becoming stainless is [simply something that appears] in

relationship to the mindstreams of individuals. Thus, it is not the case that changes in the state of a sentient being result in changes to the state of dharmatā.

Others think, “It is not logical that the primordial wisdom of buddha[hood] exists within the mindstreams of sentient beings.” This, however, contradicts the explicit statement [in the *Highest Continuum*].⁸⁴⁹

Because the primordial wisdom of buddha[hood] is present in all sentient beings . . .

Some say, “It is not feasible that the excellent qualities of buddha[hood] exist within the mindstreams of sentient beings. For example, if the strength of knowing what is the case and what is not the case⁸⁵⁰ were to exist within the mindstreams of sentient beings, it would follow [absurdly] that sentient beings know what is the case and what is not the case.” This statement is incorrect, because we do not say “Whatever is part of the mindstreams of sentient beings is buddha[hood].” If that were the consequence of saying that buddha[hood] and its excellent qualities reside in the mindstreams of sentient beings, would it also follow that when a buddha resides on a throne, the throne cognizes all knowable objects? Therefore, how could the mindstreams of sentient beings—that is, the eight modes of consciousness—be buddha[hood]? The buddha[hood] that resides [in the mindstreams of sentient beings] does not do so in the manner of a conventional support and something supported, [where buddhahood would be what is supported by a sentient being’s mindstream]. It abides in the manner of being ultimate dharmatā.

Additional Topics: Recommendations [cc”]

Most Tibetan teachers say, “This system is Chittamātra,” and regard Maitreya’s texts and Asaṅga and his brother as inferior.

The sun and moon that ornament the sky of the Sage’s teachings are the scriptural traditions of the two chariot[-systems].

The judicious thing is to give up fixed positions in which one repeatedly echoes the constellation[-like] minor texts, and engage [these two systems] in an equal way.

Most earlier and later Tibetan teachers and some ordinary Indian paṇḍitas say, “This system is the Chittamātra philosophical tenet system,” and thus they exclude it from the ranks of Madhyamaka. Many of them go further by conceitedly claiming to have fathomed the thought of the scholars [of this system], when [in fact] all they are doing is [simply] repeating [their own] exegetical system. By stating, “The exalted Maitreya’s scriptural tradition and the noble Asaṅga and his brother are Chittamātra,” they take them to be greatly inferior and the noble Nāgārjuna and others to be greatly superior. On the basis of that, they amass an infinite amount of the [bad] karma of rejecting the dharma.

What equal the sun and moon—which alone ornament the sky of the Sage’s teachings—are none other than the scriptural traditions of the two great chariot[-systems].⁸⁵¹ Therefore, if we align ourselves with those, we will avoid repeatedly echoing the constellation-like minor texts of ordinary paṇḍitas, which involves devoting ourselves to the elaborations of refutations and proofs that rely on many spurious scriptures and reasonings. We will also avoid fixating on biased positions and providing limited explanations, the results of which will only bring ourselves and others into a pit of numerous faults. The supreme traditions of these two chariots do not contradict each other: one emphasizes outer principles, the other inner principles.⁸⁵² Therefore, the judicious thing to do is equally engage their points for study, reflection, and meditation.

The mahāpaṇḍita Śākya Chokden states:⁸⁵³

Without the dharma system of the ālaya and the presentation of the three emptinesses found in the texts of Asaṅga’s positions, how would we explain the bases for purification and the means of purifications, and the presentations of outer, inner, and other found in the texts of the great approach [i.e., the tantras]?

Without [the explanations of] the way nondual primordial wisdom is empty of a nature

that are delineated by Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika texts, how would we give up taking profound and clear primordial wisdom to be real and our conceptual clinging to the sublime deities?

He also says:⁸⁵⁴

In this doctrine, there are two types of Madhyamaka:

- (1) the ultimate essence of the definitive meaning of the texts of the exalted Maitreya; and
- (2) the ultimate essence of the definitive meaning of the texts of the venerable Nāgārjuna.

(1) [The ultimate definitive meaning in Maitreya's teachings] is primordial wisdom, which is devoid of the duality of percepts and perceivers. The sources for this are [Maitreya's five Treatises:] the two *Ornaments*, two *Differentiations*, and *Highest Continuum Śāstra*. The *Differentiation of the Middle and the Extremes Śāstra* establishes this view as the Madhyamaka path, and the *Differentiation of Phenomena and Their Nature Śāstra* presents the stages by which the mind engages that [view and path].

(2) [The ultimate definitive meaning in Nāgārjuna's teachings] is a mere nonimplicative negation, which refutes all conceptually elaborated extremes. The sources for this are [Nāgārjuna's] *Collection of Reasonings*.⁸⁵⁵ What is found in his *Collection of Praises*⁸⁵⁶ is in keeping with Maitreya's Dharma Treatises.

Who were the establishing founders of these [systems]? The two: the venerable Nāgārjuna and the venerable Asaṅga. In what way were these established? As twofold: as the Rangtong system, which determines that both [conventional and ultimate] reality are empty of an essence; and as the Shentong system, which determines that only the nature of conventional [phenomena] is intrinsically empty (*rang stong*), and thereby eliminates conceptual elaborations concerning the ultimate.

Further, there are two [other systems]:

- (1) the system of Āryavimuktisena⁸⁵⁷ and Haribhadra,⁸⁵⁸ which explains the thought of the *Ornament of Clear Realization* according to the Rangtong [perspective]; and

(2) the system of Abhayākaragupta⁸⁵⁹ and Dharmapāla,⁸⁶⁰ which explains the thought of [Nāgārjuna's] *Collection of Reasonings* according to the Shentong.

In sum, all four of these pioneering systems are equal in being Madhyamaka paths, because they are clearly stated to be Madhyamaka systems in the authentic scriptural traditions.

The Rangtong mode is explained to be the Madhyamaka path by masters who are Prāsaṅgika or Svātantrika proponents, because they explain emptiness in terms of the Rangtong-Madhyamaka, [following Nāgārjuna's] statement:⁸⁶¹

Whatever is dependently arisen is explained to be empty.

It is a dependent designation and is itself the middle way.

The Shentong mode is asserted to be the Madhyamaka path by Asaṅga and his brother [Vasubandhu], because they assert emptiness in the Shentong style, [following the *Differentiation of the Middle and the Extremes*].⁸⁶²

Since [imagination] exists, [duality] does not exist, and [imagination of what is unreal] exists [within emptiness, and emptiness within it], this is the middle path.

In this regard, some in the Land of Snows [i.e., Tibet] think, “Madhyamaka, which is one of the four philosophical tenet systems, generally [consists of] the Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika systems. [A system] superior to those could only be a path that is classified as Prāsaṅgika, since [the *Entrance to the Middle Way*] says:⁸⁶³

This profound and frightening suchness will definitely be realized by those who have previously familiarized themselves with it;

but others, even with their vast learning, will not be able to comprehend it.

[I will answer] that [by showing] the comparable application of [the opponent's reason] (*ngo mtshungs*) and the actual state of things (*mal ma*).

First, [the comparable application of the opponent's reason]:

In that case, it would be [equally] reasonable to explain that the supreme type of Madhyamaka is only found in the Shentong mode, because the venerable Asaṅga explained it in that [way], and because he explained that the view of the Rangtong mode is a view of denial (*skur ba 'dëbs pa*) and a view for those of lesser acumen.⁸⁶⁴ In this context of identifying the definitive meaning,⁸⁶⁵ the venerable Asaṅga's scriptures are equally capable of negating or proving the same points that Chandrakīrti's scriptures are capable of negating or proving, because [the Buddha] prophesied that [Asaṅga] would be the master who would distinguish the provisional and definitive meanings in the sūtras. In brief, it is a matter of dispute who represents the Madhyamaka that is the pinnacle of the four systems of philosophical tenets propounded in the noble land [of India], because the Mahāyāna master Chandrakīrti did not explain the Shentong mode as Madhyamaka, and the noble Asaṅga—whose [stature] as a Mahāyāna master of the [Buddhist] doctrine is undisputed and unrivaled—explained that the Rangtong mode is not the scriptural tradition of the Madhyamaka.

Second, [the actual state of things]:

For explaining the thought of Nāgārjuna, the Rangtong exegetical system is superior; and for elucidating the thought of the exalted Maitreya, the Shentong mode is most profound. The scriptures and reasonings of one, therefore, are not able to negate the other.

If we do not look at it that way, we have [to regard] the venerable Asaṅga's scriptures and reasonings as predominant (*dbang btsan pa*), because he was prophesied as one who would attain the

level of a noble being and delineate the definitive meaning, and he was [one of] the first founders of a system of the Mahāyāna. Chandrakīrti did explain that the venerable Asaṅga's exegetical style was not [in keeping with] the thought of Nāgārjuna, but he did not explain that the venerable Asaṅga had not internalized the meaning of Madhyamaka.

These masters [that is, Tāranātha and Shākya Chokden] make a distinction between Chittamātras and Proponents of Cognition (Vijñaptivādins), as is discussed in [*Distinguishing the Two Modes* [and] *Establishing the Unity* [of the Definitive Meaning]].⁸⁶⁶ [The latter] states this in detail:

The explanation that Proponents of Cognition (Vijñaptivādins) and Chittamātras are the same is derived from:

- (1) the confusion of the many Tibetans who accept that all [forms of] awareness and primordial wisdom are necessarily mind and mental events;
- (2) their mistake of not distinguishing primordial wisdom from consciousness; and
- (3) their failure to train properly in dharma terminology of the final teachings [of the Buddha, that is, the teachings of the third dharma wheel].

You who assert that Proponents of Cognition (Vijñaptivādins) and Chittamātras are the same can understand that your position is not logical by simply reflecting on the meaning of passages that you chant, such as the following:

From scriptures, [such as the *Differentiation of the Middle and the Extremes*]:⁸⁶⁷

No phenomenon exists
apart from the dharmadhātu.

From sūtras, [such as the *Abhidharma Sūtra*]:⁸⁶⁸

The expanse of beginningless time
is the source of all phenomena.

From tantras, [the *Hevajra Tantra*].⁸⁶⁹

I pervade all these.

[I] do not see another nature in beings.

Also from tantras:⁸⁷⁰

Outside of the precious mind

there are no buddhas or sentient beings.

[When you reflect on] these sources, the expressions “dharma-dhātu” and so on found in such scriptures must be explained as nondual primordial wisdom and the natural dharmakāya, because the scriptural traditions [of those texts] clearly state that.

This system of philosophical tenets is also called by the name “Madhyamaka” in the sūtras. The *Sūtra on Ultimate Emptiness* says:⁸⁷¹

The absence of one thing in something else is [that latter thing’s] emptiness of that [first thing]. What remains there [i.e., emptiness] exists there. This is the middle path, the correct, unerring view about emptiness.

There are many such statements [in the sūtras]. The *Ornament of the Middle Way* states:⁸⁷²

Therefore, forms and so forth are the mind itself; they are not asserted to be something external.

On the basis of [knowing that appearances are] merely mind, know that external entities do not exist.

On the basis of the mode [of reasoning explained] here, know that even that [mind] is utterly devoid of self-entity.

Nāgārjuna’s *Entrance to the Three Kāyas* says:⁸⁷³

The “middle path” is mere cognition.

If we analyze logically, nothing else is feasible.

Ratnākaraśānti’s [Instructions that] Ornament the Middle Way begins:⁸⁷⁴

Here I will discuss the two truths by means of the logic (*pramāṇa*) and scriptures taught by Maitreya and Asaṅga and presented by Nāgārjuna.

the same objective aspect during their mode of apprehension; (4) their time (*das*): they occur at the same time; and (5) their substance (*rāzas*): they share an equal number of moments of a similar type.

The same list is found in the *Treasury of Abhidharma*, Chapter 2, verse 34bd; see Pruden 1988, 205–6.

303 In this book Jamgön Kongtrul presents the Vaibhāṣhikas' and Sautrāntikas' positions on the two truths as a shared assertion. In Book Seven, Part Two, he presents the Vaibhāṣhika and Sautrāntika views on the two truths separately and as different. One thing this reflects is the different Tibetan views regarding which teachers represent the Sautrāntika system. In this section, Jamgön Kongtrul says that Sautrāntika teachers include Saṅgharakṣita and Śrīlāta, and he makes no mention of Dignāga or Dharmakīrti in the Sautrāntika presentation. However, in Book Seven, Part Two (*TOK*, III:35), he quotes Dharmakīrti's *Commentary on Valid Cognition* (*Pramāṇavārtikakārikā*, *Tshad ma mam 'grei*) as the source of the Sautrāntika definition of the two truths.

304 Chapter 6, verse 4. Toh. 4089; Dg.T. Beijing 79:43. See Pruden 1989, 910.

305 “To halt the perceiving mind” (*blo 'dar ba*) means that the mind no longer identifies the object. For example, when a table is broken up, the mind no longer thinks “table” when looking at the broken bits.

306 In his *Explanation of the “Treasury of Abhidharma”* (Chapter 6, commentary for verse 4), Vasubandhu explains ultimate reality as follows:

Ultimate reality is that which, even when broken up, is engaged by the mind; and it is that which, even [if] the mind eliminates other qualities from it, is [still] engaged by the mind. An example is form. It is possible to reduce that to minute particles, and it is even possible for the mind to eliminate its qualities of taste, [but] there will [still] be the mind that engages the nature of form. The same is the case with feelings and so forth.

gang la boom yang de'i blo 'jug pa kho na yin la/ blos chos gzhom bsal yang de'i blo 'jug pa de ni don dam par yod pa yin te/ dper na gzugs ta bu'o/ de la rdul phra bar tu boom yang rung/ blos ro la sogs pa'i chos bsal kyang rung gzugs kyi rang bzhin gyi blo 'jug pa nyid de/ tshor ba la sogs pa yang de bzhin du bita bar bya'o. Dg.T. Beijing 79:695–6.

Buescher demonstrates (2005, 74) that Śrīlāta (a Sautrāntika) provides a similar definition:

Samghabhadra, in the *Samaya-pradīpika*, quoted the Śthavira sectarian Śrīlāta's definition of the two truths, which also relied upon the idea of substance:

That which exists in many substances is conventional; that which exists in a single substance is ultimate. Moreover, if, when one divides it, the thing (*dharma*) in question loses its original name, it is conventional; if it does not lose it, it is ultimate.

Cox explains (1995, 138) the position of Saṅghabhadra (a Vaibhāṣhika) as follows:

Saṅghabhadra . . . distinguishes two types of existence: existence as a real entity (*dravyasat*), which is equated with absolute existence (*paramārthasat*), and existence as a provisional entity (*prajñaptisat*), equated with conventional existence (*samprisaat*). The former category of real entities includes the ultimate constituent factors such as visible form or feelings, which produce cognition

without depending on anything else. The latter category of provisional entities includes entities such as a pot or an army, which can produce cognition only in dependence upon a real entity that serves as its basis. This dependence upon real entities may be either direct, as in the case of a pot, which depends directly upon the fundamental material elements (*mahābhūta*) of which it is made, or indirect, as in the case of an army, which depends first upon other provisional entities—that is, its human members—and secondarily upon real entities—that is, the ultimate factors of which these humans are composed.

Here, by “dependence,” Saṅghabhadra does not understand causal dependence; all conditioned factors, real entities and provisional entities alike, are causally dependent or are related through conditioning interaction. Rather, “dependence” in the case of a provisional entity refers to the possibility of further analysis; any entity that can be analyzed further into constituent elements is considered “dependent” upon those elements. The possibility of further analysis then becomes the criterion by which conventional (*samprisaatya*) and absolute truth (*paramārthasatya*) are distinguished. If the notion of a particular entity disappears when that entity is broken (e.g., a pot) or can be resolved by cognition into its components (e.g., water), that entity exists only conventionally. Entities that are not subject either to this further material or mental analysis exist absolutely. Thus, actual existence as a real entity (*dravyasat*) is attributed only to the ultimate constituent factors, which are not subject to further analysis.

Buescher (2005, 75) sums up the difference between the views of the Vaibhāṣhikas and Sautrāntikas regarding what is ultimate as follows:

The Vaibhāṣhikas, as the *Abhidharmakośa* made clear, regarded the aggregates, the sources, and the constituents (or “types”) as ultimates, and held that even one atom of “form,” for example, qualified as a “form aggregate” (*rūpaskandha*). On the other hand, the Sautrāntikas as described in the *Abhidharmakośa* (and by Śrīlāta) held that, of these three categories, only the constituents (*dhānu*) were ultimates.

For more on the Vaibhāṣhikas' explanations of what is ultimate, see Pruden 1988, 77–80 and 1989, 910–1; Buescher 2005, 66–83; Cox 1995, 133–58; Mattial 1986, 240–50; Newland 1999, 18–22; and Williams 1981.

307 Capable of performing a function (*arthakriyāsamartham*, *don byed nus pa*): An entity (*dr̥gos po*) performs the function of producing its own specific result, such as later moments of its own continuum or a consciousness perceiving that specific phenomenon. (See Dreyfus 1997, 66.)

Since here Jamgön Kongtrul presents ultimate reality from a perspective that is both Vaibhāṣhika and Sautrāntika, this paragraph combines positions that in Book Seven, Part Two (*TOK*, III:35), he attributes separately. There he says that Vaibhāṣhikas consider the partless moments of cognition and partless minute particles to be ultimate reality, and that the Sautrāntikas' presentation of the two truths is that whatever is ultimately able to perform a function is ultimately existent, and whatever is not ultimately able to perform a function is conventionally existent.

308 Element-derivatives (*'byung 'gyur*) are the five sense objects: visible forms (*rūpa*, *gzugs*), sounds (*śabda*, *sgra*), smells (*gandha*, *dr̥i*), tastes (*rasa*, *ro*), and tangible objects (*sprashṭavya*, *reg bya*).

309 See n. 302.

- 310 The formative forces not associated [with forms or mind] (*viprayuktasamāskāra*, *ldan min 'du byed*)—often shortened in translation to “non-associated formative forces” (and also translated as “non-associated compositional factors” or “non-associated formations”)—are a category of conditioned phenomena and the third of the five bases (the other four being forms, mind, mental events, and unconditioned phenomena).
- The *Treasury of Abhidharma* (Chapter 2, verses 35bcd–36ab) lists fourteen types of formative forces not associated [with forms or mind] (*viprayuktasamāskāra*, *ldan min 'du byed*): (1) attainment (or possession) (*prāpti*, *thob pa*); (2) non-obtainment (or non-possession) (*aprāpti*, *ma thob pa*); (3) homogeneous character (or equal status) (*sabhāgatā*, *skal mnyam*); (4) a state of non-discrimination (*asamjñika*, *'du shes med pa*); (5) absorption (or equipoise) without discrimination (*asamjñisamāpatti*, *'du shes med pa'i snyoms 'jug*); (6) absorption (or equipoise) of cessation (*nirodhasanāpatti*, *'gog pa'i snyoms 'jug*); (7) life-force (or vitality) (*jīvita*, *srog*); (8–11) the four characteristics (*lakṣṭana*, *mishan nyid*) of arising (or of birth) (*ātī*, *skye ba*), aging (*jarā*, *rṣa ba*), duration (*sthiti*, *gras pa*), and impermanence (*anityatā*, *mi rtag pa*); (12) the group of names (*nāmakāya*, *ming gi tshogs*); (13) the group of phrases (*padākāya*, *tshig gi tshogs*); and (14) the group of letters (or of syllables) (*vyāñjanakāya*, *yi ge'i tshogs*).
- See also Pruden 1988, 206–54; and Cox 1995, particularly 67–74. The *Compendium of Abhidharma* lists twenty-three (see Boin-Webb 2001, 18–21), which are also found in Hopkins 1983, 268–71.
- 311 See n. 326.
- 312 The sixteen defining characteristics of the four truths (each truth has four characteristics) are discussed in Chapter 2; see pp. 115–119.
- 313 The four pairs of beings, also called eight kinds of individuals (*skyes bu zung bzhi dang gang zaq ya brgyad*), are approachers and abiders who are stream enterers (*rgyan zhugs zhugs pa dang 'bras gras gnyis*); approachers and abiders who are once returners (*lan cig phyar 'ong zhugs pa dang 'bras gras gnyis*); approachers and abiders who are nonreturners (*phyir mi 'ong zhugs pa dang 'bras gras gnyis*); and approachers and abiders who are arhats (*dgra bcom pa zhugs pa dang 'bras gras gnyis*). They are discussed in A Detailed Explanation of the Gradual Type, pp. 142–149.
- 314 Incalculable aeon (*asamkhyeya-kalpa*, *bskal pa grangs med pa*): “Incalculable” is the name for the highest enumerated number in ancient India. It is the sixtieth in the series and is equivalent to 10^{60} .
- 315 Knowledge of the exhaustion [of defilements] and the knowledge of their [subsequent] nonarising (*kṣhayānupattijñāna*, *zad mi skye shes pa*) are discussed in the *Treasury of Abhidharma*, in Chapter 6, verses 50 and 67ab, and extensively in Chapter 7. (See Pruden 1989, 991, 1023, and 1087–1134.) *GTCD* says:
- The knowledge of the exhaustion [of defilements], one of the ten types of knowledge, is the confidence that one has relinquished all the factors to be abandoned (*zad pa shes pa/ shes pa bcu'i ya gyal zhig ste rang nyid spang bya thams cad spangs zin pa'i gdeng 'thob par byed pa'i shes pa'o*).
 - The knowledge of nonarising, one of the ten types of knowledge, is the knowledge that nonarising suffering is nonarising (*mi skye ba shes pa/ shes pa bcu'i nang gses/ sdug bsral mi skye ba la mi skye bar shes pa'o*).
- 316 These are Buddha Śhākyamuni's first teachers. See Butön's *History of Buddhism* (Obermiller 1932, 26). Note that *MVP* lists Arādha-kālāma for the Tibetan *rGyur tsal*
- byed kyi bu ring phur*, and Udrako-rāmaputra for the Tibetan *Rangs byed kyi bu lhang spyod*, whereas Obermiller (1932, 26) has Arāḍa-kālāma and Udraka Rāmaputra respectively for the same Tibetan.
- 317 The twenty types of saṅgha are grouped as follows: (1–5) the five types of stream enterers; (6–8) the ten types of once returners; (9–18) the ten types of nonreturners; (19) those who have entered the level of an arhat; (20) the rhinoceros-like pratyeke-buddhas (*GTCD*). See also Hopkins 2003, 228–30.
- 318 For some of the ways Sautrāntikas disagree with Vaibhāshikas on this see p. 135. This topic is discussed in the *Treasury of Abhidharma*, Chapter 6, verses 58–60b; see Pruden 1989, 1003–13.
- 319 Examples of their point are that the Buddha Śhākyamuni experienced pain when a thorn pierced his foot and felt ill when he ate some pork. They explain those by saying that the Buddha, like an arhat with remainder, had a remainder of karma.
- 320 See pp. 132–133 for a list of these seven treatises.
- 321 *Uddānavarga*, *Ched du brjod pa'i tshoms*, compiled by Dharmatrāta, who lived some time between 75 BCE and 200 CE (according to Sparham 1986, 19). According to the notes in the Derge Kangyur, Vaibhāshikas considered this to be a sūtra (i.e., the words of the Buddha Śhākyamuni), whereas Sautrāntikas considered it a śāstra (i.e., composed by followers of the Buddha). See *Catalogue of the Nyingma Edition of the sDe-dge bKa'-gyur/bsTan-gyur*, 1:498. As said there, this is “the Northern Buddhist version of the Pāli and Prakrit *Dharmapāda*.” See also the translation by Sparham 1986.
- 322 Among the non-associated formative forces, three are related to this point: the group of names (*nāmakāya*, *ming gi tshogs*), the group of phrases (*padākāya*, *tshig gi tshogs*), and the group of letters (*vyāñjanakāya*, *yi ge'i tshogs*). See Pruden 1988, 250–4; Hopkins 1983, 269; and Cox 1995, 160–3.
- 323 This is the position of the Kashmiri Vaibhāshikas and is discussed in the *Explanation of the “Treasury of Abhidharma,”* Chapter 1, commentary for verse 43. See Pruden 1989, 120–2.
- 324 This is in contrast to the Sautrāntika position that a sense consciousness apprehends an object through the intermediary of its image (or representation; aspect) (*ākāra*, *mam pa*), and does not apprehend the object itself. See Dreyfus 1997, 335–9; and Klein 1998, 100–113.
- 325 The five bases (*mūla*, *gzhi*) are forms (*rūpa*, *gzugs*); mind (*chitta*, *sems*); mental events (*chaitta*, *sems byung*); formative forces not associated [with forms or mind] (*viprayuktasamāskāra*, *ldan min 'du byed*); and unconditioned phenomena (*asamskṛita*, *'dus ma byas*). Vaibhāshikas state that these five are entities (*dngos po*), phenomena (*chos*), existents (*yod pa*), and knowable objects (*shes bya*). They then divide entities into conditioned phenomena (*'dus byas*) and unconditioned phenomena (*'dus ma byas*). Sautrāntikas differ in that they state that phenomena, existents, and knowable objects are equivalent, and then divide phenomena into entities and nonentities (*dngos med*).
- 326 It seems that Jamgön Kongtrul is drawing on a definition of non-associated formative forces, which can be found in Vasubandhu's *Delineation of the Five Aggregates* (*Pañcaskandha-prakarṇa*, *Phung po lnga'i rab tu byed pa*; Toh, 4059; Dg.1: 77:42). There Vasubandhu defines non-associated formative forces as “designations for

states that arise from form or mind” (*gang dag gzugs dang sems las byung ba'i gras skabs la gñags pa*). In Jamgön Kongtrul’s remark “that which bear a state” (*gras skabs can*) are forms, mind, and mental events to which states (*gras skabs*)—that is, the non-associated formative forces—are designated.

The point here is that Vaibhāṣikas state that non-associated formative forces are substantially existent and that they have the same status as forms, minds, and mental events (both of which are positions that the Sautrāntikas do not agree with). I am grateful to Artemus Engle for help with this passage and directing me to this source.

327 Vaibhāṣikas consider whatever is substantially existent (*dravyasat, rāzas yod*) to be ultimate reality (*paramārthasatya, don dam bden pa*). See also n. 306.

328 Space, analytical cessations, and nonanalytical cessations. See n. 279.

329 A determination (*parichēda, yongs gcod*) is the result of a negation, which may be either an implicative negation or a nonimplicative negation, and thus a determination (or conclusion) may be either an affirmation or a complete negation. Generally, this term is used to indicate the result of an implicative negation, and as such it refers to the ascertainment of something that remains after the exclusion of other features. For example, if you mistakenly take a striped rope to be a snake, but upon closer inspection see that it is not a snake, you have eliminated, or negated, the rope being a snake, and you have determined the object to be a rope. Note that this term is also translated as “positive determination” or “positive inclusion.”

330 Jamgön Kongtrul’s wording is precise: unconditioned phenomena are not conditioned entities which perform functions. Other Tibetan commentators explain that Vaibhāṣikas assert that unconditioned phenomena do perform functions although their function is not as defined for conditioned entities (see n. 307). For example, the Geluk commentator Ngawang Palden explains (Hopkins 2003, 242):

Among the four Buddhist tenet systems, only this system asserts that a permanent phenomenon such as unconditioned space is able to perform a function and thus is an effective thing. For instance, the lack of obstructive contact that space affords performs the function of allowing movement to take place. Since both permanent and impermanent phenomena are asserted to be effective things in this system, functionality is not limited to producing causal sequences as it is in the higher Buddhist schools; instead, as with unconditioned space, functionality can refer to allowing or opening the way for something to occur.

Jamiyang Shepa (*Jam dbyangs bzhad pa*) says (Buescher 2005, 105):

Vaibhāṣikas assert that the entity of an analytical cessation is a substantially existent, permanent, and virtuous, unconditioned thing. For they assert it as unconditioned in the sense of lacking causes and conditions, a thing (*bhāva*) in that it performs the function of causing an affliction to cease. . . .

331 Chapter 2, verse 55d. Toh. 4089; Dg.T. Beijing 79:13. See Pruden 1988, 278.

332 Five faculties (*dhang po lnga*): faculty of faith (*dad pa'i dhang po*); faculty of exertion (*brison gras kyi dhang po*); faculty of mindfulness (*dran pa'i dhang po*); faculty of samādhi (*ling rge 'dein gyi dhang po*); and faculty of wisdom (*shes rab kyi dhang po*). See Pruden 1988, 157.

333 Simply put, this means that although Vaibhāṣikas negate the existence of a self of persons, they are incapable of understanding that this nonimplicative negation is

the ultimate reality (or thusness, *tathātā, de bzhiñ nyid*) of all phenomena, because for them all phenomena are substantially existent.

334 The four great venerable ones (*mahābhādanta, bisun pa chen po*) are Dharmatrāta (*Chos skyob*), Vasumitra (*db'byg bshes*), Ghoṣhaka (*dByangs srog*), and Buddhadeva (*Sangs rgyas lha*), all of whom lived around the first century CE. The views of these four masters are often cited by Vasubandhu in his *Explanation of the “Treasury of Abhidharma,”* and they are said to be particularly important within the Vaibhāṣika abhidharma tradition in that they represent four different interpretations of how phenomena exist in the three time periods. Of the four, only Vasumitra’s works are found in the Tengyur. See Pruden 1989, 808–10; Willemen et al. 1998, 21–3; and Cox 1995, 139–41.

335 Saṅghabhadra (*Dus bzang*) (late fourth to early fifth century CE) was a Kashmiri Vaibhāṣika (or Sarvāstivādin) and contemporary of Vasubandhu, whose abhidharma works, **Nyūyānusāra* and **Abhidharmasamavayavāpikā*, are only extant in Chinese translations by Hsüan-tsang. A shorter work by Saṅghabhadra that is a brief summary of Vasubandhu’s *Treasury of Abhidharma* was translated into Tibetan: *An Explanation of the Treatise of the “Treasury of Abhidharma” (Abhidharmakośhāstra-kārikā-bhāṣya, Chos mngon pa mdzod kyi bstan bcos kyi tshig le'ur byas pa'i rnam par bshad pa)* (Toh. 4091). See Cox 1995, 53–60; and Cox 1998, 240–9.

336 *Go cha mtha' yas*. On the basis of the Tibetan, I tentatively identify this person as Anantavarman, who was the author of a commentary on the *Great Exposition (Mahāvibhāṣha)*. See Cox 1998, 234.

337 For a good discussion of the name Saurāntika, see Honjō 2003, 321–328. He concludes (324) that “Saurāntikas are those scholars who belong to the Sarvāstivādin sect, and who claim that Abhidharma was not expounded by the Buddha.”

338 *Ye shes la 'jug pa*.

339 *Rab tu byed pa*.

340 *Chos kyi phung po*.

341 Or *Prajñāpābhāṣya*.

342 *gDags pa'i bstan bcos*. This is said to be the only one of these seven that was translated into Tibetan (Cox 1998, 139n2); it is found in the Peking canon (nos. 5587–9) (Hirakawa 1998, 132) but is not included in Toh. This is the only one of the seven that was partially translated into Chinese (the other six were fully translated into Chinese).

343 *rNam shes kyi tshogs*.

344 Or possibly Devakṣema (*Lha skyid*).

345 *'Gro ba'i rnam grangs*. Note that TOK, II:473.4, *bGro ba'i rnam grangs*, should be *'Gro ba'i rnam grangs*. (TN)

346 *Khams kyi tshogs*.

347 For overviews of these texts, see Buswell and Jainsi 1996, 100–110; and Cox 1998, 171–229. Apart from Sanskrit fragments for some of these works and the *Prajñāpābhāṣya*, these texts only exist in Chinese translation.

348 This seems to be derived from Vasubandhu’s *Explanation of the “Treasury of Abhidharma,”* Chapter 1, commentary for verse 43d. See Dg.T. Beijing 79:123; and Pruden 1988, 122.

- 349 For a discussion of the meaning and explanations of “hidden” (*lkog na mo*), see Dreyfus 1997, 416–27.
- 350 Image (*ākāra, nam pa*) is also translated as “aspect” or “representation.” See Dreyfus 1997, 335–9; and Klein 1998, 100–113.
- 351 Jamgön Kongtrül’s wording implies that there are different views on which of the mental events are substantially existent, but I have not found the source for this comment.
- 352 Such imputedly existent entities (*brags yod kyī dngos po*) are formative forces not associated [with forms or mind]. See n. 310.
- 353 This is a case where a determination (or what is determined) (*pariścheda, yongs god*) is the outcome of a nonimplicative negation. (AL.TG.)
- 354 The meditative concentration of resting at ease in the present life (*mihong chos bder gnas kyī bsam gtan*) is one of three types of meditative concentration listed in Kongtrül 1998, 202 (TOK, II:124–5). The other two are the meditation aimed at acquiring good qualities (*yon tan sgrub pa'i bsam gtan*), and the meditation of working for the welfare of others (*sems can gyi don la dñigs pa'i bsam gtan*).
- 355 The *Treasury of Abhidharma* (Chapter 6, verse 56a) states that there are six types of arhats, one of which is called “those who regress” (*parihānadhārman, yongs su nyams pa'i chos can*). The *Explanation of the “Treasury of Abhidharma”* contains a lengthy discussion of these types and whether they can regress or not. Sautrāntikas argue their point by saying, “If it is possible for one to regress from the state of an arhat, why did the Bhagavat say an arhat could only regress from the higher mental state [i.e., meditative concentration] that abides in the ease, or bliss, of this life? Therefore, the liberation of all arhats is to be considered unswerving” (*gal te yang dgra bcom pa nyid las yongs su nyams pa srid pa zhig tu gyur na/ ci' phyir bcom ldan 'das kyes thong ba'i chos la bde bar gnas par lhag pa'i sems las byung ba dng kho na las yongs su nyams par gyur bar gsungs par gyur te/ de'i phyir dgra bcom pa thams cad kyī nam par grol ba ni mi gyo ba yin par khong du chud do*) (Dg.T. Beijing 79:759). See Pruden 1989, 1000–10, particularly 1006–7.
- 356 Valid cognition (*pramāna, tshad mo*): For a definition of valid cognition, see n. 717. For the four forms of valid cognition, see Chapter 10, p. 225; for the forms accepted by Svātantrikas, see n. 676. See also Khenpo Tsültrim Gyamtso 1996b/2000; Dreyfus 1997, 285–327; and Dunne 2004, 15–35.
- 357 I am reading *de bzhin*, “like that,” as *de bzhin nyid*, “thusness” (TOK, II:474.18), since that fits the pattern of Jamgön Kongtrül’s commentary. This statement is in contrast to his point about Vaibhāṣikas in the previous section: “. . . they are not able to posit that the nonimplicative negation that is the simple negation of the self of persons is thusness (*tathātā, de bzhin nyid*)” (TOK, II:472.15). (This reading was confirmed by AL.TG.)
- 358 Saṅgharakṣita (*dGe 'dun srung ba*) (early sixth century). According to Tārānātha’s *History of Buddhism in India*, Saṅgharakṣita was a student of Nāgāmītra and a teacher of Buddhapālita and Vimuktasena. (See Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya 1970, 151, 186, and 188.) None of his works are included in the Tengyur.
- 359 Shrilāta (*dPal len*) (330–410 CE) is thought to have been an older contemporary of Vasubandhu and Saṅghabhadra. Traditionally he is said to have been a student of Kumārāla and a teacher of Vasubandhu. (See Cox 1995, 41.) His works are not included in the Tengyur.

- 360 Traditionally it is said that in his *Explanation of the “Treasury of Abhidharma,”* Vasubandhu presents the Sautrāntika point of view, often in the form of a discussion or debate with Vaibhāṣikas. Vasubandhu’s *Explanation of the “Treasury of Abhidharma”* and its commentaries were, and still are, Tibetan scholars’ main source for the Sautrāntika view.
- 361 Shākyaprabha says in his *Luminous (Prabhāvatī, 'Od ldan)* (Toh. 4125; Dg.T. Beijing 93:415) that the Sarvāstivādin was the single original order from which the other orders split. Bhāvaviveka says in Chapter 4 of his *Blaze of Reasoning (Tarkajvālā, r'fog ge 'bar ba)* (Toh. 3856; Dg.T. Beijing 58:361) that the two root orders were the Shāviras and Mahāsāṅghikas. In the same text, Bhāvaviveka says (Dg.T. Beijing 58:364) that another presentation is that there were three root orders: Shāviras, Mahāsāṅghikas, and Vibhājyavādins. See also Bareau 1989; Dutt 1978; Hopkins 2003, 210–18; and Obermiller 1932, 94–7.
- 362 This is the presentation of Vinītadeva in his *Compendium on the Different Orders (Samayabhedoparacanachakre Nīkāyabhedopadeshanasamgraha, gZhung tha dad pa rim par bkag pa'i khor lo las sde pa tha dad pa bstan pa bsdus pa)* (Toh. 4140; Dg.T. Beijing 93:1166–71). In his *History of Buddhism (Chos 'byung)*, Butön says (Obermiller 1932, 95) that “Vinītadeva and the master of *Varṣāgāra-pṛicchinā* assert that there were four root orders.” In Hopkins 2003, 210, the latter master is identified as Padma (not to be confused with Padmasambhava from Odiyāna), and Hopkins (2003, 1028) identifies the text as *dGe shul gyi dang po'i lo dri ba* (P5634, vol. 127) and *dGe slong gi dang po'i lo dri ba* (P5649, vol. 127). For the subdivisions of the four orders according to Padma, see Hopkins 1983, 718.
- 363 In this section I believe that Jamgön Kongtrül has abbreviated Mūlasarvāstivādins twice to Sarvāstivādins (as is often done in Tibetan histories and is done by Butön, upon whom Jamgön Kongtrül draws heavily); however, this should not give the impression that these terms are necessarily to be used interchangeably. Dessein says (Willemen et al. 1998, 88) that “the Sarvāstivāda and Mūlasarvāstivāda communities seem to have been two independent monastic communities.” Cox notes (1995, 45n38) that Schmithausen “argues that even though no consensus has yet been reached about the relationship between the Sarvāstivādins and Mūlasarvāstivādins, the simplest explanation for systematic differences and similarities in their literature is to assume that they were separate but interacting groups with their own progressively revised and mutually influenced collections.” Yamabe (2003, 225–6) says, “Concerning the exact relationship between the appellations ‘Sarvāstivāda’ and ‘Mūlasarvāstivāda,’ Enomoto Fumio has recently suggested that the word ‘Mūlasarvāstivāda’ represents the Sarvāstivādin claim that the Sarvāstivāda was the root (*mūla*) of the other sects; thus, according to him, ‘Mūlasarvāstivāda’ does not refer to a subset of the Sarvāstivāda tradition.” See above n. 284. For more on these schools, see Willemen et al. 1998, xi–xiii; and Cox 1995, 23–9.
- 364 The following presentation draws on Butön’s *History of Buddhism* (Obermiller 1932, 96–7) and Pawo Tsuk-lak Trengwa’s *Feast for Scholars: A History of the Dharma (Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston; 1:62–7)* but not exclusively (e.g., some of the information on patch numbers, symbols, and name endings is different, for which Jamgön Kongtrül says he followed “Atisha’s exegesis (*gsung sgras*),” a source I have not been able to identify).
- 365 The Sanskrit for the name endings is based on MVP.
- 366 The presentation of tenets for this order and the other three is derived from Vinītadeva’s *Compendium on the Different Orders* (Dg.T. Beijing 93:1167–71).

367 Prakṛita (or Prakṛita) (*Rang bzhin gyi skad*) is the name for Middle Indo-Aryan languages that began as vernacular dialects and eventually developed into literary languages. It includes regional dialects such as Magadhi.

368 The ascetic practices (*dvādaśa dhāta guṇāḥ, sbyangs pa'i yon tan*) are twelve: [wearing] robes made of rags (*phyag dar khrod pa*); [wearing] the three dharma robes (*chos gos gum pa*); [wearing] felt robes (*phying pa ba dang*); [eating one's meal on] one seat (*stan gcig pa*); begging for alms (*bsod snyoms pa*); not taking food after [having risen from one's seat] (*zas phyis mi len pa*); [dwelling in] a hermitage (*dgon pa ba*); [dwelling in] a forest (*shing drang ba*); [dwelling in] the open (*bla gab med pa*); [dwelling in] charnel grounds (*dar-khrod pa*); [remaining in] the sitting posture (*tsog pu ba*); and [sleeping] wherever one happens to be (*gshi ji bzhin pa*) (*GTCD* and Rigdzin 1986/1993). For a similar list, see also Nānamoli 1979, 59.

369 Mahāśāṅhikas differ from Sarvāstivādins on this point. The latter state that the sixteen moments of seeing the four truths occur gradually. See the *Explanation of the "Treasury of Abhidharma"*, Chapter 6, commentary on verse 27ab for a reference to this difference in views (Pruden 1989, 947 and 1057n169). See also Dutt 1978, 88.

370 Supreme qualities (*chos mchog*) is the fourth and highest stage of the path of junction (*shyor lam*).

371 Pishācha (or Pisaca) (*Sha za'i skad*), also called Dard languages, is a group of closely related Indo-Iranian languages spoken in Pakistan, Kashmir, and Afghanistan.

372 According to the *Vaibhāṣhikas'* *abhidharma* teachings, mind (*chitta, sems*) and mental events (*chaitta, sems byung*) are interrupted during the absorption of cessation (*nirodhasamāpatti, 'yog snyoms*). This was not, however, a universally accepted explanation. See Cox 1995, 113–7; and Schmithausen 1987, 19–20.

373 Apabhramsha (or Apabhramsa) (*Zur chag gi skad*) is the name for languages of Northern India spoken in approximately the third to fifth centuries, which differ from literary Prakrit and evolved into modern languages like Gujarati and Bengali.

374 Inexplicable self [or person] (**avakavya puḍgala, brjod du med pa'i bdag*): Note that the Tibetan term *brjod du med pa'i bdag* is “inexplicable self,” whereas the likely Sanskrit equivalent, **avakavya puḍgala*, is “inexplicable person.” In translating this as “inexplicable self [or person],” I am following Duerlinger 2003, 61n29:

The term, *avakavya*, has been variously translated into English. Most of its translations are meant to convey the idea of being incapable of being spoken about or described. Nowhere, I believe, do the Puḍgalavādins [Proponents of Persons] define the term in this way. The meaning of the term is “inexplicable,” i.e., incapable of being explained as either other than or the same in existence as the phenomena in dependence upon which it is conceived.

Williams and Tribe sum up (2000, 126) the position advocated by this school regarding an inexplicable self of persons:

Adherents of the *puḍgala* [person] claim that it is neither the same as nor different from the aggregates. If it were the same as the aggregates then the *puḍgala* would be conditioned, and when the aggregates were destroyed the person would be destroyed. This would be annihilationist, . . . On the other hand if the *puḍgala* were different from the aggregates it would be unconditioned, in fact a Self like the *ātman*, and subject to all the Buddhist criticisms of the concept of a

Self. This would be to fall into the great mistake of eternalism. Thus the *puḍgala* is neither identical to nor different from the aggregates, and neither conditioned nor unconditioned. In fact, it is said to be ‘indefinable’ (*avakavya*).

Most of our understanding of the Sammitīyas’ views of an inexplicable self [or person] come from the ninth chapter of Vasubandhu’s *Treasury of Abhidharma*, where he devotes one section of his refutation of a self to refuting the Vātsīputriyas’ assertions of an inexplicable person. Vātsīputriyas, who are one of the five Sammitīya orders, are referred to by Vasubandhu as Puḍgalavādins. Proponents of Persons. See Pruden 1990, 1314–42. For an in-depth study of this chapter and the views of the Vātsīputriyas, see Duerlinger 2003.

375 Dutt says (1978, 207n1) “. . . The Sammitīyas [sic] count in all the fourteen moments instead of Sarvāstivādins’ sixteen; so the thirteenth moment of the Sammitīyas corresponds to the fifteenth of the Sarvāstivādins.”

376 *Prātimokṣha-sūtra, So sor thar pa'i mdo*. Toh. 2.

377 For a discussion of the present-day ceremony (*da lta'i cho go*) and the original ceremony (*sngon chog*) for conferring monastic ordination, see Kongtrul 1998, 89–90.

378 Part 2, Chapter 4, verses 59–60:

Because it emanates and is a firm abode,
the emanation (*nirmāṇa*) chakra is the Sthaviras.
Because it is the source for propounding the dharma,
the dharmachakra is the Sarvāstivādins.

Since the throat is honored by all,
the [sam]bhogachakra is the Sammitīyas.
Since great bliss resides at the head,
the chakra of bliss is the Mahāśāṅhikas.
What are called “the orders” refer to the body.

gang phyir sprul pa gnas brtan phyir/ sprul pa'i 'khor lor gnas brtan nyid/ chos ni smra bas byung ba'i phyir/ chos kyi 'khor lor thams cad yod/ gang phyir mgin par kun bkur phyir/ longs spyod 'khor lo kun bkur nyid/ gang phyir bde chen ngor gnas pas/ bde ba'i 'khor lo dge 'dun che/ sde pa zhes bya skur ru brjod. Dg.K. 418, 21b.4.

379 The verse 52ab in the fifth chapter of the *Kālacakra Tantra* states:

The lord of victors proclaims the Sarvāstivādins’ [doctrine] from his front [face], and the Sammitīyas’ from his right one. From his rear face, he speaks the Sthaviras’ [teachings], and from his left one, the Mahāśāṅhikas’.

rgyal ba'i bdag pos mdun nas thams cad yod par smra ba gsungs te g.yas nas mang pos bkur ba'o/ rgyab kyi zhal nas gnas brtan pa ste slar yang dge 'dun phal chen pa ni g.yon gyi zhal nas so. Dg.T. Beijing 6:200.

380 *Nikāyabhedopadeshanasāraṅgraha, sDe pa zha dad bklegs pa'i 'khor lo*. Toh. 4140; Dg.T. Beijing 93:1166–7.

381 *Pūrvaśailas, S'har gyi ri bo pa*, Eastern Mountain Ones.

382 *Aparashailas, Nub kyi ri bo pa*, Western Mountain Ones.

383 *Haimavatās, Gang rir gnas pa*, Himalaya-Dwellers.

The RI-ME
PHILOSOPHY

of Jamgön Kongtrul the Great

A STUDY OF THE BUDDHIST
LINEAGES OF TIBET

Ringu Tulku

Edited by Ann Helm



SHAMBHALA
BOSTON & LONDON
2006

*The unborn nature itself is also not there,
Because there is no thing which is unborn.
There is no relative and no absolute.
There are no buddhas and no beings.*

*There is no view and nothing to meditate on.
There is no conduct and no result.
The mind is the meditation;
The mind free of concepts rests in its own place.*

*There is nothing that recognizes and nothing that is distracted.
There are no characteristics, and the meditation is very clear.*

This quotation shows the ultimate view, in which all fabricated characteristics have completely dissolved.

Shentong Madhyamaka

THE SOURCES OF SHENTONG

As mentioned earlier, Jamgön Kongtrul divides Sutra Madhyamaka into the two categories of Rangtong, “empty of self,” and Shentong, “empty of other.” The Shentong view is the essence of the third-turning teachings on buddha nature, which are elaborated in twenty different sutras. These sutras were explained by the regent and future buddha, Lord Maitreya, in the latter four of his *Five Treatises of Maitreya*. These latter four treatises are the *Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras*, *Distinguishing Phenomena and the True Nature*, *Distinguishing the Middle and the Extremes*, and the *Sublime Continuum*.

The holders of the Shentong view also claim as their source the third-turning teachings written by Arya Nagarjuna called the *Collection of Praises*. In these texts Nagarjuna taught this view at three levels: praising the nature and knowing the nature at the level of the ground; praising skillful means and wisdom at the level of the path; and praising the individual three kayas and the view of the nature at the level of the result.

Commentaries on these treatises and this system of teaching and learning were fully expounded by Asanga and his brother Vasubandhu,

the master Chandragomin, and their followers. Later on, Shantipa and others spread this approach even more widely. In Tibet, many of the third-turning sutras and shastras were translated during both the earlier and later spreadings of Buddhism in Tibet.

During the later spreading, the main teaching lineage for the latter four treatises of Maitreya came down from Ngok Lotsawa, and the main practice lineage came down from Tsen Khawoche. The great translator Ngok Lotsawa received teachings on Maitreya’s latter four treatises and their commentaries from the Kashmiri master Sajjana, and Ngok later taught these extensively in Tibet. Tsen Khawoche, who was a student of the first tertön in Tibet, Drapa Ngönshé, also received the teachings from Khache Sajjana on the *Sublime Continuum* and other treatises. Tsen Khawoche passed on these teachings to Changrawa and others, and this teaching lineage continued for a long time. The writing of Situ Chökyi Jungne describes the approaches of Ngok and Tsen Khawoche:

The lineage of Ngok Lotsawa explains Maitreya’s teachings as Madhyamaka, and the lineage of Tsen Khawoche explains them as Chittamatra. In Tsen Khawoche’s writing, consciousness is asserted to be free of the duality of perceiver and perceived; it is self-aware, self-luminous, truly established, and the cause of buddhahood.

In this way Situ Chökyi Jungne affirmed that Tsen Khawoche followed the Chittamatra view when he asserted consciousness to be self-knowing and truly established.

In general, Indian scholars such as Vasubandhu, Dignaga, and Sthiramati explained the books of Maitreya as being Chittamatra treatises, and this interpretation spread widely. There was also a lineage of explanation that stemmed from the great siddha Maitripa, which was conveyed as a special hearing lineage for highly capable students. This lineage evolved in Tibet through Su Ga-we Dorje and Tsen Khawoche, who passed this teaching on to the siddha Yumowa, who was the first author to write on the latter four books of Maitreya according to the Shentong view. Then, Dölpopa Sherap Gyaltzen, who was born in the Water Dragon year of 1292, commented on Yumowa’s writing, and he is considered to be the founder of the Shentong tradition. It is generally

understood that before Dölpopa there was no terminology of “Rangtong” and “Shentong.”

Later on, Serdok Panchen Shakya Chogden, Jetsun Taranatha, and many others expounded the special points that constitute the Shentong philosophy. However, Kongtrul says that previously, Karmapa Rangjung Dorje and Longchenpa had already clearly stated the main points of Shentong. Although Rangjung Dorje and Longchenpa did not use the terminology of Shentong, Jamgön Kongtrul says they asserted the same definitive view. Later on, Minling Terchen Gyurme Dorje and his brother Lochen Dharma Shri, along with Situ Chökyi Jungne and their followers, called the Shentong view “the tradition of Great Madhyamaka, the definitive meaning that goes beyond Chittamatra.” They held the Shentong view very dearly, and they clarified it and spread it.

THE VIEWS OF SHAKYA CHOVDEN AND DÖLPOPA

It is said that even within the Shentong tradition there are slightly different ways of teaching it. Jamgön Kongtrul summarizes these in two main views, those of Silung Panchen Shakya Chogden and Jonang Kunkhyen Dölpopa Sherap Gyaltzen. First, Shakya Chogden teaches two levels of Shentong: that the first three books of Maitreya reflect Yogachara Madhyamaka, and the last, the *Sublime Continuum*, reflects the definitive, ultimate Madhyamaka. These two approaches to Madhyamaka have no real difference in their views; the difference is that the first three books of Maitreya do not mention some of the points covered in the *Sublime Continuum*, and they teach that ultimately there are three distinct yanas—the Shrivakayana, the Pratyekabuddhayana, and the Bodhisattvayana.

The *Sublime Continuum* teaches that ultimately there is only one yana, and that each yana leads to the next one. Because there are different levels of disciples, the *Sublime Continuum* discusses the ordinary disciples’ level of ignorance and habitual tendencies, as well as the extraordinary disciples’ level of rebirth through undefiled karma. Disciples begin by clearing their doubts through study and contemplation, and gradually actualize the true meaning through meditation. In the *Sublime Continuum* these three ways of cultivating wisdom are all stages of a single path and not segregated into separate yanas.

Generally, most Tibetan scholars would agree that teaching the three yanas as totally separate is not in keeping with Madhyamaka. However, the masters who hold this position say that a teacher is not excluded from the Madhyamaka system just because he teaches that arhats can enter parinirvana without remainder and never enter the Mahayana path. They say that the system of Madhyamaka is defined on the basis of its view, not on the basis of how the path to enlightenment is defined. The master Kamalashila gives three points that define the Madhyamaka view: all phenomena are of one taste in being empty, all sentient beings have buddha nature, and everyone has the capacity to become enlightened. Even those who teach the three yanas as separate would agree on these three points.

Jamgön Kongtrul contrasts Shakya Chogden’s understanding with that of the great Jonangpa, Dölpopa, who says that the five books of Maitreya have no difference in their view. Most Tibetan scholars think that the *Ornament of Clear Realization* is a Rangtong text, but Dölpopa disagrees. He also does not think there is a lesser level of Shentong for the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas who hear and contemplate the teachings, and a greater level of Shentong for the bodhisattvas who actualize the teachings in meditation. Dölpopa says there is only one level of Shentong, that no one would say that ultimately there are three separate yanas since all beings have the potential for full enlightenment.

Dölpopa says that many Tibetan scholars think the first three books of Maitreya are not Madhyamaka but Chittamatra, and in particular, the part of the Chittamatra school called the False Aspectarians. He says that the designations of False Aspectarians and True Aspectarians were imputed by the Tibetans. The treatises of Maitreya do question whether the mind that appears as subject and object is true or false, but there were never separate tenet systems in India called the False Aspectarians and the True Aspectarians.

Silungpa Shakya Chogden strongly posits the *Sublime Continuum* as a Madhyamaka text. He reasons in this way:

There is no scripture or reasoning that establishes the *Sublime Continuum* as a Chittamatra text, and within the *Sublime Continuum* there is no scripture or reasoning given which validates that assertion. If one can apply scripture and reasoning from outside sources to establish one point and criticize

another, then there is no teaching that can be established as totally Madhyamaka. Maitreya and Asanga say that the view expressed in the *Sublime Continuum* is Madhyamaka, and that should be enough to establish it as Madhyamaka, since there could not be a higher authority on the text than its authors.

Nagarjuna's texts are established as Madhyamaka because Bhavaviveka and Kamalashila say that Nagarjuna was an arya, a highly realized being, who was predicted by the Buddha. If that reasoning is valid, then since Maitreya and Asanga were also aryas and predicted by the Buddha, then it is appropriate for the *Sublime Continuum* to be Madhyamaka as well.

In the *Sublime Continuum*, from among the three natures, the perfected nature is said to be the ultimate truth. If someone says that a reference to the perfected nature shows this text is not Madhyamaka, that is not a sufficient reason. There are many Tibetan scholars who say that the emptiness which is a nonaffirming negation is the ultimate truth. But then that understanding would similarly not qualify as Madhyamaka, because according to Madhyamaka the definition of ultimate truth is being free of all elaborations.

According to Maitreya and Asanga's own system, there are no other treatises except the *Sublime Continuum* which give the real Madhyamaka view. This is said within the *Sublime Continuum* itself, as well as in other texts such as the *Four Collections* and Asanga's two compendia, the *Compendium of Abhidharma* and the *Compendium of Mahayana Commentaries*. Furthermore, the third-turning teachings clearly state that one should not take literally the sutras which say that all phenomena are essenceless. Taking them too literally would make one a nihilist, because that view lacks wisdom and clear light.

THE SHENTONG VIEW OF THE GROUND MADHYAMAKA

In general, all the Madhyamaka systems accept the view that the ground is the union of the two truths, the path is the union of the two accumulations, and the result is the union of the two kayas. There are

small differences in the way the two truths are stated by the different groups of Madhyamaka, such as Prasangka, Svatantrika, Rangtong, Shentong, and so on. To clarify the Shentong view, I will give Jamgön Kongtrul's explanation of the Shentong way of describing the ground as the union of the two truths.⁸

The two truths are the relative truth and the ultimate truth. First, to clarify the relative truth: consciousness exists on the relative level as impure, mistaken perception of the arising of various appearances. Although appearances are there, the way they are grasped dualistically, as a subject who is perceiving objects, is merely imputed by the mind. These imputations do not exist, even as relative truth. Therefore, relative truth is free of the two extremes of true existence and true nonexistence. Since consciousness is there on the relative level, then the extreme of nihilism is avoided; and since the perceiving subject and perceived objects are not true, and all interdependent arising is merely imputation, then the extreme of eternalism is avoided.

Next, the ultimate truth is the primordial wisdom of emptiness free of elaborations. Primordial wisdom is there in its very nature and is present within the impure, mistaken consciousness. Even while consciousness is temporarily stained, it remains in the wisdom nature. The defilements are separable and can be abandoned because they are not the true nature. Therefore, the ultimate truth is also free of the two extremes of nihilism and eternalism. Since emptiness is truly established, then the extreme of nihilism is avoided; and since all phenomena and concepts of subject-object grasping do not truly exist, then the extreme of eternalism is avoided. It is said in *Distinguishing the Middle and the Extremes*:

Impure conceptual mind exists.

But duality does not exist in that;

Emptiness exists in that

And that exists in that.

That is not empty nor nonempty.

That is how everything is explained.

*In relation to what exists, does not exist, and exists,
That is the path of the Middle Way.*

In addition, the *Treasury of Knowledge* says:

*The relative is merely deluded appearance, empty of
nature.*

The true nature is unchanging and not empty of nature.

The perceiving subject and perceived objects of the relative level are only deluded appearances arising; they have no reality of their own. Deluded appearance is empty of its own nature, and it is impossible for something to be established on the basis of another's nature. Deluded appearances are empty all the time, so there are no things that are not empty.

The primordial wisdom nature, the dharmata, always exists in its own nature and never changes, so it is never empty of its own nature and it is there all the time.

THE SHENTONG UNDERSTANDING OF THE THREE NATURES

The *Treasury of Knowledge* also says:

*Although the imaginary nature does not exist at all, the
dependent nature exists on the relative level.*

*The perfected nature does not exist on the relative level,
but it exists on the ultimate level.*

If this is true, then what about the statements in the sutras that the dharmadhatu, the sphere of reality, is also empty? Yes, it is said that everything is empty, because everything that is other than primordial wisdom—which means everything that is fabricated or an aspect of subject-object perception—is empty. Every characteristic placed on primordial wisdom is empty. That is why we say that everything is empty or emptiness.

In general, the Shentong school categorizes all phenomena into the three natures of the imaginary, the dependent, and

the perfected nature. First, the imaginary nature is defined as whatever is grasped by mental designations. This includes nonentities, like the sky; objects that one thinks about; and the relationships between names and objects, such as grasping the name as being the object, or mistaking the object for the name. Characteristics such as outer and inner, center and edge, big and small, good and bad, directions and time—all the things that are imputed by the mind and that can be grasped by the mind—are the imaginary nature.

The second of the three natures, the dependent nature, is defined as just awareness or as consciousness, which arises as the basis for the perceiving subject and perceived objects. It is called “dependent” because appearances are dependent on the habitual tendencies created by ignorance.

The third nature, the perfected nature, is defined as self-aware, self-luminous, and free of all fabrications. It is the dharmata, or nature of reality; the dharmadhatu, or sphere of reality; the tathata, or suchness; and the ultimate truth—it has many synonymous names.

The imaginary nature and dependent nature are equal in being untrue, deluded appearances, relative, and false. They are classified separately because the imaginary nature is not there, even on the level of relative truth, but the dependent nature is there as relative truth. The perfected level is not there on the level of relative truth but is there on the level of the ultimate truth.

*These three exist as imputed, exist as substantial, and
exist as unfabricated.*

*They are the emptiness of the nonexistent, the existent,
and the ultimate.*

*Their characteristics, arising, and ultimate essence do
not exist.*

As the root verse summarizes, the imaginary nature exists through imputation, the dependent nature exists as substantial, and the perfected nature does not exist in these two ways but

is beyond fabrications. The imaginary nature is the emptiness of what does not exist, the dependent nature is the emptiness of what does exist, and the perfected nature is the emptiness of the ultimate.

Jetsun Maitreya explains:

*If you understand the emptiness of what is nonexistent,
And likewise the emptiness of what is existent,
And the emptiness of the nature,
Then it is said that you understand emptiness.*

Furthermore, in the imaginary nature, the characteristics are essenceless; in the dependent nature, what arises is essenceless; and in the perfected nature, the ultimate is essenceless. There are three aspects of the essence and three aspects of essencelessness. Through these, all phenomena are taught to be natureless.

The *Treasury of Knowledge* goes on to say:

*Therefore, every phenomena is pervaded by emptiness.
The perfected nature in its essence is not connected with
relative phenomena.
It is without characteristics, the concept characterized,
and the basis for the characteristics.
It is posited as free of fabrications, permanent,
indivisible, and omnipresent.
The other presentations in Shentong concur with the
Chittamatra view.*

As the root verse says, according to the system of Shentong Madhyamaka, all phenomena are pervaded by emptiness and essencelessness, and the perfected nature is established as true. If the perfected nature is true, then one might wonder whether it arises, dwells, or ceases. Does it come or go or change? Does it have directions or times? Is it one or many? No, none of these.

If those qualities were there, then it would not be true. The perfected nature is never connected with the phenomena

of the relative level. It does not arise, dwell, or cease, it does not come or go, it is not one or many, it is not cause or effect. In its very nature, it is free of characteristics, the concept characterized, and the basis for the characteristics. It is free of all elaborations, such as directions and times, so it is permanent by nature. It is indivisible and cannot be divided into separate parts. It is the nature of everything, so it is ever present and all pervasive.

Most other aspects of the Shentong presentation of the ground, path, and result generally accord with the Chittamatra system.

SHENTONG IS NOT THE SAME AS CHITTAMATRA

Since the Shentong Madhyamaka system and the commentaries of the Chittamatra masters are both based on the same third-turning sutras, many scholars say that Shentong is Chittamatra and is not Madhyamaka. So we will look at why Jamgön Kongtrul says the Shentong view is not the same as the Chittamatra view. The *Treasury of Knowledge* says:

*The False Aspectarians within Chittamatra say that the
nature of consciousness is established as true
And within the realm of the mind. In Shentong,
primordial wisdom
Is posited as true but uncompounded.
The Shentong view is free of the fault of saying that the
ultimate is an entity.*

To explain this root verse, there are two groups within Chittamatra, which are called the False Aspectarians and the True Aspectarians. According to the False Aspectarians, the nature of the all-ground consciousness is established as true. Most Tibetan scholars believe that Chittamatra says the all-ground consciousness is within the experience of the unenlightened mind. If one asserts that, then one becomes a Vaibhashika, or Substantialist, rather than a follower of Madhyamaka.

Shentong Madhyamaka certainly does not assert that. In this system, the sphere of buddha nature is asserted as true, but it is beyond ordinary consciousness. Not only do the Shentongpas assert the presence of the very nature of primordial wisdom free of elaborations, but that the primordial wisdom free of extremes is uncompounded. So, they do not incur the fault of asserting that the ultimate truth is a substantial entity.

TARANATHA'S REFUTATION OF SHENTONG AS VEDANTA

Some of the assertions made by the Shentong masters seem to disagree with the Madhyamaka view and agree with the statements of non-Buddhists, particularly those of Vedanta. There have been many misunderstandings and refutations of this philosophy in Tibet. In order to clear up these misunderstandings, I will quote some points extracted from the teachings of Taranatha, which Jamgön Kongtrul quotes in the *Treasury of Knowledge*. Taranatha says:⁹

Some scholars cite the *Lankavatara Sutra*, which says:

If buddha nature has all the marks and signs, then isn't it the same as the arman of the non-Buddhists? In reply, the Buddha said, "It is not the same because it is emptiness."

They say that the buddha nature is not true, because if it had all the signs and marks, it would be just like the non-Buddhist traditions. They say buddha nature is not established as anything; it is like space.

I would reply that their identifying emptiness as meaning "untrue and nothing whatsoever" is a fault coming from attachment to their own tenet system. In addition, the surtras say that this view is not the same as the non-Buddhist view because the signs and marks are established as emptiness but are not established as nonexistent. Explaining the buddha nature with its radiant, perfect marks and signs as a provisional teaching is simply a mistaken, worldly misunderstanding.

Some critics say that the Shentong assertion that buddha nature is permanent makes it a non-Buddhist system. When they say that, they are rejecting the Tathagatagarbha surtras. It is illogical to declare that "permanent" must mean that something always continues. If that was enough to make something permanent, then all compounded phenomena would be permanent, since even samsara and dualistic grasping always continue.

Another related criticism says that if the buddha nature was first impure and later becomes pure, then it must be impermanent. From the perspective of the sphere of absolute reality, it was not initially impure and later purified; whether it seems impure or pure depends upon the mindstreams of the individuals. Just because an individual's perspective changes, that does not mean the true nature changes.

When they argue that it is unreasonable for the mindstream of sentient beings to contain the primordial wisdom of the buddhas, they are contradicting the direct statement of the Buddha: "Because the wisdom of the buddhas abides in the multitude of sentient beings."

They also disagree that sentient beings' mindstreams have the enlightened qualities. For example, they say that if sentient beings have the ten powers in their mindstreams, such as the power to discriminate what is appropriate and inappropriate, then it follows that they should be omniscient about what is appropriate and inappropriate. This is a wrong understanding of what is being said. We are not asserting that sentient beings' mindstreams are enlightened. If so, then saying that a buddha and the buddha qualities abide in the mindstreams of sentient beings would be analogous to saying that if a buddha abides on a throne, then the throne must be omniscient. There is no way that the eight consciousnesses in the mindstreams of sentient beings are enlightened. The enlightenment that abides in sentient beings does not abide in the relative sense like the contents in a container. It abides as the true nature in the ultimate sense.

THE MAIN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RANGTONG AND SHENTONG

In the *Treasury of Knowledge*, Jamgön Kongtrül presents the main differences between Rangtong and Shentong. He says:¹⁰

- For both Rangtong and Shentong the relative level is empty,
And in meditation, all fabricated extremes have ceased.
However, they differ in their terminology about whether dharmata is there or not there in post-meditation,
And in the ultimate analysis, whether primordial wisdom is truly established or not.*
- Shentong says that if the ultimate truth had no established nature
And was a mere absolute negation, then it would be a vacuous nothingness.
Instead, the ultimate is nondual, self-aware primordial wisdom.*
- Shentong presents a profound view which joins the sutras and tantras.*

For both Rangtong and Shentong Madhyamaka, all phenomena included in the relative truth are established as emptiness, and in meditation there is the cessation of all fabricated extremes. Their views do not differ on these points.

However, in relation to post-meditation, to clearly distinguish the tenet systems, merely in terms of the way they use terminology, Shentong says that the dharmata, the true nature, is there, and Rangtong says the dharmata is not there. In the ultimate analysis, using the reasoning that examines the ultimate, Shentong says nondual primordial wisdom is truly established and Rangtong says primordial wisdom is not truly established. These two statements delineate their main differences.

In relation to the three natures, the holders of the Shentong philosophy say that the imaginary nature and the dependent nature are the relative truth, and that the perfected nature is the

ultimate truth. Seeing things as not truly established, as mere absolute negations and vacuous emptiness, is true for the relative level, but the emptiness of the ultimate nature is not like that. The ultimate nature is primordial wisdom, which is devoid of subject-object discrimination, but is self-awareness. The Shentong tradition is very similar to the enlightened intent of the great tantras. It has reached the pinnacle of Madhyamaka, and its profound view is a bridge between the sutras and the tantras.

EQUAL RESPECT FOR THE TRADITIONS OF NAGARJUNA AND ASANGA

Many earlier and later Tibetan scholars, as well as many of the Indian panditas, dissociated this system from Madhyamaka and said it belongs in Chittamatra. Not only that, but they held this system as being greatly inferior to the Madhyamaka treatises of Nagarjuna.

The Buddha's teaching is like the sky, and the two great charioteers, Nagarjuna and Asanga, adorn it like the sun and moon. The scriptural traditions of other Buddhist masters cannot compare with theirs. The supreme paths of the two charioteers do not contradict each other, but are supportive—one is mainly outer and the other is mainly inner. Therefore, it is good to study, contemplate, and meditate on them with equal dedication and respect.

The great master Shakya Chogden also says that the teachings by Asanga and Nagarjuna are both necessary. He says:

- Without the treatises taught by Asanga, which include the system of the alayavijnana
And the presentation of the three types of emptiness,
How could one explain the ground of purification and the purifier taught in the vajrayana scriptures,
And the presentation of the three aspects of outer, inner, and other in the Kalachakra Tantra?*

How could one explain nondual primordial wisdom and the way everything is empty of essence

Without the explanations of the Prasangika and Svatantrika treatises?

How could one quit clinging to the concept of profound and clear primordial wisdom as being true,

And give up clinging to the sublime deities?

The Madhyamaka philosophy of the Buddha's teachings has two aspects: the ultimate essence of the definitive meaning as presented in the texts of Maitreya, and the ultimate essence of the definitive meaning as presented in the texts of Nagarjuna. In the first aspect of Madhyamaka, which comes from Maitreya's texts, the primordial wisdom is free of the dualistic grasping of subject and object. This view is explained in his two "ornament" texts—the *Ornament of Clear Realization* and the *Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras*; in his two "distinguishing" texts—*Distinguishing the Middle and the Extremes* and *Distinguishing Phenomena and the True Nature*—as well as in the *Sublime Continuum*. The treatise *Distinguishing the Middle and the Extremes* is the text that establishes this view as Madhyamaka philosophy, and *Distinguishing Phenomena and the True Nature* is the text that shows how to bring this view into one's personal practice.

The second aspect of Madhyamaka, which comes from Nagarjuna's texts, negates all fabricated extremes, and it is simply an absolute negation or a negation in which nothing is affirmed. This view is explained in Nagarjuna's texts called the *Collection of Reasoning*. However, the understanding expressed in Nagarjuna's *Collection of Praises* is the same as the teachings of Maitreya.

The main exponents of these two systems of Madhyamaka are Nagarjuna and Asanga. The Rangtong system establishes both the relative truth and the absolute truth as empty of nature. The Shentong system establishes only the relative truth as empty of nature, and through that it automatically eliminates elaborations about the ultimate truth. There are two other systems particularly worthy of note: that of Haribhadra, whose Rangtong interpretation of Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realization* was very influential; and the system of Jigme Chökyong Shap, who interpreted Nagarjuna's *Collection of Reasoning* as Shentong. All four of these systems are within the Madhyamaka path and their treatises are considered to be authentic.

The Rangtong system is accepted as Madhyamaka by the great masters of Prasangika and Svatantrika. Nagarjuna explains the emptiness of the Rangtong view by saying:

*Whatever arises interdependently
Is taught to be emptiness.
Whatever is dependently imputed
Is the path of Madhyamaka.*

The Shentong system is accepted as Madhyamaka by Asanga and his brother Vasubandhu. Maitreya explains the emptiness of the Shentong view, with its three types of emptiness, when he says:

*In relation to what exists, does not exist, and exists,
That is the path of the Middle Way.*

The Tibetans think that from among the four philosophical schools of Buddhism—Vaibhashika, Sautrantika, Chittamatra, and Madhyamaka—that the Madhyamaka school generally refers to the systems of Prasangika and Svatantrika. From among those two, Prasangika alone is superior. Chandrakirti says:

That which was just explained [the Prasangika view] is very profound and frightening, and it is realized only by those accustomed to it from past lives. Even those who study extensively cannot fully comprehend it.

There are two possible responses to this quote. The first merely confirms the assertion. For instance, if someone uses the reasoning that Rangtong Madhyamaka is the highest Madhyamaka because Chandrakirti says so, then one could say that Shentong Madhyamaka is the highest because Asanga says so. Asanga says that the Rangtong view understates the ultimate nature, making it less than it is, and this is the view put forth by overbearing people who just talk loud. Therefore, if one tries to identify the most definitive meaning, the same authority that is given to the texts of Chandrakirti to prove or disprove something could be given to the texts of Asanga. Actually, Asanga would be more

authentic because in the sutras Buddha predicted that Asanga would be the master who defined the provisional and definitive meanings. Chandrakirti, who is a great Mahayana master, does not accept the Shentong scriptures as part of Madhyamaka. But then the arya Asanga, who is also an undisputed master of Mahayana, says that Rangtong is not the scriptural tradition of Madhyamaka. In conclusion, determining which philosophical school is the highest is basically a matter of debate.

There is a second possible response to the quote from Chandrakirti. When teaching the intention of Nagarjuna, the Rangtong system is supreme; and when commenting on the intention of Maitreya, the Shentong system is the most profound. The scriptures and reasoning of each system cannot refute the other. Otherwise, we would have to give more weight to Asanga's texts and logic, because he had reached the spiritual level of an arya, a bodhisattva on the bhūmis, and he was predicted in the sutras as the one to clarify the definitive meaning. Also, he was the first to found a philosophical system within the Mahayana. Chandrakirti does not say that Asanga does not understand Madhyamaka; he merely says that Asanga does not explain the intention of Nagarjuna.

DISTINGUISHING VIJANAVADA AND CHITTAMATRA

It is also relevant to distinguish between the Chittamatra school and the Vijanavada school. *Establishing the Two Systems as One* states:

Many Tibetan scholars teach that the Chittamatra and Vijanavada are the same in meaning, but those scholars are deluded in stating that awareness and primordial wisdom are pervaded by the conceptual mind and mental factors, and deluded in not distinguishing between consciousness and wisdom. This misunderstanding comes from not having thoroughly studied the terminology of the third-turning teachings.

For those of you who assert that Chittamatra and Vijanavada are the same, it is said in scripture:

*Other than the dharmadhatu, the sphere of reality,
There are no existent phenomena.*

A sutra says:

*The sphere of beginningless time
Is the domain of all phenomena.*

A tantric scripture says:

*I pervade all of this
And do not see any other nature of beings.*

And another tantra says:

*Outside of the precious mind
There are no buddhas or sentient beings.*

Rather than just reciting the words of the tantras, if you contemplate their meaning, you will understand that it is unreasonable to say that Chittamatra and Vijanavada are the same.

It is clear that the Vijanavada scriptures say that the dharmadhatu must be understood as nondual wisdom, as the natural dharmakaya. The Vijanavada doctrine is not Chittamatra; it is a much higher view because it is also in the tantras.

There are also quotations from the sutras that establish that the Shentong view is Madhyamaka. For instance, it says in the *Ultimate Emptiness Sutra*:

When a thing is not there, there is the emptiness of that thing, but what remains is there. This is the Madhyamaka path, the view of emptiness, genuine and unmistakable.

There are many similar quotations in the sutras. Also, it says in the *Ornament of the Middle Way*:

*Therefore, form and so on are the mind itself;
They are not asserted to be external.
Based on the Chittamatra view,
One should understand that there are no external,
substantial things.*

Having that system as a basis, then on top of that, One should fully understand selflessness.

In the *Entrance to the Three Kayas*, Nagamitra says:

*That which is called “the path of Madhyamaka”
Is none other than mere awareness.
Once one has analyzed with reasoning,
Nothing else is acceptable.*

And Shantarakshita says in the *Ornament of the Middle Way*:

*Here I will explain the two truths,
In conjunction with valid cognition and scripture,
As they are taught by Maitreya and Asanga
And agreed upon by Nagarjuna.*

In this way, both Shentong and Rangtong are free of the fault of not being Madhyamaka. They accord in espousing a view free of all fabricated extremes. Not only that, but in most schools of Tibetan Buddhism there were masters who were lineage holders of both systems, and nobody looked upon them as having wrong views.

Tantra Madhyamaka

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Jamgön Kongtrul broadly categorizes Madhyamaka into Sutra Madhyamaka and Tantra Madhyamaka. Having discussed Sutra Madhyamaka, we will complete this chapter with a synopsis of Tantra Madhyamaka. Kongtrul Rinpoche says in the *Treasury of Knowledge*:

*In the profound view of Tantra Madhyamaka, the nature
of all phenomena
Is naturally clear light, distinguished by great bliss.
The primordial wisdom that is the union of clarity-
emptiness and bliss-emptiness*

Is clearly taught in the texts such as the Five Stages and the Trilogy of Commentaries by Bodhisattvas.

For the Madhyamaka that comes from the tantras, the most important aspect is nondual wisdom, which makes Tantra Madhyamaka more in accord with Yogachara Madhyamaka. The nature of the mind, which is clear light, free of all fabrications and characteristics, is the self-aware, true nature of all phenomena, and it is timelessly and spontaneously that way. This understanding is clearly elaborated in the third-turning teachings of the Buddha, and it is established and practiced in the tantras.

Furthermore, being naturally clear light and distinguished by great bliss, the emptiness aspect is designated by the syllable E and the compassion aspect by the syllable VAM. This pristine wisdom is the union of clarity and emptiness, bliss and emptiness, and so forth. This meaning is clarified and elaborated in tantric commentaries such as the *Five Stages* and the *Trilogy of Commentaries by Bodhisattvas*, and should be understood through those teachings.

The general understanding of Tantra Madhyamaka has two aspects: one related with creation stage practice, and one related with completion stage practice. Within the creation stage, there are also two aspects: first, the bases for generating the deity; and second, after the deity has been accomplished, the way of concluding without fabrication. First, the bases for generating the deity are the seed syllables and symbolic implements, which arise from nondual primordial wisdom. They arise from emptiness and are no other than the dharmadhatu wisdom. This view accords with the teaching of Shentong Madhyamaka.

In the second aspect of the creation stage, the way of concluding the accomplishment of the deity without fabrication, one begins by establishing the deity as clarity-emptiness. In this context, clarity refers to clearly seeing all the characteristics and details of the deity and its mandala, and emptiness refers to not conceptualizing or clinging to the deity at all. If one clings to the characteristics of clear appearance, one will not transcend samsara. On the other hand, it is not simply a

matter of stopping thoughts. Through the mere absence of thoughts one can transcend suffering, but one will not reach the state of union, so that approach is still poisonous.

One needs to practice clarity and emptiness in union. While the deity clearly appears it is empty, and while the deity is empty it clearly appears. In the pith instructions, particularly in the Sakya lineage, the union of clarity and emptiness is called “the inseparability of sam-sara and nirvana.” At that time, one sees perceived objects as the union of appearance and emptiness and the perceiving consciousness as the union of clarity and emptiness. When one arises from this stage of meditation, without losing the pride of the deity, one then engages in the outer yogic practices. This is an overview of the creation stage practice.

Next, the Tantra Madhyamaka of the completion stage practice also has two parts: letting go of attachment to the creation stage, and the real wisdom of the completion stage. The first is when the entire mandala of the deity and environment is no longer maintained but is dissolved, and the practitioner remains in a state without reference point. This is the same approach as in Rangtong Madhyamaka, and it is supreme in dissolving the elaboration of thoughts. However, this is not the real wisdom of the completion stage practice because it is not the experience of self-aware primordial wisdom.

The real wisdom of the completion stage has three aspects: what is to be experienced, the methods through which one experiences it, and the stages of actualizing it. What is experienced is self-awareness simultaneous with the wisdom of great bliss. The method through which this is experienced is the process of blessing oneself, also called the wisdom of self-awareness. This is nonconceptual, undeluded wisdom, which is the view free of poison.

However, simply generating this experience does not mean that one has reached the level of an arya or the first bhumi, because this is just the example wisdom. This experience is called the wisdom that is the union of bliss and emptiness, or the wisdom that is the coemergent melting in bliss. This explanation is according to the general tantras; its special presentation is found in the *Kalachakra Tantra*, but that will not be explained here. The main difference between Sutra Madhyamaka

and Tantra Madhyamaka is in the perceiving subject or practitioner; there is no difference in terms of the perceived objects, which are in themselves free of all extremes.

To summarize the main points of all the Madhyamaka schools, Jamgön Kongtrül says in the *Treasury of Knowledge*:

*Whatever appears in relative truth is not denied,
And the natural state is free of all fabricated extremes.
This is the ground.*

*With profound wisdom, one abandons all grasping at
characteristics,*

*And with compassion, one accumulates what is positive
for the benefit of others. This is the path.*

*By accomplishing the peace of the dharmakaya, and
through the form kayas,*

*One acts without concepts to benefit beings. This is
the result.*

*All the teachings of Madhyamaka are condensed in
this way.*

All the main points of the various systems of Madhyamaka can be summarized in this way. By not denying any of the relative appearances, one is free of nihilism. Since the natural state, the ultimate truth, is free of all fabricated extremes, then one is free of eternalism. This is the Ground Madhyamaka, the union of the two truths.

Through the wisdom of prajna, by not holding on to any phenomena or characteristics, one is free of eternalism. Through compassion, by accumulating a great collection of positive deeds for the benefit of others, one is free of nihilism. This is the Path Madhyamaka, which is the union of the two accumulations.

Through attaining the dharmakaya, which is the pacification of all conceptual complexity, one is free of eternalism. Through the endless activity of the two form kayas to benefit both supreme and ordinary beings, one is free of nihilism.

JAMGÖN MIPAM
His Life and Teachings

Douglas Duckworth



Shambhala
Boston & London
2011

ultimate truth. We can see how Mipam blurs the distinction between the two truths or, rather, how the distinction between two separate truths dissolves in his portrayal of authentic experience. Nevertheless, he is careful not to impute an ultimate status to anything, so even though wisdom is the ultimate truth for Mipam, nothing ultimately exists. Thus, in his presentation, wisdom can be said to be the ultimate truth when representing how the two truths (of appearance and emptiness) are not divided in the experiential presence of unity (in authentic experience) but wisdom is not ultimate when the appearance/emptiness model is analyzed in terms of two separate truths.

SELF- AND OTHER-EMPTINESS

There is a lot of debate among traditional Tibetan and academic scholars about where Mipam stands on his interpretation of ultimate truth: is he, in the end, a proponent of the Yogic Practice School or the Consequence School? Does his position entail a position of other-emptiness or self-emptiness? Does he insist on emptiness as a non-implicative negation, or does he in the end advocate emptiness as an implicative negation? As mentioned earlier, Mipam does clearly say that a statement of emptiness as a lack of true existence should be understood to be a non-implicative negation, not an implicative negation, because the latter simply involves another entity conceptualized in the mind.¹³⁶ However, how emptiness is experienced is a different story: the nonconceptual experience of emptiness need not be evoked exclusively by a negation; given that it is nonconceptual, there is no reason why it could not be evoked by an affirmation as well.

We can see that in discussing the meaning of emptiness in Mipam's work, an important distinction should be made between perspectives, or contexts, of discourse relating to emptiness and the experience of it. In the context of meditative equipoise directly experiencing emptiness, there are no concepts. Buddhists do not debate this fact. Nevertheless, when this experience is theorized in postmeditation, we come across different accounts of the experience and disagreements as to how emptiness should best be represented or evoked. In the context of theorizing authentic experience, we have the problem of how best to conceptualize the non-

conceptual and express the inexpressible. This issue is at the heart of the self-emptiness versus other-emptiness debate.

Depending on how self-emptiness and other-emptiness are defined, Mipam can be called a proponent of both (or neither). We've already seen how he aligns himself as a proponent of self-emptiness by not asserting that anything ultimately exists. When we consider the way he depicts the ultimate truth of authentic experience, we could say that the *non-* in his portrayal of the nonconceptual is an implicative negation because the word *nonconceptual* implies that there must still be some sort of experience happening, otherwise that experience would be hollow and lifeless, which he denies. Alternatively, we could say that the *non-* in *nonconceptual* is better understood as a non-implicative negation, because its true meaning involves no word or thought and so is best reflected as an utter negation of thought that implies nothing. Mipam's words also suggest this. Taking one or the other of these stances based on Mipam's works, many contemporary scholars, Western Buddhists, and Tibetan academics alike disagree as to how to interpret his view.

We can see how, depending on the purpose at hand and the intended context, a case can be made for Mipam's portrayal of the nonconceptual to be represented by an implicative negation or a non-implicative negation. Yet we should also recognize that, according to him, neither implicative nor non-implicative negations represent emptiness in the perspective of wisdom beyond concepts (after all, it is inexpressible).¹³⁷ Insisting that the content of nonconceptual experience be determined undermines the possibility of that experience occurring. Nevertheless, we can also see how each of the two types of negation can play a role in overcoming a conceptual tendency toward reification: a non-implicative negation can function to overcome the tendency to pin the nonconceptual down as some sort of idea, while an implicative negation can function to overcome the tendency to hold on to it as a simple absence by inviting us to open up to its experiential presence. Even so, for Mipam, neither form of negation can adequately represent the nonconceptual unity that can only be known in one's individual experience. As soon as the nonconceptual is determined by thought and language, it will necessarily not adequately reflect that experience because of being a mere conceptualization of it.

EIGHT

Immanent Wisdom

WE HAVE SEEN how emptiness and unity are predominant themes in Mipam's works. Another major theme is buddha-nature, which is one more way he expresses unity, the genuine meaning of emptiness.

BUDDHA-NATURE

According to Mipam, the meaning of buddha-nature is the unity of emptiness and appearance. Buddha-nature also embodies the unconditioned qualities of a buddha (such as wisdom, love, and power), which according to Mipam are essentially present when one is a sentient being. He states that "buddha-nature" refers to the existence of wisdom as the innate nature of the minds of all sentient beings, because when this innate nature of mind is realized, one becomes a buddha.¹³⁸ Although one's innate qualities may not be manifest, since the qualities of a buddha are unconditioned, they necessarily cannot arise anew or they would be impermanent and conditioned. The fact that they *seem* to arise anew is only from the perspective of obscuration, like the sun appearing to arise anew when the clouds disperse. In reality, the sun has been shining all along, and it was only obscured from the limited perspective of the observer.

The fact that the unconditioned qualities of a buddha intrinsically exist as the ground of being is an important feature of the Nyingma view. Since wisdom is unconditioned, it cannot be produced by anything, and for this reason, wisdom must be present from the primordial beginning as

the true nature, the buddha-nature, of all sentient beings. We might think that if we already have these qualities, then what is the point of doing anything to become a buddha? The point is that even though these qualities exist when we are sentient beings, they are obscured due to defilements, and we are not actual buddhas until these unconditioned qualities are manifest.

In his *Trilogy of Innate Mind*, Mipam argues extensively that wisdom is not conditioned and, further, that wisdom is not just a subtle form of the conditioned mind.¹³⁹ According to Mipam, wisdom does not arise from mind but is the nature of mind, in the same way that emptiness does not arise from entities but is the nature of all things.¹⁴⁰ Thus, even though wisdom, like emptiness, is there from the beginning, it does not follow that everyone realizes it, because obscurations prevent us from seeing reality as it is.

Buddha-nature is often represented through metaphors, and Mipam also turns to them to show the way buddha-nature exists in the world. He says that the primordial qualities of wisdom are an intrinsic property of reality, like a knife having the ability to cut, a mirror to reflect, and a gemstone to shine; yet when the knife is in a sheath, the mirror in a box, and the gemstone muddy, the qualities are not evident. While such qualities appear to be newly developed when their obscurations are removed, the qualities are not newly arisen; they have been there all along.¹⁴¹ Although the qualities of wisdom are primordially present, when not manifest, there is only what is known as "natural purity." When the qualities become manifest at the time of a buddha, there is the twofold purity: (1) natural purity (*rang bzhin mam dag*) and (2) purity that is free from the adventitious defilements (*glo bur bral dag*), when all obscurations have been removed.¹⁴²

As with the two purities, there are two types of effects: a ripened effect (*rnam smin 'bras*) and a freed effect (*bral 'bras*). Self-existing wisdom is unconditioned, so rather than developing as a newly produced effect, it is actualized as a freed effect when it becomes manifest. In other words, it has been there from the beginning and becomes manifest when the conditions that obscure it are removed. A ripened effect is like a seed becoming a flower; the flower is a new production. Even though the process of

becoming a buddha seems to be this sort of transformation, this is only the way it appears, not how it really is. Mipam explains that there only appears to be a new development of a Truth Body (Tib. *chos sku*, Skt. *dharma-kāya*);¹⁴³ in the way things are in reality, all phenomena are primordially buddha in the essence of the Truth Body, which is the nature of all phenomena.¹⁴⁴

Buddha-nature is a topic through which Mipam affirms the unity of the two truths—emptiness and appearance. He equates the genuine meaning of emptiness (unity) with buddha-nature. In this light, his position on buddha-nature seems to share a characteristic of a Geluk view. The predominant Geluk tradition, stemming from one of Tsongkhapa's disciples, asserts that buddha-nature is emptiness, that is, the mind's lack of true existence.¹⁴⁵ However, what the Geluk tradition means by emptiness (a lack of inherent nature) is different from what Mipam means by emptiness (unity).

Like Mipam, the mainstream Sakya tradition that follows Gorampa asserts buddha-nature as a unity.¹⁴⁶ However, there is an important difference in the way this tradition represents the wisdom of a buddha to be a new production from the way Mipam depicts it as being there from the beginning. Also, Mipam distinguishes his view of buddha-nature from the unity of clarity, or mind (*sems*), and emptiness, and emphasizes that buddha-nature is the unity of wisdom (*ye shes*) and emptiness. Making an important consciousness/wisdom distinction, he does not accept that buddha-nature is the unity of an impermanent mind (or consciousness) and emptiness.

Given that Mipam asserts the innate presence of the qualities of a buddha when one is a sentient being and that he affirms that these qualities are unconditioned, his view shares significant features with the Jonang tradition. In general, what have come to be the mainstream Sakya and Geluk traditions do not accept the qualities of the buddha to be present from the beginning in this way. They interpret statements in sutras that affirm that the buddha's qualities exist when one is a sentient being to have a basis in another intention (*dgongs gzhi*)¹⁴⁷; that is, they interpret the real import of these statements to be emptiness. Mipam is more closely aligned with the Jonang tradition in his interpretation of these

scriptures because he affirms that the qualities of a buddha are present from the beginning. Unlike the Jonang tradition, however, Mipam does not portray buddha-nature to be truly real and not empty of its own essence. By asserting that it is empty in this way too, he represents his view of buddha-nature in a way that is different from that of the Jonang tradition.

By representing buddha-nature as a unity of emptiness and appearance, Mipam synthesizes the middle and last wheels of Dharma. The topic of buddha-nature also functions as a common ground of sutra and tantra. Yet we can also see a distinction in the way that Mipam frames the way buddha-nature is represented in sutra and tantra. According to the “causal vehicle” of sutra, buddha-nature is depicted as the cause of a future effect. In the “resultant vehicle” of tantra, however, the qualities of a buddha are said to be spontaneously present from the beginning, without the notion of temporal causality.¹⁴⁸ Within the path of sutra as well, the middle wheel tends to emphasize the path to becoming a buddha as a process of transformation, in which wisdom is produced anew by a cause. In contrast, in the last wheel, the path to becoming a buddha is depicted as a process of uncovering the wisdom that is already there.¹⁴⁹

For Mipam, tantra is distinguished by a view that at once marks a definite departure from sutra yet also sustains a fundamental continuity with it. This view can be seen as a natural outgrowth of sutra traditions, as an extension of the view. Before we examine some of the important features of Mipam’s presentation of the distinctive view of tantra, we will look briefly at how he lays out the paths to actualize buddha-nature and become a buddha (see translations 14 through 16).

PATHS TO ENLIGHTENMENT

What follows is a short explanation of the way Mipam presents the structure of the Buddhist path to awakening. According to him, we can only go so far in the Lesser Vehicle, realizing the lack of a personal self based on its path, but without the Great Vehicle, we will not come to fully realize the lack of self (that is, emptiness) with respect to all phenomena. In

other words, those in the Lesser Vehicle realize only part of emptiness (the lack of a personal self) but do not realize the entire scope of emptiness. They hang on to an ultimate foundation of reality (the fundamental elements of reality, or *dharmas*), whereas there is actually no such foundation. Therefore, according to Mipam, one cannot become a buddha based solely on the Lesser Vehicle path; becoming a buddha is the result of the Great Vehicle. Nevertheless, realizing the lack of a personal self is enough to free us from samsara, because in doing so, we relinquish the obscurations of the afflictive emotions.

The afflictive emotions can be included within the “three poisons” of attachment, aversion, and delusion. These afflictive obscurations function to prevent liberation, and they are tied in with the apprehension of a personal self. Based on the notion of such a self, we become attached (to me and mine) and averse (to what is other). This notion of self keeps the wheel of samsara rolling, because it perpetuates the distorted framework through which we selfishly act out attachment and aversion, thus sowing the seeds of suffering. Afflictive obscurations have two aspects: a gross, imputed aspect and a more subtle, innate aspect. According to Mipam, the imputed aspects are relinquished on the first “ground” (Tib. *sa*, Skt. *bhūmi*) when you directly perceive the suchness of reality. This experiential realization is called “the path of seeing.”

The imputed aspects of the afflictive obscurations are learned and not inborn like the innate aspects. Imputed aspects involve distortions that are explicitly conceptual, as opposed to the perceptual distortions that comprise the innate aspects. The difference between the imputed and innate aspects can be understood as something like the difference between software and hardware: the innate aspects are embedded more deeply in one’s mind-stream and are thus more difficult to eliminate. Imputed ego-clinging refers to imputing qualities to the self that are not there—namely, apprehending the self as a singular, permanent, and independent entity. This is overcome on the first bodhisattva ground in a direct, non-conceptual experience of reality that is the culminating insight of analysis. Nevertheless, the more subtle, innate aspect of ego-clinging hangs on. The innate ego-clinging, as the bare sense of self that is imputed on

into the thick darkness of oblivion, where it is difficult to view, see, conceive, or experience this profound truth.

—WORDS THAT DELIGHT GURU MANJUSHŪSA, 88

2 *Conceiving the Inconceivable*

The following selection shows how Mipam balances a conceptual representation of the ultimate with its nonconceptual meaning. While Buddhist texts commonly describe the ultimate as inexpressible, they still do so with words. This is the paradox of describing the indescribable. Mipam clarifies this muddy philosophical problem by showing how this paradox need not involve a contradiction that must be resolved with a one-sided solution. He argues that those who claim that all meaning is confined to language and say there is no way to express anything beyond words are close-minded. Yet he also contends with those who claim that words are utterly pointless and can serve no function in leading us to an understanding of the inconceivable ultimate truth. In contrast to these two extreme positions, he formulates an alternative by showing how words and thoughts can disclose the nonconceptual, albeit in an indirect way. That is, even though words are nothing more than words, like a finger pointing to the moon, they can guide us to what is beyond them.

Through scripture and reasoning, you can realize what is free from conceptual constructs. For example, when someone points at the moon with a finger, you can see the moon, yet the moon and finger need not be alike. Likewise, through the path of scripture and reasoning, you can realize what is ineffable and free from conceptual constructs. Yet it is impossible for words of scripture and intellectual reasoning, as they are, to be beyond conceptual constructs. This is the reason why in the sutras and great treatises, the meaning of suchness free from conceptual constructs is explained in two ways: (1) it is said to unexemplifiable, indemonstrable, and not the domain of language or mind; and (2) it is said to be determined by means of examples, arguments, scripture, and reasoning.

Without knowing how to explain the way that these distinctive viewpoints are without contradiction, people who have partial intelligence maintain only one side of the intended meaning and throw out the other by necessity. In this way, if they assert that there is definitely no other profound meaning beyond what can solely be determined by language and the intellect, then they must claim that whatever is knowable is exclusively the domain of confined perception. Thus, the Buddha would not know the suchness beyond the domain of all logic. . . . Or they claim that the ultimate is inconceivable and that its essence is beyond the domain of language and thought, such that there are no words or thoughts through which one could ever come to understand it. In this case, it would not be suitable to be known by anyone; the claim is similar to the assertion of an inconceivable Creator—there is no valid cognition to establish it. Also, there would be no point to the sutras, tantras, and treatises that set upon the ultimate. Hence, the intelligence of one with partial vision is like an eye of a needle; it is unable to enjoy the bliss of the great ocean of the profound texts difficult to fathom, those of the Victorious Ones and the great bodhisatva chariots.

—LIGHT OF THE SUN, 276–78

3 *Unity and Buddha-Nature*

In the following passage, Mipam demonstrates his keen ability to synthesize various strands of Buddhist thought through his interpretation of buddha-nature. He claims that the emptiness taught in the middle wheel of Dharma and the qualities of a buddha taught in the last wheel of Dharma are both the definitive meaning. Distinguishing the definitive meaning from the provisional meaning is an important way in which Buddhist commentators convey a unified interpretation of the different teachings in scriptures that sometimes have contradictory literal meanings. The definitive meaning is the true meaning, the ultimate truth, in contrast to what is simply taught for a provisional purpose, as a temporary means to understand the deeper import of the ultimate truth.

Mipam holds that buddha-nature is the definitive meaning that is taught in the middle wheel as well as the last wheel of Dharma. He claims that the meaning of buddha-nature is taught from the aspect of its emptiness in the middle wheel and from the aspect of the presence of its qualities in the last wheel. This synthetic interpretation is an important means by which he integrates the vast tradition of activity, associated with Asāṅga and the last wheel, with the tradition of the profound view, associated with Nāgārjuna and the middle wheel. His integration responds to a long history of dispute in India and Tibet as to the real meaning of the Buddha's intent and how to harmonize the teachings of emptiness with the teachings on the positive qualities of buddha-nature. He also states that understanding buddha-nature in this way is an important part of understanding the Vajrayāna.

Even though the reasoning that analyzes the ultimate establishes the emptiness of all phenomena, it does not negate the qualities of [buddha-]nature, because although the sublime qualities exist, they are also claimed to be essentially empty. Therefore, the meaning demonstrated by the middle wheel that all the phenomena (of thorough affliction and complete purification) are taught to be empty is established as such because buddha-nature is also the nature of emptiness. However, since this teaching of [buddha-]nature—characterized as neither conjoined with nor separable from the appearances of the empty-natured exalted body (Tib. *sku*, Skt. *kāya*) and wisdom—is the viewpoint of the definitive meaning sutras from the last wheel, then by this fact alone it is superior to the middle wheel. Although the meaning of the last wheel is praised in the sutras and commentaries, [this does] not [refer to] everything in the last wheel, but is spoken in this way concerning the definitive meaning position of demonstrating the [buddha-]nature. This can be clearly ascertained as such through other sutras like those that teach the basic element of heritage through the metaphor of cleansing a jewel. Therefore, the emptiness taught in the middle wheel, along with the exalted body and wisdom taught in the last wheel, should be integrated as a unity of emptiness and appearance. Without dividing or excluding the subject matters of the definitive meaning found in the middle and last

wheels, we should consider both to be the definitive meaning just as the omniscient Longchen Rapijam asserted.

By maintaining both of these [wheels] to be the definitive meaning, there is no contradiction that one [wheel] must be held as the provisional meaning. Not only that, but with both wheels integrated, we come to the key point of the quintessential instructions of the Vajrayāna, where buddha-nature as such is taken to be the meaning of the causal continuum.¹⁸¹ Therefore, you should know how the teachings of the Buddha converge on this single essential point and that this consummate meaning is the single viewpoint of the sublime beings like Nāgārjuna and Asāṅga.

—LION'S ROAR: EXPOSITION OF BUDDHA-NATURE, 585–86

4 Steps to the Middle Way

This selection shows Mipam's explanation of "the four stages of the dawning of the Middle Way." It is taken from his overview of Longchenpa's commentary on the *Secret Essence Tantra*, and nearly the same words can also be found in his commentary on the *Ornament of the Middle Way*. This illustrates the importance of this Middle Way view in the contexts of both sutra and tantra. Through a fourfold scheme, he outlines a process for those who progressively engage in the meaning of nonconceptuality through the stages of *empty, unity, freedom from constructs*, and *equality*. Beginning with the object of negation, true existence, each of the stages probes deeper into the meaning of emptiness and the Middle Way. The process culminates with equality, free from all concepts and dualities, which is beyond all distinctions between sentient beings and buddhas, nirvana and samsara.

When beginners properly investigate using the reasons that establish emptiness—such as [the reason of] being neither singular nor plural—through contemplating the meaning of the nonestablishment of a pot and so forth, they [mistakenly] think that the abiding reality is nonestablishment itself because, although existing when not analyzed, nothing is

In this way of positing the relative and ultimate truths—presenting the way things appear and the way things are by positing them as the appearing aspect and the empty aspect—both samsara and nirvana are alike and equal. And here, there is a way of positing appearance in accord with reality [that is, authentic experience] as ultimate, and appearance in discord with reality [that is, inauthentic experience] as relative. These two great ways occur often, even in sutras, so they should not be conflated. This latter way of presenting is to posit the two truths through conventional valid cognition, which distinguishes the authentic and inauthentic. One should know this from this [*Wish-Fulfilling Treasury*] text as well, “To divide by the conventional manner of the two truths . . .”¹⁸⁸ It is important to distinguish these; nirvana does not withstand analysis, it is not established as truly real.

Furthermore, within the domain of dualistic experience, these various appearances of the relative, which have a fluctuating, unstable nature, are like an illusion, a water-moon, an apparition, or a reflection. When analyzed, they do not have a nature that is established in the slightest. Yet, while nonexistent, they appear. When whatever appears is thoroughly examined by the reasoning of ultimate analysis, not even the slightest thing, no gross basis or subtle root, is established. It is empty like space. Also, phenomena being established by way of their own characters does not withstand the scrutiny of analysis. Yet when not analyzed or examined—when let be just as they are—they appear with the nature of various forms. For example, they are like an illusory horse or elephant that appears while not existing.

You may wonder, “Why do they appear even while not existing?” From beginningless time, they arise through habituation to predispositions, the dependent arising of what has a distorted nature. For example, it is like elephants and so on appearing to the eyes of someone who has eaten *dhatura*.¹⁸⁹ These distorted appearances are naturally empty of a self of phenomena, and they lack a personal self. As this is the mode of being, or abiding reality, of appearances, this empty aspect is said to be “ultimate,” and its appearing aspect is said to be “relative.” In this way, from the very time it appears, it is not established as arising, abiding, and so on. Consequently, the phenomenon and its nature (or abiding reality) are appear-

ance and emptiness, which remain without coming together or parting. Therefore, this is the identity of the indivisible truth.

—COMMENTARY ON THE WORDS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER
[OF THE WISH-FULFILLING TREASURY], 566–70

14 Unconditioned Buddha-Nature

The following excerpt reveals central features of Mipam’s view of buddha-nature. He argues that since everyone has the potential to become a buddha, and since a buddha’s wisdom is unconditioned, then it follows that presently the wisdom of a buddha abides in sentient beings. This wisdom is what is meant by “buddha-nature,” which is also called “the basic element” and “naturally abiding heritage.” For Mipam, buddha-nature is the unchanging wisdom that is the way things are in reality. He claims that because a buddha’s wisdom is unchanging, it follows that it is not newly produced when one becomes a buddha. Also, because it never changes, there can be no essential difference between this wisdom at the time of the cause, when one is a sentient being, and at the time of the effect, when one is a buddha. Here he makes an important distinction between the way things appear, in which there is a difference between buddhas and sentient beings, qualitatively and temporarily, and the way things are in reality, in which there is no difference.

Through evaluating by means of merely an awareness based on ordinary confined perception, one may think, “Unconditioned wisdom is impossible because there is no common locus¹⁹⁰ of a cognition and a permanent entity.”

This is nonsense, because even though partial cognitions that cognize objects are necessarily impermanent, the wisdom that is the one taste of the knower and known, “the one with the space-*vajra* pervading space,” is not like that [impermanently cognized]. This is because in the state of unchanging luminous clarity, which is the self-radiance (*rang glang*) of the unconditioned, all the phenomena of nirvana and samsara are incorporated;

hence, reasoning that examines the consummate [reality] establishes that there is primordially no arising or ceasing in the essence of this. Therefore, wisdom such as this is “the great unconditioned,” which does not abide in either extreme of being conditioned or unconditioned; it is not at all like a mere nonentity. Since entities and nonentities are phenomena and are dependent arisings, or dependent imputations, when authentically analyzed they are hollow, fake, lies, and deceptions; buddha-nature is the great unconditioned, the suchness of all phenomena that are entities or nonentities; which is authentically nondeceptive. As is said in the *Root Verses of the Middle Way*:

Nature is uncontrived,
And does not depend on another.¹⁹¹

And,
Entities and nonentities are conditioned;
Nirvana is unconditioned.¹⁹²

In this way, if the wisdom of the consummate Truth Body is established—by scriptures of definitive meaning sutras and by reasoning examining the consummate [reality]—to be the nature of the immutable ultimate truth, completely pervading nirvana and samsara, equality, and unconditioned, then the cause, which is able to actualize that [Truth Body] at one time, is presently the nature of the Wisdom Truth Body,¹⁹³ abiding in the manner of suchness without decrease or increase. Although it may or may not be actualized in the mode of appearance (whether it is free or not free from adventitious defilements), there is not even the slightest qualitative or temporal difference in the mode of reality, because it is the intrinsic nature of the immutable unconditioned. In the *Sublime Continuum*,

As it was before so it is later—
The immutable suchness.¹⁹⁴

And,

The luminous clarity that is the nature of mind
Is immutable like space.

It is undisturbed by adventitious defilements

Such as attachments that arise from the imagination of the unreal.¹⁹⁵

All the phenomena of samsara are changing and unstable. While there appear to be transformations within the state of the suchness of all this, it should be known, as was frequently taught, that the purity of mind, the buddha-nature, is without change like space. In this way, the unconditioned expanse of luminous clarity is naturally pure and untainted by delusion; within the self-radiance of the basic nature of the nondeluded, the qualities of fruition, such as the powers, abide without separation—like the sun and light rays. Furthermore, in the *Sublime Continuum*,

The basic element is empty of those adventitious [phenomena] that
have the character of separability

But not empty of the unexcelled qualities that have the character of
inseparability.¹⁹⁶

All of the faults of samsara arise from the deluded mind which apprehends a personal self or a self of phenomena. Since this deluded mind also is adventitious like clouds in the sky, from the beginning neither mixing nor polluting the luminous clarity of the primordial basic nature, these faults are separate from the basic element and suitable to be removed. Therefore, the essence of the basic element is empty of these faults; it is untainted. Without depending on the polluting delusion, the basic element is luminous and clear by its own nature; self-existing wisdom permeates the thusness¹⁹⁷ of all phenomena. It is not empty of that which it is inseparable from, the basic element of consummate qualities, because in its essence, this is the basic nature from which it is inseparable—like the sun and its rays of light.

In this way, the naturally abiding heritage is established as the unconditioned essence of the Truth Body, which is primordially endowed with qualities. Due to the potential to be a buddha, the Wisdom Truth Body, without decrease or increase, necessarily resides in the mind-streams of all

sentient beings, because in training on the path, the potential to be a buddha is established by the power of fact. Also, since the Truth Body at the time of being a buddha is unconditioned—it is not possible for it to be a conditioned phenomenon that is newly formed by causes and conditions—it is established that “it presently resides as the essence of the buddha.”

Regarding this, some people think, “If it presently resides as the essence of the buddha, why does that omniscient wisdom not dispel the obscurities of these sentient beings?” Or fixating upon the range of meanings of the common vehicle, they think, “Since the buddha is the effect and sentient beings are the cause, the effect being present in the cause is invalidated by reason, using such reasoning as the eating of food would [absurdly entail] the eating of excrement.”

For you who have been guided by merely a limited understanding of the common scriptures and have not trained in the meaning of the extremely profound, definitive meaning sutras, it is no wonder that such qualms have arisen! These [objections of yours], however, are not the case. Why? Although the suchness that is luminous and clear wisdom is present in everything without distinction, when adventitious delusion arises in one’s mind, the basis of designation of samsara is only this deluded mind together with its object; due to this delusion, one’s suchness is not known as it is. For example, when sleeping, due to the power of mental consciousness alone, unrestricted appearances arise such as the body, objects, and eye-consciousness, and so forth. At that time, although the subject and object are observed and apprehended separately, the mental consciousness itself is not able to know its own mode of being, in which the perceived [object] and the perceiving [subject] are not established as different; even though it is not known, there is nothing other than this mode of being. Likewise, all phenomena abide as emptiness; even so, merely being like this does not entail that everyone realizes this, because there is the possibility of delusion—appearances that do not accord with reality.

Therefore, since mind and the wisdom of the essential nature are [respectively] phenomenon and suchness, sentient beings and the Buddha are taught in terms of the mode of appearance and the mode of reality. Thus, using the reason that the effect is present in the cause to invalidate this position is simply not understanding it. In this way, this reasoning is

that the evidence of a clear manifestation of the Truth Body at the time of the fruition establishes that the heritage, primordially endowed with qualities, is present at the time of the cause because there is no temporal causality in the mode of reality; nevertheless, in dependence upon the mode of appearance, it is necessarily posited as cause and effect.

—LION’S ROAR: EXPOSITION ON BUDDHA-NATURE, 575–79

15 *Appearance and Reality*

The distinction between appearance and reality plays a major role in Mipam’s presentation of the two truths and buddha-nature. In the following passage, he illustrates this distinction in terms of the relationship between buddhas and sentient beings by showing how assertions about the nature of buddhas and sentient beings must be contextualized. That is, statements cannot be taken as objectively true or false outside of any context or perspective. Truth claims must take into account a perspective, in this case, whether it is a statement about the way things appear or the way things are.

In the way things appear, sentient beings are confused, wander in samsara, and suffer, whereas buddhas are held to be enlightened and beyond suffering. However, from the perspective of ultimate truth, this is not the way things are: there are no distinctions between sentient beings and buddhas in this perspective. The buddha is the nature of suchness, the empty and aware ground of being, and such is the nature of sentient beings as well. This is how things are. The difference between buddhas and sentient beings is that buddhas are free from distortions and realize this nature, whereas sentient beings do not. Yet this difference pertains only to the way things (mistakenly) appear, not the way they are.

Someone may ask, “Is the naturally pure ground, the suchness of luminous clarity, the buddha?”

It is the naturally pure buddha. In terms of the natural abiding reality, it is primordially pure with spontaneously present qualities—there is nothing

THREE MISTAKES REGARDING BUDDHA-NATURE

Aside from the correct view of tathagatagarbha we have been discussing, anything we hold, grasp, or cling to is wrong: this clinging is a mistake, a lack of realization of the authentic nature. At this point in his *Tongthun Senge Ngaro*, Mipham Rinpoche explains that he will correct some common mistakes made by beings in terms of their understanding of tathagatagarbha. According to Mipham, there are three common misunderstandings of buddha-nature. First, some people perceive tathagatagarbha as permanently or solidly existing, instead of empty. This view mistakenly assumes that tathagatagarbha is substantially existent. Second, some people interpret tathagatagarbha to be the same as blank emptiness, whereas it is actually the indivisible union of emptiness *and* clarity. Third, some people believe tathagatagarbha to be compounded and thus impermanent. In reality, tathagatagarbha is uncompounded. Mipham Rinpoche states, 'Whatever thoughts one holds regarding these three perceptions of tathagatagarbha are mistaken, so I will remove and reverse these errors.' Mipham does not mention the names of the great masters who misinterpreted buddha-nature in these three ways, remarking that there is no need. He says, 'By making straight what is crooked, the view I put forth will cut through all mistaken perceptions regarding buddha-nature. Thus, it is unnecessary to mention the names of people who hold incorrect views.'

Mipham Rinpoche removes mistaken perceptions about tathagatagarbha by means of two methods: scriptural support and logical reasoning. First, the words of Buddha Shakyamuni himself—widely studied in Tibetan Buddhism—are used to correct mistaken views. Second, Mipham will use the valid cognition reasonings of great masters such as Maitreya, Asanga, and Nagarjuna to help correct

OPENING THE WISDOM DOOR OF THE Rangtong & Shentong Views

A BRIEF EXPLANATION OF THE ONE TASTE OF
THE SECOND AND THIRD TURNINGS OF
THE WHEEL OF DHARMA

by
Khenchen Palden Sherab Rinpoche
and
Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche

Edited by Andrew Cook

mistaken views about buddha-nature. Both methods will disprove specific ideas about tathagatagarbha which are held by other teachers.

1. Tathagatagarbha as Substantially Existent

Mipham Rinpoche begins by using scriptural support to refute the view of those who hold that tathagatagarbha is not empty, and who instead assert that buddha-nature is substantially existent. For instance, this mistaken view contradicts what the Buddha taught in the *Noble Lankavatara Sutra*. In this discourse, the Blessed One engaged in many dialogues with several great disciples, such as the bodhisattva Lodro Mizepe, also known as Lodro Chenpo. Lodro Mizepe addressed the Buddha: 'You talk about buddha-nature as if it resides within a shell as something permanent and solidly existent. This seems to be the same thing as the doctrine of atman taught in non-Buddhist schools. What is the real difference between buddha-nature and atman?' The Buddha responded, 'They are not the same. Tathagatagarbha has three doors to liberation and the unborn state: the cause is unborn, the nature is emptiness, and the result is emptiness.' Or simply, the cause is emptiness, the result is emptiness, and the nature is emptiness.

When the Buddha taught that tathagatagarbha is permanent, he also said it is unborn. So the unborn nature and the three doors of liberation are tathagatagarbha. Even though Buddha Shakyamuni sometimes referred to things as existent, he did not mean they exist substantially; actually, he was talking about the nature of great emptiness beyond causes, conditions, and characteristics. Buddha continued, 'Oh Lodro Chenpo, future bodhisattvas should not hold tathagatagarbha to be the same as the atman, which is permanent and substantially existent. Tathagatagarbha is great emptiness.' In other dialogues between the Buddha and Lodro Chenpo, the Blessed One clearly described that tathagatagarbha is neither permanent nor impermanent, since both labels are merely conceptual. Holding on to any conception about the nature is a mistake. This is why the Awakened

One taught that clinging to any conceptual fabrications is 'the devil of conception.' Mipham quotes a line from one of the *Prajnaparamita Sutras*, in which the Buddha said, 'If there is something higher than enlightenment, that should also be perceived as magic, as a dream.' Throughout his teachings, Buddha described the empty nature of phenomena. He taught that nothing exists as substantially solid. Therefore, we must go beyond all ideas and mental fabrications.³⁴

Next, Mipham Rinpoche uses valid cognition to refute the view of those who hold that tathagatagarbha is not empty, asserting instead that buddha-nature is substantially existent. The nature of tathagatagarbha is empty because tathagatagarbha is the nature of mind. If it were not empty, how could tathagatagarbha be the nature of mind? It is precisely due to the emptiness of mind that mind is pervasive and can continue over time. Additionally, buddha-nature is inconceivable. Since tathagatagarbha is the genuine nature of mind, it also has the infinite qualities we have described throughout these teachings: love, compassion, and wisdom. Mipham continues, 'If you assert that tathagatagarbha is not empty, it could not be the nature of mind, nor could it be the nature of objects or the dharmadhatu. If it were substantially existent, as you say, tathagatagarbha would be independent. Thus, it could not be the nature of mind.' Buddhist logic uses many reasons to make this point.

Nothing truly substantial or solid can be found anywhere, at any time. It is exactly due to the fact that tathagatagarbha is empty that it can be the nature of everything, including the nature of mind and phenomena. By meditating and practicing in the correct way, we will gradually remove all the dualistic fabrications of grasping and clinging. The very fact that we can remove obscurations proves that the nature is empty. This is like seeing everything from the absolute perspective of emptiness. But even if we look at things from the point of view of relative reality, we still cannot find anything substantially solid. So, tathagatagarbha cannot be found as solidly existent anywhere on the

relative level. This is a brief version of Mipham's scriptural and logical refutations of those who claim that tathagatagarbha exists substantially.

2. Tathagatagarbha as Blank Emptiness

Second, Mipham Rinpoche refutes the view of those teachers who believe that tathagatagarbha is blank emptiness. He begins by using scriptural support for his refutation, citing the *Yeshe Chagya Tingnezin Sutra* [*ye shes phyag rgya ting nge 'tshin gyi mdo*]. In this sutra, the Buddha says, 'In the distant future, individuals will appear who talk endlessly about things, because talking is what they really like to do. Although they are not realized, these individuals will speak about the Dharma, stating, 'Everything is empty' simply because it is convenient to say. They will claim, 'I have realization of emptiness and can say from personal experience that all is emptiness. Nothing really exists.' Such individuals will hold on to the emptiness aspect of the nature, negating everything else. While these people will definitely come, whoever acts in this way is a robber of the Dharma, and their grasping to blank emptiness will definitely become a hindrance to their realization.'

Mipham Rinpoche next uses a quotation from the *Prajñāpāramitā* sutra known as the *Sāncayagatha*³⁵ to counter grasping to the view of tathagatagarbha as a negation state. Within these teachings, the Blessed One explains that bodhisattvas who are merely holding on to the idea that the aggregates are empty are engaging in grasping; instead of emphasizing the extreme of substantial existence, they are grasping to the dualistic conception of emptiness. As a result, these practitioners are unable to recognize the truth of the nature, which is actually beyond duality altogether. The next scriptural support offered by Mipham Rinpoche comes from the *Samādhi Raja Sutra*, in which the Buddha teaches that the views of 'existence and nonexistence' as well as 'dirty and clean' are both extremes. We must go beyond all extremes, since holding on to these ideas is merely conceptual fabrication. When we follow in the footsteps of wise beings and transcend extremes, we

discover that there is nothing central to hold on to, no spot for us to grasp as our principal reference point. This view is completely beyond extremes, beyond the notion of any center whatsoever. Throughout his teachings, the Buddha taught that holding on to any rigid views about the mind is a mistake.

Next, Mipham Rinpoche uses valid cognition to correct the view of those teachers who claim that buddha-nature is blank emptiness. We should begin by investigating what we mean when we say there is 'no true existing.' This phrase kind of removes the idea of existing, but whether we say 'no true existing' or 'no existing,' this is just a conception based on negation. It is an idea that jumps from the extreme of existence to the extreme of nonexistence. Either way we are still holding on to a mere idea. For this reason, the negation state is not the true nature—it is another way to hold on to fabrication.

However, Mipham Rinpoche continues by explaining that is not completely wrong to use this negation conception. As we saw in last year's discussion of Madhyamaka, this idea represents 'countable' absolute truth, and it is useful to help some beginners avoid the extreme of grasping to existence as solid; it is a jumping off point to the absolute state of the true nature. Yet what we are talking about here is *not* tathagatagarbha, or the absolute nature—it is the idea or conception of absolute truth. This truth is a useful way to leap closer to the nature of tathagatagarbha. This is Mipham Rinpoche's brief valid cognition refutation of tathagatagarbha as blank emptiness.

3. Tathagatagarbha as Compounded

Mipham Rinpoche begins with scriptural support to refute the mistaken notions of those teachers who cling to the idea that tathagatagarbha is compounded and impermanent. In the sutras, Glorious Conqueror Shakyamuni compares buddha-nature to the sun: When one discovers the sun of buddha-nature and the sky of mind is freed from the clouds of obscuration, buddha-nature shines forth

unimpededly as the omniscient state of a fully-awakened one. But is this buddha-nature permanent or impermanent? Sometimes in the scriptures it looks as though the Buddha describes tathagatagarbha, or the omniscient state, as permanent. Other times it looks as though the Buddha describes the omniscient state of a buddha as impermanent.

Why did the Awakened One speak about buddha-nature in these two different ways? When he described buddha-nature as impermanent, he was explaining how buddha-nature is perceived by individuals. Upon looking to our minds, we perceive the enlightened mind of the Buddha. However, it looks as though this mind is impermanent because it is moving, and, in a way, it is based on frames of time. Therefore the Buddha adapted his teachings to the perceptions of beings and described the omniscient state as impermanent.

In his famous text *Tsema Namdrel [tshad ma rnam 'grel]*, Skt. *Pramanavarttika*, the great teacher Dharmakirti puts forth valid reasoning to explain why the Buddha sometimes referred to tathagatagarbha as impermanent. This text is a detailed explanation of the system of valid cognition, in which Dharmakirti asserts that valid cognition is not permanent. He asserts that the kind of valid cognition which recognizes existing as existing is valid cognition, along with the kind of valid cognition that recognizes objects as existing. Even so, the objects of investigation themselves are not permanent, and therefore valid cognition is not permanent; both subjects and objects are all in the instant state. So everything we experience in this world—including perceiving consciousness itself—is in the instant state of impermanence. This is why the Buddha sometimes spoke about the omniscient state as impermanent.

In contrast, we can view buddha-nature as permanent from the enlightened perspective of purity, as when Mipham Rinpoche quoted Maitreya earlier in the text, stating, 'Tathagatagarbha is great permanence beyond both permanence and impermanence.' From this perspective, tathagatagarbha is great permanence beyond all notions of

permanence and impermanence. It is beyond all dualistic conceptions. Although there is nothing substantially solid to which we can grasp, we can use the word 'permanent' to describe buddha-nature since it is the original nature which is unborn and unceasing. Because the nature is unborn, it is also uncompounded—like the sky. Hence when we look to the nature, there is nothing to see. This is not the same permanence that comes from making dualistic distinctions between 'permanence' and 'impermanence'; we can simply call it 'great permanence.' Mipham Rinpoche offers many quotations from different sutras to show why the Blessed One spoke about buddha-nature in slightly different ways, as either permanent or impermanent. The main point to remember is that the unborn, uncompounded nature is not subject to the same conceptual fabrications we have in mind when we make false distinctions based on dualistic habit patterns.

2. Explaining the Mode of Reality of Pure Appearance

This section has three parts: (1) a concise demonstration, (2) an extensive presentation, and (3) advice to realize the profound meaning.

Distinguishing the Views and Philosophies

Illuminating Emptiness in a
Twentieth-Century Tibetan Buddhist Classic

1. CONCISE DEMONSTRATION

*The mode of reality of pure appearance,
which is the great meaning revealed by the scriptures of sūtra
and tantra, is
The heritage of the basic element, the nature of luminous
clarity, etc.—
Whatever pure appearances there are.*

Regarding this, “the mode of reality of pure appearance,” which is the great meaning revealed by scriptures of sūtra and tantra, is the basic element of heritage, the Buddha-nature, the maṅḍala that is the nature of luminous clarity, etc.—whatever pure appearances there are of the abiding reality of the ground.

2. EXTENSIVE EXPLANATION

This section has three parts: (1) refuting other traditions, (2) presenting our tradition, and (3) a summary of the essential meaning of that [mode of reality of pure appearance].

Bötrül

Translated, Annotated, and Introduced by
Douglas Samuel Duckworth

1. REFUTING OTHER TRADITIONS

This section has three parts: (1) a concise demonstration, (2) an extensive explanation, and (3) a summary.

1. CONCISE PRESENTATION

*Regarding this, other than a constructed extreme of existence
or nonexistence, permanence or annihilation,
Masterly scholars of the later generation do not know
The nature of the essential nature, the heritage of the basic
element,
Which is profound, peaceful, and stainless.**

*Those of the later generation refer to the Kagyü, Sakya, and Geluk, as stated by Bötrül's student, Khenpo Chökyap.



Regarding this, other than either a constructed extreme of existence or nonexistence, permanence or annihilation, it appears that most masterly scholars of the later generation do not know the profound abiding reality as it is—the profound, peaceful, and stainless nature of the heritage of the basic element—which is Buddha-nature.

2. EXTENSIVE EXPLANATION

This section has four parts: (1) refuting the extreme of entities, (2) refuting the extreme of nonentities, (3) refuting the extreme of both, and (4) refuting the extreme of neither.

1. REFUTING THE EXTREME OF ENTITIES

Some people take the position that the Mahāyāna heritage is an entity that is the ultimate truth. They say: "The sūtras, tantras, and śāstras that explicitly teach emptiness free from extremes are the provisional meaning."*

This heritage that is a common locus of a permanent phenomenon and an entity conflicts with the path of reasoning. Such a heritage that is an entity of true permanence is not the illustrious tradition of the Lion of the Śākya.

Regarding this, as was set forth as an opponent in [Mipam's] *Lion's Roar: Exposition [of Buddha-Nature]*, some philosophers make the claim that the Mahāyāna heritage, which is the intended meaning of the last Word, is a truly established entity that is not ultimately empty. They explain all sūtras, tantras, and śāstras that explicitly teach the empty essence—the emptiness that is free from all extremes—as the provisional meaning.

As such, this heritage that is a common locus of a permanent phenomenon and an entity conflicts with the path of reasoning. Such a heritage that is an entity of true permanence conflicts with the scrip-

*This view is attributed to the Kagyü and "proponents of other-emptiness," such as the Jonang scholar Dölpopa, by Bötrül's student, Khenpo Chökyap.

tures of the Victorious One, the Lion of the Śākya. Therefore, one should know the extensive presentation of scripture and reasoning as to the manner that it cannot be established as the Buddha's illustrious tradition from the *Lion's Roar: Exposition [of Buddha-Nature]*.¹⁶⁶

2. REFUTING THE EXTREME OF NONENTITIES

*Some people say, "The Mahāyāna heritage is merely an ultimate nonentity. The sūtras, tantras, and śāstras that explicitly teach the appearing aspect of luminous clarity are the provisional meaning."**

Is a heritage of the basic element that is a permanent nonentity, eloquent to those who know reasoning, or what? Such a heritage that is annihilation, nothing at all, is not the illustrious tradition of the Buddha.

Also, some people say that the Mahāyāna heritage is a mere nonentity that is the emptiness of what is truly established ultimately. They explain all the sūtras, tantras, and śāstras that explicitly teach the manner of the nature of luminous clarity's appearing aspect as the provisional meaning.

However, since a heritage of the basic element that is devoid of qualities—and a nonentity, unconditioned, with a permanent nature—conflicts with reasoning by the power of fact, is it eloquent to those who know reasoning, or what? Moreover, such a heritage as this—an annihilation that is nothing at all—also conflicts with the scriptures of the Victorious One, the perfect Buddha. Therefore, it cannot be established as his illustrious tradition. Know the extensive manner of this also from the *Lion's Roar: Exposition [of Buddha-Nature]*.¹⁶⁷

*This view is attributed to the Geluk by Bötrül's student, Khenpo Chökyap. For a Geluk view on Buddha-nature as an absence, the aspect of the mind's lack of true establishment, see Khedrupjé, *rgyud sde spyi'i rnam par bzlog pa rgyas par bshad pa* in Ferdinand Lessing and Alex. Wayman, *Mkhas grub rje's Fundamentals of the Buddhist Tantras*, 52-53. See also David Ruegg, "On the dGe lugs pa Theory of the *talhaṅtagartha*," in *Pratidhāni*, ed. J.C. Heisterman, 505. For more on Geluk interpretations of Buddha-nature, see David S. Ruegg, *Three Studies in the History of Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka Philosophy*, 75-76n171.

3. REFUTING THE EXTREME OF BOTH

Some people assert the heritage as
 A common locus of what is unconditioned and conditioned—
 A unity of both (1) the nonentity that is emptiness and
 (2) The entity that is the clarity of mind.*

There are no *sūtras*, *tantras*, or *śāstras* that state
 A naturally abiding heritage (*rang bzhiñ gnas rigs*) that is
 conditioned.

Are they asserting this conditioned heritage of clarity
 To be the developing heritage (*rgyas 'gyur rigs*)?

Also, some people assert the Mahāyāna heritage as a unity of both the unconditioned and the conditioned—a common locus of the two: (1) the emptiness that is the absence of constructed entities and (2) the conditioned entity that is the clarity of mind.

However, a naturally abiding heritage that is conditioned is not at all stated in the scriptures of *sūtra*, *tantra*, or *śāstra* that assert the definitive meaning of the supreme vehicle, the Great Middle Way. Also, when examining this by reasoning, is this conditioned aspect of the heritage of clarity asserted as merely the developing heritage? This manner also appears extensively in the *Lion's Roar: Exposition [of Buddha-Nature]*.¹⁶⁸

4. REFUTING THE EXTREME OF NEITHER

Some people fear that if they assert the heritage as either
 existent or nonexistent,
 Then it will contradict reasoning.

*This view is attributed to the Sakya and Rongtön Sheja Künnik (*rang ston shes bya kun rig*, 1367–1449) in particular, by Bötrül's student, Khenpo Chökyip. Ngawang Jorden explains Buddha-nature as the indivisibility of the emptiness and clarity of mind as the view of the Sakya scholar, Gorampa, in "Buddha-nature: Through the Eyes of Go rams pa bsod mams seng ge in Fifteenth-Century Tibet," 125. Jorden cites the Sakya scholar, Mangtö Ludrup Gyatso (*mang thos klu sgrub rgya mtsho*, 1523–1596), from a manuscript of *nam bsñad nor bu'i phreng ba*, a commentary on Gorampa, in his thesis, p.124n252. "In short, the unity of clarity and emptiness is posited as Buddha-nature because *sañsra* and *nirvāna* are comprised within the mind (*sems*) and the mind also is free from constructs, empty of true existence; therefore, the abiding nature of objects primordially abides as the unity of clarity and emptiness" (translation mine).

They speak of [heritage] in the manner of a cause that
 potentially emerges,
 Like butter from milk.†

Such a manner of a cause that potentially emerges
 Is said to be conditioned by proponents of reasoning.
 This heritage of the basic element—which was not present
 before, but potentially emerges—
 Is not the tradition of the omniscient one, father and son.

Also, some people fear that if they say that the heritage is either existent or nonexistent, then it will conflict with reasoning. Due to this, they speak of the Mahāyāna heritage as well in merely the way of a cause that potentially emerges but lacks qualities beforehand—like butter potentially emerging from milk. When this is examined by reasoning, such a cause that potentially emerges—but has no qualities beforehand—is accepted as conditioned by proponents of reasoning. Therefore, there is the consequent fault that heritage would be conditioned. It also contradicts scripture: In general, such a heritage of the basic element—that potentially emerges but has no qualities beforehand—is not the assertion of the omniscient, perfect Buddha. Specifically, it is not the assertion of Longchenpa, father and son, nor is it that of the lord of doctrine, Mingling, father and son.¹⁶⁹

3. SUMMARY

Other than merely the valid cognitions analyzing the
 categorized ultimate and
 Conventional confined perception,

†This apparently is addressed to a Sakya position. For instance, the Sakya scholar, Rongtön, in his commentary on the famous verse from the *Ultimatāntara* I.155 that states, "The basic element is empty of those adventitious [phenomenal] that have the character of separability, but not empty of the unexcelled qualities that have the character of inseparability," glossed the second line, which literally states that the basic element is not empty of qualities, by saying that it is "not empty due to not being empty of the twofold self." Rongtön, *Commentary on the Ultimatāntara* (*rgyud bla ma'i 'grel pa*), 145. See also Shenpen Hookham, *The Buddha Within*, 40–41. He thus explained the heritage as an absence, without affirming positive qualities of a Buddha to innately exist when one is a sentient being. Rongtön also portrayed the heritage as a cause as follows: "The basic element is the potential (*sa bon*) for transcendent qualities; it is a cause because the three jewels arise in dependence upon the defilements becoming purified through properly directing the mind toward it." Rongtön, *Commentary on the Ultimatāntara*, 108.

They do not have the valid cognition of purity; Therefore, there is fault.

Other than only the mere valid cognition that analyzes the categorized ultimate for ultimate valid cognition, and the mere valid cognition of confined perception for conventional valid cognition, those who propound [the heritage of Buddha-nature] in these ways do not have an account of the conventional valid cognition of purity. Therefore, there is fault.

2. PRESENTING OUR TRADITION

This section has three parts: (1) a concise demonstration, (2) an extensive explanation, and (3) a summary.

1. CONCISE DEMONSTRATION

Ordinary philosophies do not know of

This luminous clarity, which is the abiding reality of the mind. It is the great meaning revealed by the scriptures of sūtra and tantra, and

Is present in the tradition of the scholars of the early generation.

It is the great, profound meaning, purposefully expressed

By the Guide, the Lion of Men,

“Profound, peaceful, free from constructs, and luminously clear—

The identity of the unconditioned.”

It is the supreme, revealed meaning widely taught

In the definitive meaning sūtras of the middle and last wheel:

“The mind is devoid of mind;

The nature of mind is luminous clarity.”

The suchness of mind free from extremes

Is the great indivisibility of the expanse and wisdom.

It is luminously clear, profound, peaceful, free from constructs, Self-existing, unconditioned, and spontaneously present.

Its nature cannot be known or expressed by a confined intellect,

Like that which is an entity or a nonentity. Therefore, since it transcends the extremes of purity, bliss, permanence, and the self, It is the transcendent perfection.

Regarding this, this abiding reality of the mind free from superimposition and denigration—luminous clarity, the heritage of the basic element, which is Buddha-nature—is not known of by ordinary philosophies. This great meaning revealed by the scriptures of sūtra and tantra—the heritage of the basic element as it is—is lucidly present in the tradition of scholars of the early generation. Moreover, it is the great, profound meaning purposefully expressed by the Victorious One, the Guide and Lion of Men, in the *Lalitavistara-sūtra*:

Profound, peaceful, free from constructs, luminously clear, and unconditioned,

I have found a nectar-like truth. . . .¹⁷⁰

It is the supreme revealed meaning taught widely in definitive meaning sūtras of the middle and last wheels of the Word:

The mind is devoid of mind;

The nature of mind is luminous clarity.

Buddha-nature—the suchness of mind free from extremes—is the great indivisible unity of (1) the expanse of emptiness taught in the middle Word and (2) the wisdom of natural, luminous clarity taught in the last Word. It is distinguished as self-existing, unconditioned, and with spontaneously present qualities—as is explicitly taught in the *Mahāyāna-Uttaratantra*: “profound,” “peaceful,” “free from constructs,” “luminously clear,” “self-existing,” “unconditioned,” “spontaneously present,” and so on. Its nature is not expressed or conceived by an intellect of confined perception, like that which is an entity or a nonentity. Therefore, it is the transcendent perfection, free from all extremes of purity, bliss, permanence, and the self that are posited by a valid cognition of confined perception.

2. EXTENSIVE EXPLANATION

This section has two parts: (1) the essence (*ngo bo*) of the essential nature free from extremes and (2) differentiating its nature (*rang bzhiin*).

1. ESSENCE OF THE ESSENTIAL NATURE FREE FROM EXTREMES

The property of the essential nature, the abiding reality pure from the beginning,

Has the identity of three distinctive qualities:

It is essentially empty, naturally clear, and

Its nature is all-pervasive compassionate resonance (hugs rje).

The essence of such a heritage is asserted to be (1) the abiding reality that is the primordially pure property of the essential nature (2) bearing the identity that is the endowment of the three distinctive qualities—the nature of empty essence, natural clarity, and all-pervasive compassionate resonance. In short, the defining character of heritage is: the abiding reality which is the primordially pure property of the essential nature endowed with the three distinctive qualities. When divided by means of support, one should also know the way of the threefold division, and so on, as intended in the statement:

Like the sequence of pure, impure/pure, and completely pure,

There is the sequence of sentient beings, bodhisattvas, and Buddhas.⁷¹

2. DIFFERENTIATING ITS NATURE

This section has three parts: (1) empty essence—the intended meaning of the middle wheel, (2) nature of clarity—the intended meaning of the last wheel, and (3) showing the noncontradiction of the middle and last [wheels] as all-pervasive compassionate resonance.

1. EMPTY ESSENCE—THE INTENDED MEANING OF THE MIDDLE WHEEL

The supreme definitive meaning of the middle wheel

Is the expanse of phenomena endowed with the three gates of liberation.

"The mind is devoid of mind. . . ."

The essence of mind itself abides as empty.

From the two truths as appearance/emptiness,

The ultimate emptiness is the supreme freedom from constructs.

Since it is the object found by the valid cognition of ultimate analysis,

It is free from the extreme of the truth of permanent entities.

The distinctive empty essence is as follows: From the aspect of the empty essence of Buddha-nature, the nature of the expanse of phenomena is emptiness endowed with the three gates of liberation—as intended in the supreme, definitive meaning, and profound sūtras of the middle wheel of the Word. The essence of mind itself abides as emptiness, in accord with the intended meaning of the statement, "The mind is devoid of mind. . . ." From the manner of dividing the two truths as appearance/emptiness—which is the way of the middle wheel—this is the identity of emptiness that is the supreme ultimate truth free from extremes. Also, without the slightest thing withstanding the analysis of valid cognition analyzing the ultimate abiding reality, it is the consummate object found—dawning as the handprint [result] of negation by exclusion. Therefore, it is free from the extreme of the truth of permanent entities.

2. NATURE OF CLARITY—THE INTENDED MEANING OF THE LAST WHEEL

The supreme definitive meaning of the last wheel

Is the heritage of the Buddha endowed with knowledge, love, and powers.

". . . The nature of mind is luminous clarity"

Is the nature that abides as the great luminous clarity.

From the two truths of authentic/inauthentic experience,

It is the supreme ultimate of the concordant modes of appearance and reality.

Since it is the object found by the conventional valid cognition of purity,

It is free from the extreme of annihilation as nothing at all.

The distinctive nature of luminous clarity is as follows: From the aspect of the nature of clarity, the heritage of the basic element is endowed with knowledge, love, and powers; it is the identity of the heritage of the Buddha—as intended in the supreme, definitive meaning sūtras of the last Word. The nature abides as the great luminous clarity, as is the intended meaning of the statement, ". . . The nature of mind is luminous clarity." From the manner of dividing the two truths as authentic/inauthentic experience—which is the way of the last wheel of the Word—this is the essence of authentic experience that is the supreme ultimate. Also, it is established as the consummate object found by the conventional valid cognition of purity. Therefore, it is naturally free from the extreme of annihilation as nothing at all.

3. SHOWING THE NONCONTRADICTION OF THE MIDDLE AND LAST [WHEELS] AS ALL-PERVASIVE COMPASSIONATE RESONANCE

*The supreme noncontradiction of the middle and last wheels
Is the unity of appearance and emptiness—the basic element of
the essential nature.*

*From the purity and impurity of mind itself,
It abides as the great interdependent arising of compassionate
resonance.*

*It is the supreme meaning of the noncontradiction of the two
truths*

Of appearance/emptiness and authentic/inauthentic experience.

Since it is not the domain of confined valid cognition,

It is free from all adventitiously constructed phenomena.

The viewpoint of the supreme noncontradiction of the middle and last wheels is as follows: Compassionate resonance, abiding as the great interdependent arising, shines everywhere due to the power of the purity and the impurity of the mind itself; it is the self-expression of the basic element of the essential nature—the Buddha-nature—which is the unity of appearance and emptiness. This manner—the noncontradictory two truths distinguished as appearance/emptiness and authentic/inauthentic experience—is the identity of the supreme ultimate truth. Since it is beyond the domain of the valid cognition of confined perception, it is naturally free from all adventitiously constructed phenomena such as existence and nonexistence, permanence and annihilation.

3. SUMMARY

This is unlike ordinary other-emptiness

*Because [it] cannot withstand the analysis of ultimate valid
cognition;*

*Due to being the object found by the valid cognition of pure
[vision].*

It is not revealed by the ordinary emptiness of true existence.

From the aspect of the nature of luminous clarity, this heritage of the basic nature abides as the identity indivisible with all the qualities of the Truth Body, which is a freed effect. However, it is not the

essence that by appearing, it cannot be empty, for it abides as the empty essence that is unable to withstand analysis by the valid cognition of ultimate analysis. Therefore, it is not like some [claim of the proponents of an] ordinary other-emptiness, who are the opponents in the *Lion's Roar: Exposition [of Buddha-Nature]*.¹⁷²

From the aspect of emptiness, it abides as empty of true existence, as the great freedom from constructs. However, it is not the case that by being empty, it cannot appear; it abides as the great nature of luminous clarity that is the object found by the conventional valid cognition of purity. Therefore, it is also not rivaled by the ordinary [claim of the proponents of] emptiness of true existence, who are the opponents in the *Lion's Roar: Exposition [of Buddha-Nature]*.¹⁷³

SUMMARY OF THE ESSENTIAL MEANING OF THAT [MODE OF REALITY OF PURE APPEARANCE]

This section has three parts: (1) distinguishing three conventions of the Middle Way, (2) describing their ways of explaining the Word's viewpoint, and (3) through this, advice to realize the immeasurable profound meaning.

1. DISTINGUISHING THREE CONVENTIONS OF THE MIDDLE WAY

*Regarding this, through three distinct objects of negation
Of reasoning by a valid cognition of ultimate analysis,*

Three conventions of the Middle Way are made:

- (1) *Emptiness of true existence, (2) other-emptiness, and
(3) self-emptiness.*

In general, there are nominal distinctions, such as emptiness of true existence, etc. However, in this context there are three operative distinctions widely renowned in Tibet, the Middle Ways of: (1) emptiness of true existence, (2) other-emptiness, and (3) self-emptiness. It is clear that these are made by means of three distinct ways of identifying the object of negation of reasoning by a valid cognition analyzing the ultimate.

2. DESCRIBING THEIR WAYS OF EXPLAINING THE WORD'S VIEWPOINT

*Regarding this, [the proponents of] emptiness of true existence
and other-emptiness*

*Explain the middle and last wheels as contradictory.
The great school of early translations' Middle Way, free from extremes,*

Accepts the middle and last wheels as the definitive meaning;

They are accepted without contradiction as a single essential point,

Having elegantly distinguished between the ways of dividing the two truths—

The two truths of appearance/emptiness and Authentic/inauthentic experience.

This is the intended meaning of the Victorious Ones and their [bodhisattva] offspring;

*It is the unexcelled, distinctive assertion
Of the powerful victor, Longchenpa, and
The omniscient Lochen Dharmaśrī.*

If this meaning, as it is, is understood well,

*The definitive meaning [sūtras] of the middle and last wheels,
Candrakīrti's texts and the Uttaratantra, etc.,*

Drawn without contradiction as a single essential point.

The proponents of the Middle Way of emptiness of true existence and the proponents of the Middle Way of other-emptiness explain the intended meaning of the middle and last wheels of the Word as contradictory. However, the school of early translations' Middle Way, free from extremes, distinguishes well the ways of dividing: (1) the ultimate accepted as the nature of the empty essence from the division of the two truths into appearance/emptiness, and (2) the ultimate that is the identity of the nature of luminous clarity from the division of the two truths into authentic/inauthentic experience. The viewpoint of both the definitive meaning [sūtras] of the middle and last wheels of the Word are accepted as a single essential point—the consummate great unity that is the noncontradiction of appearance and emptiness.

This is also shown by the Victorious One, the Lion of the Śākyas: The quality of the empty essence is extensively taught in the middle Word and the quality of the nature of luminous clarity is extensively elucidated in the last Word. The great [bodhisattva] offspring of the Victorious Ones, Mañjuḥśa and Maitreyaṅgā, as well emphasized the profound emptiness and the vast nature of luminous clarity. The

powerful victor, Longchenpa, also asserted the intended meaning of (1) the middle Word as the empty essence and (2) the last Word as the identity of the luminous and clear nature.

In particular, the omniscient Lochen Dharmaśrī, in his great commentary on the [three] vows, asserted that the commentaries on the viewpoint of the middle Word, such as the Middle Way "Collection of Reasonings," literally state the empty essence; and that these are given the name "the Middle Way of self-emptiness." He asserted that commentaries on the viewpoint of the last Word, such as the *Uttaratantra*, literally elucidate the quality of the luminous and clear nature.¹⁷⁴ He also gave these the name "the Middle Way of other-emptiness," intended just *nominally*. However, this is not at all like the *operative* other-emptiness that is widely renowned these days because it is only intended *nominally*. This follows because he applied the name "other-emptiness of phenomena" (*chos can gzhan stong*) to proponents of Mind-Only as well.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, for the explicit teaching of the *Uttaratantra*:

The basic element is empty of those adventitious [phenomena] that have the character of separability,

But not empty of the unexcelled qualities that have the character of inseparability.¹⁷⁶

He also applied the mere name "other-emptiness of suchness" (*chos nyid gzhan stong*), intending simply that in the literal intended meaning, the ultimate expanse—the Buddha-nature—is not empty of its own essence from the perspective of the valid cognition of pure vision; while it is empty of what is other, namely, the adventitious defilements that are abandoned.

However, this is not at all like ordinary other-emptiness because it is explicitly clear from his texts that he accepts, without dividing or excluding, the viewpoints of the definitive meaning sūtras of the middle and last Word, and the commentaries on their viewpoint, such as Nāgārjuna's "Collection of Reasonings" and Maitreyaṅgā's *Uttaratantra*. Moreover, he does not put forward even a single word in line with those who say that (1) the middle Word is a provisional meaning or that (2) the chariot tradition of Nāgārjuna, the father and sons who are the commentators on its viewpoint, is a view of annihilation. Due to this, he accepts the ultimate Buddha-nature as the indivisibility of appearance and emptiness.

Also, what is called "indivisible" in general is divided into three types of indivisibility:

1. “partial indivisibility,” like a black and white thread intertwined
2. “nominal indivisibility,” like a multicolored rope being empty of a snake, which is the emptiness of the imagined nature in the dependent nature within the Mind-Only system, and
3. “genuine indivisibility,” like the indivisible essence of fire and heat

From among these three, “the indivisibility of purity and equality” is not merely partial or imputed indivisibility; the way that it must be asserted as genuine indivisibility is stated in [Lochen’s] texts such as *Words [of the Lord of Secrets]*¹⁷⁷—this is the same essential point. Therefore, other than merely the way they use words, I see both this manner and that of the omniscient lord of doctrine [Longchenpa] as the same essential point. Consequently, I say that it is “the unexcelled, distinctive assertion of the omniscient one and his lineage.”

Accordingly, in the great summary of philosophies by Getsé Pañchen, one should know the way that he too stated that the viewpoint of the middle and last Word should be realized as one—like the tastes of honey and molasses.¹⁷⁸ Otherwise, by considering just the way of word usage without even seeing where the profound viewpoint of scriptural meaning lies, one gets involved in various painstaking hardships of negating and affirming, which is a cause for wasting [a life with] leisure and advantages.

In short, having ascertained the viewpoint of the middle and last Word as noncontradictory—not in mere words, but realizing the great indivisibility of appearance and emptiness—whatever words are used become the essential point of the viewpoint of the omniscient one and his lineage; otherwise, it seems to be difficult. If the essential point of the meaning of this is understood well, as it is, then all the essential meanings—not mere words—of the definitive meaning sūtras of the middle and last wheel, and the likes of Candrakīrti’s texts and the *Uttaratantra* as well, dawn without contradiction as a single essential point.

3. ADVICE TO REALIZE THE IMMEASURABLE PROFOUND MEANING

*Through this, know the immeasurable profound meanings
Of the tantras of Secret Mantra, such as*

*The natural maṇḍala of spontaneous presence and
The abiding reality, which is the innate mind.*

*An extremely clear presentation of this is
Elucidated in the Lion’s Roar: Exposition [of Buddha-
Nature].*

*If you want to know its difficult points,
See the Notes [on the Essential Points of the Exposition]
that I wrote.*

*This does not withstand ultimate analysis,
Nor is it an object found by a conventional valid cognition of
confined perception;*

*It is the meaning established by the uncategorized ultimate
analysis, and
Is the object found by the conventional valid cognition of
purity.*

This is a stanza at the interlude between sections.

As illustrated by what has been explained, know also the vastly immeasurable, profound meanings revealed by the great tantras of Secret Mantra—such as the ground that is the natural maṇḍala of spontaneous presence, and the abiding reality, which is the innate mind (*gniyug sems*).

In this way, there is a very clear presentation of this definitive meaning Buddha-nature elucidated in the *Lion’s Roar: Exposition [of Buddha-Nature]*. If you want to know just a little bit about its difficult points, also see the *Notes [on the Essential Points of the Exposition]* that I wrote.

The stanza that summarizes the section is as follows: Revealed in this way, the essential nature, the heritage of the basic element, does not withstand the valid cognition of ultimate analysis. It is also not an object found by a conventional valid cognition of confined perception. However, it is the meaning established in the ascertainment of the great empty essence, through the valid cognition of the uncategorized ultimate having negated all extremes by exclusion. The quality of luminous clarity, its self-lucidity, is the object found by the conventional valid cognition of purity. This is a stanza at the interlude between sections.

Thus the Madhyamaka of the ground refers to the two truths, the Madhyamaka of the path to the provisions, and the Madhyamaka of the result to the coalescence of the two buddha-bodies.

Great Madhyamaka

[77a.4-84a.4] Secondly, concerning the subtle, inner Great Madhyamaka of definitive meaning, it is stated in the *Jewel Lamp of the Madhyamaka* by the master Bhavya (*skal-ldan*):

The Madhyamaka of the Prāsaṅgika and the Svātantrika is the coarse, Outer Madhyamaka. It should indeed be expressed by those who profess well-informed intelligence during debates with [extremist] Outsiders, during the composition of great treatises, and while establishing texts which concern supreme reasoning. However, when the subtle, inner Madhyamaka is experientially cultivated, one should meditate on the nature of Yogācāra-Madhyamaka.¹⁶⁹



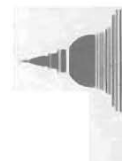
Asaṅga

*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism
Its Fundamentals and History*

Section One: The Translations

Dudjom Rinpoche, Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje

Translated and edited by
Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein



WISDOM PUBLICATIONS Boston

In this way, two Madhyamaka are spoken of, one outer and coarse, the other inner and subtle.

Concerning the latter, the regent Ajita [Maitreya] has extensively analysed the meaningful intention of the topics of vast significance which revealed all things in terms of the three essential natures. This he did by means of discourses connected with the irreversible intention of the final turning of the doctrinal wheel and with the utter purity of the three spheres [of subject, object and their interaction].

Whereas in the aforementioned tradition of Mind Only, the dependent nature is the ground of emptiness and is explained to be the absolute, empty of imaginary objects of refutation, here it is the absolute reality (*chos-nyid yongs-grub*) that is claimed to be empty of imaginary objects of refutation. Accordingly, the components, psychophysical bases and activity fields, which are dependently conceived, are said to be a ground which is empty of the imaginary self and its properties, and the ground which is empty of that dependent ground of emptiness is absolute reality. This ground of emptiness never comes into existence because it is empty of the phenomena of samsāra, which are characterised as suddenly arisen and which are divided according to essential stains and substantial faults. However this ground is not empty of the amassed enlightened attributes of nirvāṇa which spontaneously abide from the beginning.

Accordingly, it is said in the *Supreme Continuum of the Greater Vehicle* (Ch.1, v.155):

The seed which is empty of suddenly arisen phenomena
Endowed with divisive characteristics
Is not empty of the unsurpassed reality
Endowed with indivisible characteristics.

And in the *Commentary [on the Supreme Continuum of the Greater Vehicle, Mahāyānottaratantrasāstravyākhyā, T 4025, p.76]:*

If one asks what is revealed by this passage, the reason for there being no basis of all-conflicting emotions requiring to be clarified in this naturally pure seed of the tathāgata is that it is naturally free from suddenly arisen stains. It contains nothing at all which can be established as a basis for purification, for its nature is reality, pure of divisive phenomena. So it is that the nucleus of the tathāgata is empty of divisions - which may be removed and of the entire nest of conflicting emotions, but it is not empty of the inconceivable attributes of the buddhas which outnumber all the sands of the River Ganges and are non-divisive and inalienable.

Now it is also said that the imaginary implies that attributes are without

substantial existence, the dependent that creation is without substantial existence and the absolute that ultimate reality is without substantial existence. The first two of these [indicate] that the conceptual aspects of the subject-object dichotomy, which are suddenly arising fictions, are empty of their own essence, and the latter refers to emptiness as the naturally expressed, fundamental essence itself which has no substantiality. Since this [ultimate reality] is naturally pure, it abides, through its function of emptiness, as the enlightened attributes of the buddha-body of reality, and through its apparitional function as the ground on which the buddha-bodies, fields, celestial mansions and so forth arise. Through its function of awareness, it is spontaneously present from the beginning, free from causes and free from results, because it is the supporting ground of the ten powers, the four fearlessnesses and the like. This natural expression of the buddhas, which is called the nucleus of the sugata, does not abide as the seed of creation, destruction, transformation, change, increase or decrease, cause or condition, and so forth, and it is ever uncovered, without being an object of metaphor, thought or expression. It is said in the *Play of Mañjuśrī* (*Mañjuśrīvikīrtitamahāyānāsūtra, T 96*):

Sister, although suddenly arising conflicting emotions do emerge in relation to the natural inner radiance, the natural inner radiance cannot be defiled by those suddenly arisen all-conflicting emotions.

And the regent Ajita has said [in the *Supreme Continuum of the Greater Vehicle, Ch.1, v.5*]:

Uncompounded and spontaneously present,
Unrealised through external conditions,
Endowed with knowledge, love and power
Is the buddhahood possessing the two benefits.

If one were otherwise to apprehend all things as being exclusively empty of their own essence, in the manner of the proponents of intrinsic emptiness (*yang-stong-pa*), then it is said that according to the same extreme [argument] the buddha-body of reality would also be empty of itself. The buddha-bodies, pristine cognitions, fields and so forth would be non-existent, the accumulation of the provisions and purification of obscurations, which depend upon these, would also be non-existent, and indeed the teachings through which the causal and resultant vehicles reveal all the means of purifying stains, whatever their basis or path, would be diminished. The ground of purification being non-existent, there would be no need to effect purification. Being empty of pristine cognition, there would be no work on behalf of others and no [enlightened] understanding. There being nothing existent, even with respect to the relative appearances of the impure dependent

nature, there would also be no enlightened attributes to transform these impurities into the pure dependent nature. There would be no self to become the ground of bondage and liberation, and there would be no doctrine to be realised by each one individually. Many such faults would persist and by nature give rise to the source of unbearable views. This can be known from quotations such as the following from the *Sūtra of the Dialogue with Kāśyapa from the Sublime Pagoda of Precious Jewels (Aryaratnakūṭakāśyapaparivartasūtra, T 87)*:

O Kāśyapa, whoever, referring to emptiness, relies upon emptiness deviates from this discourse of mine; theirs is said to be a great deviation. O Kāśyapa, it is better to abide in a view [which clings to] individual existence to the extent of Mount Sumeru, than with manifest egotism to adopt a view to emptiness. If you ask why, O Kāśyapa, I have explained that although that which arises from all views is emptiness, Kāśyapa, that which exclusively regards emptiness is untenable.

If one were, on the other hand, to object that this would not be emptiness, it is not the case, as the *Sublime Sūtra of the Descent to Lañkā* says:

If you ask what is the emptiness which is the ultimate reality of all things, the great pristine cognition of the sublime beings, it is as follows. The attainment of the pristine cognition of the sublime beings, which is one's own intrinsic awareness, is empty of the propensities of all views and faults. This is called the emptiness which is the ultimate reality of all things, the great pristine cognition of sublime beings.

This ultimate reality that is empty of extraneous entities (*gzhan-stong*), is similarly found in sūtras belonging to the intermediate promulgation of the doctrinal wheel. It is said in the *Transcendental Perfection of Discriminative Awareness in Twenty-five Thousand Lines*:

In this context, if you ask what is the emptiness of other substances, it applies whether the tathāgatas have appeared or not. As the abiding nature of reality, as reality itself, the expanse of reality, the faultlessness of reality, the nature of just what is, the unmistakable nature of just what is, the unalterable nature of just what is, and as the genuine goal, it abides as just what is. Therefore, this reality, which is empty of extraneous entities, is called the emptiness of other substances. Subhūti, this is the greater vehicle of the bodhisattvas, great spiritual warriors.

And it is extensively mentioned in the *Supreme Continuum of the Greater Vehicle*, as cited above in the passage (Ch.1, v.155) which begins:

The seed which is empty of suddenly arisen phenomena
Endowed with divisive characteristics...

The nature of this expanse in the minds of sentient beings is like a treasure of precious gems within the earth, uncovered by stains in respect of its own essence, and yet it simultaneously assumes the suddenly arisen forms of saṃsāra, in the manner, for example, of water and ice. It says in the *Sūtra of the King of Contemplation*:

Pure, clear and inwardly radiant,
Undisturbed and uncompounded
Is the nucleus of the sugata.
It is the reality that abides from the beginning.

And in the master Nāgārjuna's *Eulogy to the Expanse of Reality* (v.23):

The water that lies within the earth
Remains immaculately pure.
The pristine cognition within conflicting
emotions, too,
Remains similarly immaculate.

Such quotations maintain that the status of the nucleus [of the tathāgata] according to the definitive meaning is inconceivable.

This nucleus of the tathāgata, with respect to its own essence, is the same throughout saṃsāra and nirvāna, without good or evil. As it is said [in the *Ornament of the Sūtras of the Greater Vehicle*, Ch.9, v.37]:

The nature of just what is, in all things, is
undifferentiated.

When purified, it is the nature of the tathāgata.
Therefore all living beings possess that nucleus.

Such extensive quotations have an intention directed towards the absolute nature, which is unchanging reality. Therefore the *Supreme Continuum of the Greater Vehicle* (Ch.1, v.51) says:

Subsequently just as it was before
Is the unchanging reality.

When beings are circumstantially classified in relation to the stains which suddenly arise, they fall into three categories. As it is explained in the *Supreme Continuum of the Greater Vehicle* (Ch.1, v.47):

According to their respective order of being impure,
Purifying that which is impure and being utterly pure,
They are called sentient beings, bodhisattvas and
tathāgatas.

And in the *Commentary [on the Supreme Continuum of the Greater Vehicle, p.40]*:

Therefore, those in the circumstance of being impure are called sentient beings, those in the circumstance of purifying that which is impure are called bodhisattvas and those in the circumstance of being utterly pure are called tathāgatas.

Similarly, everything appears according to distinctions such as the three vehicles, to differentiations based upon hierarchical classifications such as the ten levels and the five paths, and likewise to ethical hierarchies such as good and evil sentient beings, pious attendants and self-centred buddhas, and sublime bodhisattvas and buddhas. However, the natural inner radiance, which is the expanse of reality and the ultimate truth, pervades everything without [distinctions between] good and evil or decrease and increase, just as, for example, vases appear to be distinguished according to their quality, there being clay vases, wooden vases, vases of precious gems and so on, while the space within these vases is identical in that it is without qualities. Accordingly, the *Supreme Continuum of the Greater Vehicle (Ch.1, vv.49-50)* says:

Just as space is omnipresent,
 Having a thoughtless nature,
 So the natural expression of mind,
 The immaculate expanse, is all-pervasive.
 Its general characteristic pervades the limits
 Of negative and positive attributes,
 In the manner of the space
 Within inferior, mediocre and superior material forms.

If one then asks what exactly the three circumstances just mentioned are, beings are separated between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa according to the distinction of whether they are liberated or not liberated from the stains that obscure the nucleus. As the same text says:

One covered by the net of conflicting emotions
 Is truly called a sentient being.
 On becoming free from conflicting emotions
 One is called a buddha.

Regarding this threefold circumstance, ordinary persons who are obscured by the great darkness of obscuration have nothing but a portion of enlightened attributes. By contrast, the arhats among the pious attendants and self-centred buddhas are more sublime than them in enlightened attributes since they have gradually reduced the stains covering the nucleus by the greater or lesser potency of the antidotes which have power to remove them. Then, the bodhisattvas appear to be even more sublime, having attained the levels, and surpassed those

who have not renounced all aspects of ignorance. Beyond that, the buddhas free from all obscurations appear yet more sublime.

Therefore, this ultimate truth which is the expanse [of reality] is not qualitatively perceived according to its abiding nature by the three lower kinds of sublime being, namely, the pious attendants, self-centred buddhas and bodhisattvas. It is not manifestly perceived by one who abides on the paths of provision and connection except as a mere volition of the scrutinising intellect. Again, although it is partially perceived on the paths of insight and meditation, the expanse cannot be perfectly perceived through these paths, apart from a mere proportion of its enlightened attributes, just as a small child does not perceive the all-encompassing sun apart from the mere glimpse of its rays through an aperture.

As has previously been cited [from the *Supreme Continuum of the Greater Vehicle, Ch.2, v.68*]:

Because it is not an object of speech,
 Is subsumed by ultimate reality,
 Is not within reason's domain,
 Is beyond exemplification,
 Is unsurpassed and is subsumed neither by existence
 nor quiescence,
 The objective range of the Conqueror is inconceivable
 Even to sublime beings.

It is on the buddha level that the natural expression [of reality] is directly and perfectly perceived. As explained in the *Commentary on the Supreme Continuum of the Greater Vehicle (p.77)*:

Just as the sun in the sky appears
 Through an aperture in the clouds,
 In this situation you are not fully perceived
 Even by sublime beings endowed with pure eyes of
 Intelligence; for their intelligence is partial.
 However, Transcendent Lord, you who are the pure
 body of reality,
 Pervading the spacious expanse of limitless knowledge
 Are totally perceived by those whose intelligence is
 limitless.

Would it then be, one might object, that sentient beings become buddhas who have accumulated the two provisions and renounced the two obscurations by means of this naturally radiant expanse, which is effortlessly present in the nature of sentient beings? That is not so, because there are two kinds of renunciation, one that is naturally pure and the other that becomes free from the suddenly arisen stains. The former is the reality which, in respect of its own essence, abides without

changing in the fundamental nature of great primordial purity. It is said in the *Sūtra of the Adornment of Pristine Cognition's Appearance which Penetrates the Scope of All Buddhas* (*Sarvabuddhahaiṣayāvatāra-jñānālokaṅkāśāstra*, T 100):

Mañjuśrī, since the mind is naturally radiant, it is naturally undefiled by all-conflicting emotions, and is only [provisionally] defiled by all the subsidiary conflicting emotions which suddenly arise. That which is naturally radiant is the very absence of all-conflicting emotions. For one who is without all-conflicting emotions, there is no antidote through which all-conflicting emotions should be renounced.

And in the *Transcendental Perfection of Discriminative Awareness in Twenty-five Thousand Lines*:

"Kausika, what do you think of this? Are sentient beings created or do they expire?" He replied, "Venerable Subhūti, that is not the case. If you ask why, it is because sentient beings are pure from the beginning."

And also in the same text:

Since form is naturally radiant, it is pure without all-conflicting emotions. Since feeling, perception, habitual tendencies and consciousness are naturally radiant, they are pure without all-conflicting emotions. Since all manifestations up to omniscience are naturally radiant, they are pure and without all-conflicting emotions.

According to such extensive quotations, natural renunciation is that which transcends the phenomena of consciousness and is a genuine liberation from all obscurations. It is complete from the beginning in ultimate truth because absolute reality is naturally pure.

The second kind of renunciation is the removal of the suddenly arising obscurations by an appropriate antidote. Although, as previously explained, the unactualised enlightened attributes which exist in the ground unrefined by the path are present in the situation of sentient beings, no defect is thereby introduced to this philosophical system because it is not claimed that sentient beings are buddhas free from all obscurations.

In the same way, there are also two kinds of realisation, namely, the naturally present pristine cognition realised through the intrinsic awareness of primordial reality, and the dependently produced pristine cognition realised through the power of meditating on the path. The former is characterised as supramundane, being the naturally present pristine cognition or discernment through individual intuitive awareness which

realises the ultimate reality. Thus [the *Litany of the Names of Mañjuśrī*, v.155ab] says:

It is awareness of itself, awareness of others,
And awareness of all.
It is the all-knowing sacred total awareness.

The two fundamental kinds of renunciation and realisation are complete in their own essence, which is the abiding nature of ultimate reality. As the venerable Maitreya [in the *Supreme Continuum of the Greater Vehicle*, Ch.1, v.154]⁷⁰ says:

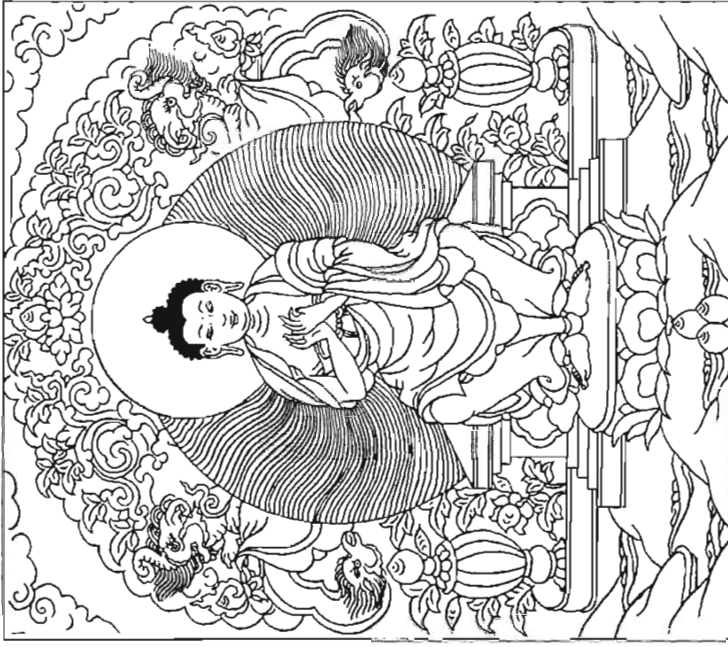
Therein there is nothing to be clarified
And nothing to be minutely established.
Genuinely regarding that genuine reality,
Genuinely perceiving it, one will be free.

The second kind of realisation is that pattern of realisation which is expanded by the power of meditating on the path. It is called the absolute which is incontrovertible because enlightened attributes of obscurationless power are actualised once the two provisions of pristine cognition have been accumulated through meditative equipoise and merit during the aftermath. As the *Ornament of the Sūtras of the Greater Vehicle* (Ch.9, v.22abd) says:

Though there is no distinction
Between the former and the latter,
It is the nature of just what is,
Untainted by all obscurations,
That is held to be the buddha.

aspects of consciousness is revealed in the ultimate truth. Accordingly, it is said in the *Sublime Sūtra of the Descent to Lankā*:

One who has become without mind, intellect, the consciousness of the intellect, conceptualising thoughts and perception, will become receptive to the uncreated doctrine. O Mahāmāti, since the doctrine which is apparitionless and divorced from conceptualising thoughts is revealed, this ultimate reality is without order or orderly intervals.



Maitreya

And also [Ch. 3, vv. 40-1]:

Having renounced the mind and intellect,
Consciousness, perception and thoughts,
The pious attendants who have obtained the
conceptualising doctrine
Become the sons of the Conqueror.
Through the distinctions of [buddha-]field
and [bodhisattvas'] receptiveness,
[They gain] the virtuous pristine cognition of the Tathāgata.

4 The Superiority of Great Madhyamaka to Mind Only

[84a.4-92a.6] This system, according to which the relative is empty of its own essence and the ultimate empty of other entities, is variously revealed in both the intermediate and final promulgations. However, in particular, the presence of profound, radiant and non-dual pristine cognition, the nucleus of the sugata, as the ground of emptiness is extensively taught in the piṭaka of the final transmitted precepts, and in those which speak of all things as merely apparitional aspects of mind.

Derived from these [precepts], certain masters of the past have been obliged to admit that the mind is ultimately real and thereby originated the school of the Vijñānavāda [proponents of consciousness], which is one of those known at the present day as the four philosophical systems. While not reaching the genuine intention, that mind described as the mind of which all things are merely apparitional aspects partakes of two circumstances, one under which its intention is directed to the consciousness of the ground-of-all, and the other under which its intention is directed to the absolute reality (*chos-nyid yongs-grub*).

When the former is intended, it is said not to be the ultimate truth because it is impermanent, the bewildered subject and object being relative appearances. For example, the *Sūtra of the Adornment of Pristine Cognition's Appearance which Penetrates the Scope of All Buddhas* says:

Sāradvatīputra, that which is called mind includes the consciousness of mind and intellect, the mental body, the faculty of the intellect and the base of the intellect. This is what is called the mind. If you ask how emptiness relates with it, Sāradvatīputra, the mind is empty of the mind. In it there is no actor. If there were some actor, then its actions would be experienced as such by others. The mind is not manifestly conditioned even by the mind.

Though it is taught that all things are merely apparitional aspects of mind, there is no occasion so to speak in connection with the ultimate truth, for the pristine cognition transcending mind, intellect and all

There are, in addition, proponents of the Mind Only philosophical system who hold that consciousness is not transcended in the ultimate truth. But this is simply a subjective perception of *samsāra*, unable to sublimate the world. The ultimate truth is characterised as the uncorrupted expanse, and as the obscurationalless pristine cognition which realises it, namely, the supramundane, individual, intuitive awareness of the sublime beings.

The distinction between these two [views] has been extensively taught in passages such as the following from that [same] *sūtra* of the greater vehicle [*Descent to Lañkā*, p.64]:

In this context, Mahāmātī, pristine cognition is of three kinds: mundane, supramundane and most supramundane. Of these, that which having been created is destroyed is consciousness; and that which is neither created nor destroyed is pristine cognition. Moreover, Mahāmātī, that which falls into the dichotomy of being symbolic or non-symbolic, that which falls into the dichotomy of being and non-being, and that which is created from causes of diverse character, is consciousness; whereas that which is characterised as utterly transcending the dichotomy of symbolic and non-symbolic is pristine cognition. And yet again Mahāmātī, that which is characterised as accumulating them is consciousness, and that which is characterised as diminishing them is pristine cognition.

Now these three kinds [of pristine cognition respectively] generate the realisation of individual and general characteristics, the realisation of that which is created and destroyed and the realisation of that which is neither created nor ceases. The mundane pristine cognition is that of the extremists who manifestly cling to theses of being or non-being and of all ordinary childish persons. The supramundane pristine cognition is that of all pious attendants and self-centred buddhas who openly cling to thoughts which fall into individual and general characteristics. The most supramundane pristine cognition is the analytical insight of the buddhas and bodhisattvas into apparitionless reality. It is seen to be without creation or cessation, for they comprehend the selfless level of the Tathāgata who is free from theses concerning being and non-being.

Furthermore, Mahāmātī, that which is characterised as unattached is pristine cognition, and that which is characteristically attached to various objects is consciousness. And again, Mahāmātī, that which is characterised as being produced from the triple combination [of subject, object and

their interaction]¹⁷¹ is consciousness and that characterised as the essential nature which is not so produced is pristine cognition. Then again, Mahāmātī, that which is characterised as not to be attained is pristine cognition, since each one's own sublime pristine cognition does not emerge as a perceptual object of realisation, [but is present] in the manner of the moon's reflection in water. On this it must be said [Ch.3, vv.38-9]:

*The mind accrues deeds and so forth,
But pristine cognition breaks them down;
By discriminative awareness, too, the apparitionless
Reality and powers are well obtained.
It is the mind which objectifies.*

And similarly it is said in the *Sublime Sūtra of Clouds of Precious Jewels* (*Āryarūnameghasūtra*, T 231):

This doctrine genuinely transcends all written and spoken words. It genuinely transcends the entire range of expressions. It genuinely transcends all verbalisation. It is free from all conceptual elaboration and free from all that is accepted or rejected. It is free from all opening and closing, and free from all sophistry. It is not to be analysed and is not within the range of sophistry. It genuinely transcends the range of sophistry. It is non-symbolic, free from symbolism and genuinely transcends the range of symbolism. It genuinely transcends the range of all demons, and genuinely transcends the range of all conflicting emotions. It genuinely transcends the range of consciousness. It does, however, lie within the range of the indeterminate, dynamic, quiescent and sublime pristine cognition. The individual, intrinsic awareness of these attributes is a topic which is taintless, uncovered, pure, bountiful, supreme, sacred, perfect, permanent, firm, enduring and imperishable. Whether the tathāgatas have appeared or not, this expanse of reality is exclusively present.

The inconceivability of the ultimate, sublime pristine cognition, extensively revealed by such quotations, does not lie within the path [followed] by the proponents of the Mind Only system. It is admitted that this naturally radiant, intuitive awareness, the perception free from the subject-object dichotomy, is itself the true basis of buddhahood, and it is held that the subject is dependently real. It is therefore difficult for anyone holding consciousness to exist substantially in ultimate reality to understand literally the selflessness of phenomena. In the same vein the *Sūtra of the Descent to Lañkā* (Ch.10, vv.359 and 358) also says:

Being mind only, it is apparitionless.
 Being apparitionless, it is uncreated.
 These middle paths
 Have been explained by myself, and others too.
 Realising that there is only mind,
 External substances are clarified.

By reversing the pattern of conceptualising thought,
 That path becomes the middle one.

So it is that this intention of the final transmitted precepts, abiding in the Great Madhyamaka of definitive meaning, is clearly revealed in the commentaries of great bodhisattvas¹⁷² and in the compositions of the two promulgators who were masters of the greater vehicle [Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga] along with their followers. Although certain masters may well have developed other systems and tenets elsewhere out of necessity, it is difficult to estimate whether they are ordinary or sublime beings. There may well be occasion to speak in the manner [of these masters] owing to various basic intentions once one has reached the level of the sublime ones, but childish persons like ourselves should understand the importance of not accumulating evil deeds which renounce the doctrine, having clung to a single extreme [view].

If this system [of Great Madhyamaka] were also to be described as Mind Only because the three essential natures are taught therein, then the three essential natures are extensively revealed, too, in the intermediate transmitted precepts such as the *Intermediate Mother*:

Maitreya, regard any imaginary form as not substantially existent. One might regard any conceptualised form as substantially existent because thoughts exist substantially, but do not confer independent status upon it. Then you should regard the very form of reality as being disclosed by ultimate reality, for it is neither substantially existent nor not substantially existent.

And again in the *Epitome of the Transcendental Perfection of Discriminative Awareness in Eight Thousand Lines (Aṣṭasāhasrikāpīṇḍārtha, T 3809, vv.27-9)*:

The transcendental perfection of discriminative awareness
 Genuinely depends on three teachings:
 The imaginary, dependent and absolute alone.
 By negative expressions and the like
 All that is imaginary is refuted.
 By apparition and other such similes
 The dependent is correctly revealed.
 Through the fourfold purification¹⁷³
 The absolute is well known.

Other than the transcendental perfection
 Of discriminative awareness,
 The buddhas have no teaching.

Similarly, in the master Nāgāmītra's *Introduction to the Three Bodies (Kāyatrayaṅvāitāramukha, T 3890)*, the three essential natures are also summarised as the causal basis for the attainment of the three buddha-bodies, and in the *Commentary [on the Introduction to the Three Bodies, Kāyatrayaṅvārti, T 3891]* composed by the proponent of the Great Madhyamaka, Jñānacandra, the same point is explained. Despite all the definitive structures of the three essential natures which have been set forth in all such texts of Great Madhyamaka, those who propound that they belong not to the Madhyamaka tradition but just to that of Mind Only have not even seen these relevant texts. As the *Sūtra of the Descent to Lañkā (Ch.10, vv.256-7)* says:

One who relies on Mind Only,
 Does not discern external objects.
 Relying on the apparitionless,
 Mind Only should be transcended.
 Relying on the genuine object of reference,
 The apparitionless should be transcended.
 A yogin who abides in the apparitionless
 Does not perceive the greater vehicle.

Accordingly, after Mind Only has been provisionally taught and then genuinely transcended, the apparitionless Madhyamaka is taught; and when that too has been transcended, the apparitionless Madhyamaka is revealed. If that is not reached, it is said that the profound meaning of the greater vehicle is not perceived. It is, in general, erroneous to describe everything expressed by the word *mind* as the Mind Only doctrine; for there are occasions when the abiding nature free from all extremes, [known] inclusively as the nature of just what is, the genuine goal, the natural nirvāṇa, the expanse of reality, the mind of inner radiance, and the intellect of Samantabhadra, is indicated by the word *mind*. The *Long Mother* says:

Subhūti, that mind is not the mind.
 The nature of that mind is inner radiance.

One should not therefore mistake that which is spoken of as mind-as-such, the inner radiance transcending the mind of saṃsāra and its mental events, for the Mind Only system which does not transcend consciousness. The latter is characterised in the *Sūtra of the Descent to Lañkā (Ch.3, v.32 and Ch.10, v.486)* as follows:

Connected with propensities of conceptualising thought,
 The diversity which arises from the mind

And appears externally to mankind,
Is the mundane Mind Only [view].

There is indeed a distinction between the mundane and the supra-mundane Mind Only which is identical in meaning to the distinction between consciousness and pristine cognition, as previously explained. Similarly, those terms revealed in the most profound [sūtras] of the greater vehicle which are synonyms of mind should be likewise known. It would indeed be a grave error to equate the tenets of mundane Mind Only with the Great Sage's buddha-body of reality and the mass of its inseparable enlightened attributes, exceeding all the sands of the River Ganges, which are inclusively known as the uncorrupted expanse, the inconceivable expanse, ultimate virtue, unchanging and firm reality, truth in the ultimate abiding nature of reality, the primordially liberated buddha-body, freedom from all conceptual elaborations of the four extremes, and renunciation of the two concepts of selfhood. These are spontaneously present, utterly transcending the phenomena of consciousness.

In general, those whose intelligence is authoritative, without falling into prejudice, do not differentiate between the two modes of emptiness [*rang-stong* and *gshan-stong*] when abiding in the Madhyamaka [view], which is the summit of the four philosophical systems dependent on different traditions of promulgation which have been precisely enumerated. This is clearly understood through the respective treatises of the two great masters, Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga, whom the Conqueror had prophetically declared would comment on the intention of the definitive meaning; and in conformity with them, it has been similarly explained by the all-knowing dialectician Ratnākaraśānti, the venerable Bhavya, the Guru of Suvarṇadvīpa,¹⁷⁴ the lord Atiśa and others. Even the master Haribhadra gives confirmation of it because, when explaining the intention of the *Ornament of Emergent Realisation* [in his *Mirror Commentary*, T 3791], he resolves that this non-dual pristine cognition alone is the genuinely existing essence. He then asserts this resolution to be made through the sequence of [discriminative awareness] produced by reflection, or through the yoga produced by the meditation of a yogin on the third level.¹⁷⁵ And he additionally confirms this by explaining the recognition of just what is to be pristine cognition, and by explaining, in his commentary on the essential buddha-body, that the remaining three buddha-bodies, through which it abides, are reality.

In this way, the emptiness directly revealed through the intermediate promulgation is claimed to have the definitive meaning of outright explicit negation in order that it might cut through the egotism that is co-emergent with intellect in corporeal beings; as well as through the view of self, which is newly postulated by the philosophical systems of the eternalistic extremists; and through the subjective, conceptual elaborations

tions of those of our own [Buddhist] philosophical systems which promote substantial existence.¹⁷⁶ Since [this intermediate promulgation] teaches that one meditates on emptiness when meditating on nothing at all, and realises just what is when nothing at all is perceived, that [reality] and its significance are indeed perceived. The view of this [promulgation] is therefore in the range of understanding or proper realisation of selflessness.

It is difficult to destroy attachment to superficial characteristics (*mishan-'dzin*).¹⁷⁷ However, in order for the discriminative awareness born of study and thought to refine it, the Prāsāngika and Svātantrika reasoning which cuts through conceptual elaboration is sharp. But when the experiences of meditation are established, it is this tradition of the Great Madhyamaka, as taught in the third promulgation, which is supremely profound and vast. This naturally present pristine cognition, the ultimate truth of the naturally pure expanse, is the original abiding nature of all things, and it is the pristine cognition to be experienced by individual intuitive awareness. As it is said in Rāhula's *Praise of the Mother* [*yun-la bstod-pa*, T 1127, attributed to Nāgārjuna]:

Homage to the Mother of the conquerors of the three times,

Who is the ineffable, unthinkable, inexpressible

Transcendental perfection of discriminative awareness,

Essential nature uncreated and unceasing as the sky,

Within range of the individual intuitive awareness

That is pristine cognition.

And [in the *Sūtra of Extensive Play*, Ch.25, v.1]:

I have found a nectar-like doctrine

Profound, calm, unelaborate, radiant and uncompounded.

By such quotations, the inconceivable pristine cognition has been illustrated, and through the vision of its nature the ultimate truth is perceived. It is wrong to refer to the mere emptiness, which is nothing at all, as the ultimate truth.

Thus, absolute reality is the pristine cognition of the non-dual nature of just what is. It is indicated by the words buddha-body of reality or essential buddha-body which genuinely transcends the phenomena of consciousness. Yet, also comprised within this doctrine, which is misrepresented as the philosophical system known as the Mind Only, are: the definitive order of the three continua as taught in the way of secret mantra,¹⁷⁸ the definitive order of the ground, path and result of purification and so forth which are adhered to by followers of the greater vehicle in both its causal and resultant aspects, and which include [the terminology] of deities, mantras, embodiments of indestructible reality, supreme bliss, emptiness endowed with all supreme aspects, the im-

perishable seminal point which is the fundamental support of body, speech and mind; and also the uncommon definitive order of the ground, path and result.

One should know that the intention of the final promulgation, even though not within the path upheld by the proponents of intrinsic emptiness (*rang-stong-pa*), is without contradiction by examining, one by one, the commentaries of the great lords of the tenth level and the teachings belonging to the *tantrapaṭāka* of the way of secret mantra.

Therefore, while the intention of the final transmitted precepts is not the same as that of the mundane Mind Only system in any of its forms, the purposes of the lower phases of the vehicle are gradually gathered within the higher, so that [Mind Only and the like] are not contradictory apart from their vindication of an extreme position. Indeed, one must truly comprehend that the great distinction of the higher over the lower phases is a feature of the precious teaching of the sublime Sugata. Otherwise, after one had been given teaching on suffering, selflessness, impurity and impermanence according to the first promulgation and everything had been established as emptiness according to the intermediate transmitted precepts, if one were then to grasp literally the meaningful intention revealed according to the final transmitted precepts concerning bliss, purity, permanence and true self, without knowing how to accept them with an attitude confident in the four kinds of reliance, one would engage in conceptualising thoughts which would confuse those who require training and wrongly scrutinise the teaching.

With an intention directed toward this, the *Commentary on the Supreme Continuum of the Greater Vehicle* (p.74) says accordingly:

To sum up, there are four kinds of individuals who do not possess the eye which perceives the nucleus of the tathāgata. If you ask who these four are, they are as follows: ordinary persons, pious attendants, self-centred buddhas and bodhisattvas who have newly entered the vehicle. As it has been said,¹⁸⁰ “O Transcendent Lord, this nucleus of the tathāgata is not within the range of those who fall into views concerning worldly existence, who openly delight in deception and whose minds waver towards emptiness.”

This same point can also be proven thoroughly from all the transmitted precepts and treatises, but here one will suffice.

5 *The Provisional and Definitive Meaning of the Transmitted Precepts*

[92a.6-95b.6] When these teachings are allocated between the provisional meaning (*drang-don*) and the definitive meaning (*nges-don*), the three successive promulgations of the doctrinal wheel have the same common purpose, that is, to purify the stains covering the single nucleus of the tathāgata. They differ only in the greatness of their means which respectively purify the gross, subtle and very subtle stains that suddenly arise to obscure it. Thus, by teachings such as impermanence, the first promulgation arouses the mind from saṃsāra and causes it to approach nirvāṇa. In the second, the three approaches to liberation become an antidote to attachment to superficial characteristics, which include the mundane view of self; and the third intends that the extensive way of the sugatas be comprehended through the topics of that irreversible promulgation. This is extensively mentioned in passages such as the following from the *Sūtra of the Dialogue with King Dhāraṇiśvara* (*Dhāraṇiśvaraparipricchāsūtra*, T 147):

Son of the enlightened family, it is in the same way as, for example, a skilled jeweller, who knows well how gems are refined, takes an impure stone from a species of precious gemstones and, after wetting it in dirty salt water, has it cleaned with goats' hair, and similarly after then wetting it in a beverage has it cleaned with a woollen cloth, and afterwards, in the very same way, wets it in a herbal solution and has it cleaned with fine clean linen; when it is well refined, the stainless gem is said to be “a great gemstone of the species beryl”. Likewise, when a sentient being has first been induced to enter the Vinaya by the disturbing topics such as suffering and impermanence, and has then been made to realise the way of the tathāgatas by means of the three approaches to liberation, he subsequently is made to enter the objective range of the tathāgatas by the topics of the irreversible promulgation. To enter in this

way and realise reality is to become an unsurpassed object of offering.

Thus, the three successive [promulgations] of transmitted precepts are classified into those of provisional meaning and those of definitive meaning. It says in the *Sūtra which Decisively Reveals the Intention* (*Sandhivimocanasūtra*, T 106):

The first promulgation of the doctrinal wheel by the Transcendent Lord, through which the four sublime truths were taught to those who enter the vehicle of the pious attendants, is surpassed, circumstantial, of provisional meaning and continues to be a basis for debate. Then, beginning with the Transcendent Lord's teaching that things have no essence, the second promulgation of the doctrinal wheel which teaches emptiness to those who correctly enter the greater vehicle is surpassed, circumstantial, of provisional meaning and continues to be a basis for debate. And then, beginning with the Transcendent Lord's teaching that things have no essence, the third promulgation of the wheel of the exceedingly wondrous and amazing doctrine, which is well distinguished, was revealed to those correctly entering the entire vehicle. That promulgation of the doctrinal wheel is unsurpassed, not circumstantial, of definitive meaning and does not become a basis for debate.

The allocation of provisional and definitive meaning is determined in ways such as these.

The intermediate promulgation has accordingly been allocated provisional meaning because in this turning of the doctrinal wheel the enlightened attributes of ultimate reality, such as the powers of the sugatas, are mostly revealed to be empty of their own essence (*tangstong*), though they are not actually empty of their own essence, and because it does not teach that these attributes are well distinguished and without inherent contradiction. For such reasons it is said to be surpassed and so on. Definitive meaning, on the other hand, is allocated to the third promulgation because [therein] things of relative appearance are empty of their own essence and the ultimate reality is empty of extraneous entities, so that the nature of these [attributes] is qualitatively well distinguished and then revealed.

If there are those who say that definitive meaning is contained in the intermediate promulgation because it teaches the transcendental perfection of discriminative awareness, but that the final promulgation has an intention of provisional meaning because it teaches the contrary, then they have not made an accurate examination. The attributes, such as uncreated and unceasing original quiescence, which are terms relating

to the transcendental perfection of discriminative awareness, are most extensively revealed in the final promulgation and very profoundly revealed in the vehicle of indestructible reality.

However, there is no distinction in the essence of the transcendental perfection of discriminative awareness, which is said to be distinguished as surpassed or unsurpassed depending on whether it is unclearly, clearly or very clearly revealed; for all the limitless [attributes] which are revealed by names such as the nucleus of the sugata, the expanse of reality, the mind of inner radiance, the naturally pure enlightened family, the genuine goal and the emptiness which is the essential nature devoid of substantiality, are identical in the naturally present, non-dual pristine cognition. This same [pristine cognition] is the transcendental perfection of discriminative awareness. Therefore the master Dignāga [in his *Epitome of the Transcendental Perfection of Discriminative Awareness*, v.1] has said:

Being the transcendental perfection of
Discriminative awareness,

This non-dual pristine cognition is the Tathāgata.

Since it possesses the meaning

Which is to be accomplished,

This term applies to the central texts and path.¹⁸¹

The final transmitted precepts are conclusively proven to be the definitive meaning by all [scriptural] transmissions and [logical] reasoning. The Conqueror himself made the classification of provisional and definitive meaning, and moreover, in his own words said:

A monk who is called Asaṅga

Learned in the meaning of these treatises,

Will differentiate in many categories

The sūtras of provisional and definitive meaning.

The final [transmitted precepts] were accordingly allocated conclusive definitive meaning by this sublime [Asaṅga], whom the Conqueror had prophetically declared would differentiate the provisional and definitive meanings.

There are, on the other hand, no authoritative passages declaring the intermediate [transmitted precepts] to have definitive meaning and the final [transmitted precepts] provisional meaning. Indeed, even if the proponents of the Vijñānavāda could have composed these final transmitted precepts as such, they would have mistaken the correct sequence revealed by the above simile of the refinement of gemstones and by other similes which refer to the medical treatment of ill-health and the study of letters.¹⁸² There would be no need even for the definitive order made by the Conqueror himself and the sublime [Asaṅga], and there would be limitless other such faults. In addition, after first teaching

the provisional meaning and intermediately the definitive meaning to those who require training, the provisional meaning would then be repeated, so that one would be obliged to consider just what is the Buddha's intention *vis-à-vis* the teaching. It should be known that by proceeding in this way, there would be all kinds of unbearable evils, such as allocating the conclusive definitive meaning to philosophical systems which propound substantial existence, slandering the buddhas and great bodhisattvas as holders of a relative teaching, and abandoning this doctrine of the nucleus.

Furthermore, since the three vehicles have reference to the definitive meaning gathered in the final promulgation, the definitive meaning is conclusively proven. This is extensively mentioned in passages such as the following from the *Sūtra of the Irreversible Wheel* (*Acaicitacakra-sūtra*, T 240):

Then, in reverence to the Transcendent Lord, the great bodhisattva Madhuraniṅghoṣa arose from his lotus posture and asked, "Transcendent Lord, what is the dimension of this world system of Patient Endurance?"

He replied, "Son of the enlightened family, in the western direction of this world system there is a world system which outnumbered the sands of the River Ganges."

Then he asked, "Transcendent Lord, in that world system which Transcendent Lord teaches the doctrine?"

"He is called the Tathāgata Śākyamuni."

"What manner of doctrine does he teach?"

"He begins from the three vehicles."

"What are the three vehicles?"

"He reveals the doctrine beginning with the three vehicles, which are the vehicle of the pious attendants, the vehicle of the self-centred buddhas and the greater vehicle."

"Do these conform to the doctrine revealed by the Transcendent Lord Buddha?"

"Son of the enlightened family, the doctrines revealed by the [different] Transcendent Lord Buddhas do conform."

"Just in what respect do the doctrines revealed by the Transcendent Lord Buddhas conform?"

And he replied, "The doctrines revealed by the Transcendent Lord Buddhas conform to the irreversible promulgation."



THE CENTER OF THE SUNLIT SKY
Madhyamaka in the Kagyü Tradition

Karl Brunnhölzl

*Including a Translation of Pawo Rinpoche's Commentary
 on the Knowledge Section of Śāntideva's The Entrance
 to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life (Bodhicaryāvatāra)*

*Is There Such a Thing
 as Shentong-Madhyamaka?*

MOST PEOPLE THINK that, in terms of its Madhyamaka alignment, the Kagyü school is a monolithic bloc of staunch supporters of Shentong-Madhyamaka (“other-empty Madhyamaka”). However, as should be clear by now, there are quite a number of masters in this school who do not follow what is known as Shentong. Even Milarepa sometimes adopts a typical Rangtong (“self-empty”) approach in his enlightened songs.¹⁰³² Still, the reader may be wondering why a book on Madhyamaka in the Kagyü lineage has thus far barely mentioned the term “Shentong,” much less presented the system it refers to. The answer is simple and may be shocking to some: There is no Shentong-Madhyamaka nor any need to make one up. The subdivision of Madhyamaka into “self-empty” and “other-empty” is obsolete.

Before I am excommunicated from the Kagyü lineage for making this statement, let me say that I am just going by what the Eighth Karmapa and Pawo Rinpoche say in *The Chariot of the Tagbo Siddhas* and *The Commentary on The Entrance to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. I also want to make it clear from the outset that the reason for such a statement is not at all to deprecate the contents or the value of the teachings that came to bear the name Shentong in Tibet. Rather, the reason is quite the contrary, since what is called Shentong is nothing other than the Yogācāra¹⁰³³ (Yoga Practice) system of Maitreya, Asaṅga, and Vasubandhu, also called “the lineage of vast activity.”¹⁰³⁴ Just like Centrism, in its rich entirety, this system is a distinct, well-established, and—at least in India—unequivocally renowned system of presenting the teachings of the Buddha. It can stand very well on its own and has no need to be included under Centrism or even to be promoted as the better brand of Centrism. It is all the more inappropriate to wrongly subsume it—as many Tibetan doxographies do—under the questionable category of “Mere Mentalism”¹⁰³⁵ and thus regard it as inferior to Centrism. It would definitely contribute to the appreciation of this Yogācāra system for what it is if it were called neither Mere Mentalism nor Shentong but simply “the Yogācāra System of Maitreya/Asaṅga” or “the lineage of vast activity.” The following presentation will provide sufficient evidence for this by high-

SNOW LION PUBLICATIONS
 ITHACA, NEW YORK ♦ BOULDER, COLORADO

lighting some essential points of Yogācāra in the original texts, consulting the main Kagyü sources on both Centrism and Yogācāra, and comparing the relationship between these two systems.¹⁰³⁶

As for the question of whether there is a Shentong-Madhyamaka, both the Eighth Karmapa and Pawo Rinpoche give a very clear answer: “No.” They not only refute any realistic interpretation of what the word *shentong* might refer to, such as the notion of a permanent, intrinsically existing Buddha nature;¹⁰³⁷ they simply consider this term a misnomer altogether. At the same time, the two systems of Nāgārjuna—the lineage of profound view—and Asaṅga—the lineage of vast activity (to which the term “Shentong” usually refers) are clearly distinguished. When questioned, The Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche confirmed that it is indeed better to make a distinction in terms of the lineages of profound view and vast conduct than between some lineages of “Rangtong” and “Shentong,” since the former two are the clear lineages of transmission that can be traced back to India. Pawo Rinpoche explicitly explains that the final intention of these two systems is identical, while the Eighth Karmapa in his *Chariot of the Tagbo Siddhas* does so implicitly.¹⁰³⁸ Moreover, Pawo Rinpoche emphasizes that what Tibetans call “Mind Only” or “Mere Mentalism” is not the lineage of vast activity.¹⁰³⁹

In his *Chariot* commentary, the Eighth Karmapa says that, in general, there is no difference between Buddha Śākyamuni and Maitreya in that they are both Buddhas. However, the sole teacher of this realm of Buddha activity who appears as the Supreme Emanation Body of a perfect Buddha is Buddha Śākyamuni, and there is no dispute that he prophesied Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga as the founders of Centrism and Yogācāra. Thus, whoever is a Centrist in the setting of the teachings of this realm must definitely be in accord with the Centrism of Nāgārjuna and his spiritual heirs. Imputations of different kinds of Centrism (such as one specific to Maitreya) that do not correspond to Nāgārjuna’s system are rejected by the Eighth Karmapa. He says that if there were a Centrism of Maitreya, then it would be equally fine to present innumerable forms of Centrism, such as the eight kinds of Centrism that were asserted by the eight close bodhisattva sons of the Buddha and the thousand different kinds of Centrism that are asserted by the thousand Buddhas of this fortunate eon. Some people might object that if this newly named Centrism of Maitreya does not fulfill the function of actual Centrism, then the Centrism of Nāgārjuna also would not fulfill this function, because both system founders are equal in being noble bodhisattvas. However, by using the same kind of argument, it would then also follow that the vehicles of the hearers and solitary realizers that were taught by the Buddha are the great vehicle, because they are equal in being vehicles and being spoken by the Buddha.

The Karmapa corrects another misunderstanding regarding what is called “self-emptiness” and “other-emptiness.” He says that some Tibetans assert the absence of a nature of their own in phenomena as being the meaning of “self-emptiness”

and the absence of other phenomena as being the meaning of “other-emptiness.” This is not justified, because such an explanation or terminology does not exist in the topics of the sūtras on emptiness. Nor is it found anywhere in the treatises of the two system founders Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga, whose authority in this matter rests at least in part on the fact that they were prophesied by the Buddha as the ones to comment on the intentions of the topics of these very sūtras in terms of Centrism and Yogācāra respectively.

In particular, the Eighth Karmapa takes issue with the position of Dölpopa Sherab Gyaltzen, which he reports as follows: “On the level of seeming reality, phenomena are empty of a nature of their own. Therefore, they are self-empty. In ultimate reality, the supreme other consciousness that is not empty of its own nature—the permanent entity of the Heart of the Blissfully Gone Ones—is empty of all other seeming phenomena. This is explained as ‘other-empty.’ The Centrists who propound other-emptiness are the Great Centrists, and the Centrists who propound self-emptiness turn the Centrist view into something like poison.”

The Karmapa regards such an explanation as a deprecation of the meaning of Prajñāpāramitā for several reasons. To start with, if one claims an ultimate phenomenon that is really established and not empty of its own nature, this contradicts the Buddha’s determination of the definitive meaning, which is that all phenomena are emptiness. In particular, this explanation is also contradictory to all commentaries on the intention of this definitive meaning that were given by Centrists, including Āryavimuktisena and Haribhadra, the two main Indian commentators on the hidden meaning of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*. With regard to “the emptiness of other-entity,”¹⁰⁴⁰ the sūtras clearly negate this “other-emptiness” by saying, “Since it lacks any solid abiding and ceasing, it is empty of itself.” Following this, Āryavimuktisena, Ramakaraśānti, and others say, “Since it is an emptiness that is not produced by others, it is the emptiness of other-entity” and “Since it is the entity that is not produced by others, it is the other-entity.” Thus, they take solely the emptiness that is natural emptiness (and not any nonempty entity) as the basis of being empty of something other. On the other hand, in the scriptures, there never appear any reifying explanations in the sense that, by taking the supreme and permanent other-entity—the Heart of the Blissfully Gone Ones—as the basis for emptiness, this Heart is empty of all other seeming phenomena and that this is the meaning of other-emptiness.

Before Dölpopa, the Karmapa says, nobody in India or Tibet had ever stated that there are these two systems of “self-emptiness” and “other-emptiness” within the philosophical system of Centrism. If one follows Centrism, it is impossible to assert an ultimate phenomenon that is really established and to say at the same time that the seeming is without reality in that it is empty in the sense of self-emptiness. If one were to propound something like this, one would just be a

realist. It is obvious that one cannot be a realist and at the same time speak about the center free from all reference points.

In his commentary on *The Ornament of Clear Realization*, the Eighth Karmapa identifies the correct referent of using the term “other-empty” in an expedient, functional way (if one wants to use this term, that is). However, he emphasizes that the nature of phenomena is neither self-empty nor other-empty anyway, let alone really existent:

The name “other-empty” is applied to emptiness [in the sense] that the other features within this basis [emptiness] are empty of their own respective natures. Therefore, the other-empty’s own nature does not become nonempty. The reason for this is that the name “other-empty” is [only] applied to the compound meaning that this basis [emptiness] is empty of such and such [and not to this basis being other-empty in itself].¹⁰⁴¹ However, it is not asserted that this basis—the nature of phenomena—is empty of its own nature. [Likewise, as was just said,] this [basis itself] is not other-empty either. Therefore, if it is not other-empty, forget about it being self-empty [since these two are just mutually dependent]. . . .

This basis—the nature of phenomena—is neither other-empty nor self-empty, because [let alone being other-empty or self-empty,] it is not even suitable as a mere emptiness that is not specified as being empty or not empty of itself or something other. The reason for this is that it has the essential character of being the utter peace of all discursiveness regarding being empty and not being empty. Thus, from the perspective of the [actual] freedom from discursiveness, no characteristics whatsoever of being empty of itself or something other transpire within the basis that is the nature of phenomena.¹⁰⁴²

In brief, “other-empty” in this sense, as a mere matter of conventional parlance, means the following. By definition, emptiness can in no way be identified or reified. It is the very freedom from all reference points, not still another reference point. So, it is nothing but this emptiness that is empty of everything “other,” such as reifications, discursiveness, reference points, and so on.

As for wisdom, it cannot be an ultimate entity either. In his *Chariot*, the Karmapa adds that some proponents of other-emptiness assert that it is not consciousness that is ultimately existent, but wisdom, and that this is the crucial difference between Mere Mentalism and the Centrism of other-emptiness. However, he says, this is just an attempt to sell Mere Mentalism as Centrism. For as long as a really established cognition in the sense of a momentary, mere men-

tal experience that is clear and aware is asserted, it does not matter whether this is called consciousness or wisdom.

Therefore, Mikyö Dorje says that he does not at all direct his mind to any of the various presentations of Centrism, Yogācāra, or any other system by those people who say that Centrism has this twofold division into the Centrism of self-emptiness and the Centrism of other-emptiness. Among such people, some claim that the view of the Centrism of self-emptiness is higher and others the opposite. Rather, the Karmapa says that he prefers to present the philosophical systems of Centrism and Yogācāra and so on from their own sides and in their own right through correct reasons.¹⁰⁴³

Pawo Rinpoche presents the contradiction inherent in the claim of some people who say that the Centrism explained in the second turning of the wheel of dharma represents the teaching on self-emptiness and that the Centrism explained in the final turning of the wheel of dharma is the teaching on other-emptiness, which represents the ultimate view. Since the perfection of knowledge has already been explained in the second turning, these people implicitly accept that the final turning is not the perfection of knowledge; and since its teachings are not included in any of the other perfections either, they would consequently not even belong to the great vehicle. These people might then object that the teachings of the final turning belong to the category of meditative stability, the fifth perfection. However, according to this position, the direct fruition of meditative stability—the perfection of supreme knowledge—is self-emptiness. Therefore, to say that the third turning belongs to the category of meditative stability contradicts their claim that this turning is the ultimate view—that is, other-emptiness—since its fruition is self-emptiness.

Then, Pawo Rinpoche takes on the position of “some Tibetan scholars who are as well-known as the sun and the moon.”¹⁰⁴⁴ They say, “One must definitely accept a middle between the two extremes. This is the great ultimate that is empty of other. It is a permanent, unchanging, and solid entity that is empty of adventitious stains and not empty of all Buddha qualities, such as the ten powers. This is the great kingdom of wisdom.”

Pawo Rinpoche refutes this view by pointing to the intentions behind different presentations of emptiness. Although there surely are many explanations that the nature of phenomena is permanent and lasting and such, these explanations are given with particular issues in mind. For example, the descriptions of the infinite positive qualities of Buddhas are provided in order to eliminate clinging to a certain kind of limited emptiness, that is, taking the ultimate to be utter nonexistence. Such explanations may also be given for those pure disciples who are already released from believing in extremes, such as permanence and extinction. Obviously, these disciples would no longer set up any reference points in terms of superimposition and denial, no matter how they are taught the nature

of phenomena. They are like people who are cured of a disease and have regained their full strength. Such people may relish all kinds of tasty and nourishing dishes. However, the dietary situation of those people who suffer from the nasty illness of being inflated by entertaining reference points is a different story. They are definitively in need of curing this disease through the purging medicine of emptiness. As for a middle and extremes, these are only established in mutual dependence. Thus, if the extremes have been refuted, their middle cannot be established either, because a middle without extremes is impossible. If there is a middle, there are also extremes, because as long as there is clinging to a middle, the clinging to extremes operates too, just as even an infinitesimal particle entails at least a left side, a right side, and a middle. Its middle part can again be divided into a middle, left, and right, and so on. As *The Sūtra of the Meditative Concentration of the Direct Presence of All Present Buddhas* states, both middle and extremes are seeming and not ultimate:

Not observing, not conceptualizing, and not establishing the two extremes, not mentally engaging, and not being occupied with them is what is taught in a nominal way and through the worldly seeming. Therefore, it is called “the middle way.” However, ultimately, neither extremes nor middle can be observed here.

The sūtra continues by saying that followers of the great vehicle should also not cling to wisdom:

A bodhisattva mahāsattva should wish for wisdom but not cling to wisdom.

Nāgārjuna’s *Fundamental Verses* says that as long as one entertains reference points, such as existence, nonexistence, or a middle in between, Buddhahood is out of reach.

The four possibilities of permanent, impermanent, and so on,
Where should they be in this peace?
The four possibilities of finite, infinite, and so on,
Where should they be in this peace?

Those who entertain discursiveness with regard to the Buddha,
Who is beyond discursiveness and inexhaustible,
As a consequence of being affected by all this discursiveness,
They will not see the Thus-Gone One.¹⁰⁴⁵

In the same vein, Pawo Rinpoche ridicules some people’s claim of resting in a nonconceptual way within the state of both knowing that the adventitious stains do not exist and knowing that the ultimate exists. He says that it is truly amazing to rest in a nonconceptual way within a state in which there is clinging to the nonexistence of stains and clinging to the existence of the ultimate.

Also, there is no separate “kingdom of wisdom” or “kingdom of consciousness.”

What is the nature of the Thus-Gone One
Is the nature of beings.

The Thus-Gone One is without nature
And all beings are without nature.¹⁰⁴⁶

If there were a single, ultimately existing nature of all phenomena, it would follow that these phenomena could not have different characteristics. Moreover, if an ultimate emptiness were definitely established, this emptiness would not be the means to vanquish reification but rather something to be vanquished itself.

Some people claim, “The other-empty ultimate is an existent beyond existence and nonexistence.” However, in a way, this is just a play on words. For what would be wrong then in claiming a nonexistent that is beyond existence and nonexistence? And how would one then refute the claim of a nonexistent that is even beyond such an existent beyond existence and nonexistence? As is obvious from this, there would moreover follow an infinite regress, starting with an existent beyond an existent beyond existence and nonexistence. Therefore, Pawo Rinpoche says, it is problematic to introduce conventions, such as other-emptiness, that are not known in the Buddha’s teachings and proclaim them to be the heart of his teachings.

Then there are those who talk in a one-sided way in terms of Mere Mentalism and say that the other-dependent nature empty of the imaginary nature is the perfect nature. This is just something that is set up by their own minds, without an understanding of the true intention of the lineage of vast activity. Following *The Sūtra That Unravels the Intention*, the lineage of vast activity explains that the imaginary nature is like being affected by the disease of blurred vision; the other-dependent nature is like the manifestations that appear due to blurred vision; and the perfect nature is like the natural object of clear vision upon being cured. This means that once the disease of blurred vision has been cured, the appearance of floating hairs vanishes. Likewise, when the fundamental disease of the most subtle level of the imaginary nature—mind’s nature or the expanse of dharmas being blurred by the dualistic split into subject and object—is eradicated, then the seeming appearances of the other-dependent nature will vanish. At that point, the more coarse levels of the imaginary nature—which come about through focusing on the appearances of the other-dependent nature and labeling

them—automatically do not remain either. What remains is the perfect nature, the expanse of dharmas as it is, seen by the unimpeded, natural vision of personally experienced wisdom.¹⁰⁴⁷

Furthermore, notions such as existence and nonexistence belong to the imaginary nature. So, if one claims the ultimate existence of the perfect nature, one in fact claims that the perfect nature is the imaginary nature. This was prophesied by the Buddha in *The Sūtra of the Arrival in Lañkā*:

In the future, those who cling to non-Buddhist thinking will conceptualize that the wisdom of the noble ones exists as an object of personal experience and as having the nature of an entity. . . . How could such notions operate in the noble ones? If such [notions] were entertained, they would be nothing but the clinging to an identity.

Then, Pawo Rinpoche quotes a seemingly contrasting passage from *The Sūtra of the Great Nirvāṇa*:¹⁰⁴⁸

Before, in Varāṇasī, I taught impermanence, suffering, emptiness, and identitylessness to those of medium vigor. Now that I turn the wheel of dharma here in Kūśinagara, I teach completely pure permanence, purity, bliss, and identity.

He explains that the Buddha taught on the Dharma Body by emphasizing that it is endowed with the four qualities of permanence, purity, bliss, and identity in order to counteract mainly the clinging to the extreme of deprecation, such as regarding the Dharma Body as impermanent. In this context, permanence means that the completely pure nature of phenomena will never change into something impure. However, this is not a teaching on any kind of reified permanent substance. This sūtra furthermore says that Buddhahood can be attained if there is mind, just as butter can appear if there is milk. Therefore, all sentient beings are said to have Buddha nature. However, in dependence on the capabilities of various disciples, identity may be explained as identitylessness and identitylessness as identity. Just as blind people do not see visible forms, sentient beings do not see their own nature that is like a powerful vajra. Although yogurt does not exist in milk as long it is milk, yogurt may come forth from milk. It is from this point of view that one says, “Yogurt exists in milk.” Likewise, the teaching that Buddha nature exists in sentient beings is given in the same way. As *The Sūtra Requested by Brahmā* says:

O Blessed One, those who seek for nirvāṇa as an entity do not go beyond cyclic existence. Why? O Blessed One, “nirvāṇa” is utter peace

of all characteristics, the cessation of all mental flux. O Blessed One, foolish persons who seek nirvāṇa as an entity, while taking ordination in the well-spoken vinaya of the dharma, fall into the views of the ford. O Blessed One, those who seek nirvāṇa within all phenomena that are fully in the state of nirvāṇa, [just like extracting] sesame oil from sesame seeds or butter from milk, I declare to be vain ford.ers.¹⁰⁴⁹

It is important, when looking at the teachings of the Buddha, to be aware that the meanings of certain terms can change according to different contexts. For example, “causes” can have two meanings: causes for the arising of something and causes for something to become clearly manifest. Here, it is taught that the “actual cause” for sentient beings to have Buddha nature is sentient beings’ own mind, while the conditional causes are the six perfections, such as generosity. In other contexts, it is also explained that confidence, the four immeasurables, or the ten bodhisattva grounds and such are Buddha nature. Thus, it is taught again and again that all phenomena are undetermined and subject to conditions.

The same goes for the term “nonexistence,” since there are six ways in which it may be used. It can mean total nonexistence, temporary nonexistence, nonexistence due to insignificant quantity, nonexistence because of not being experienced, nonexistence due to the adoption of bad dharmas, and nonexistence because of the lack of a counterpart to depend on.

“Not being seen” can have eight meanings: not being seen due to being too distant, not being seen due to being too close (such as one’s eyelashes), not being seen due to ceasing, not being seen due to the seer being upset, not being seen because of being too subtle, not being seen due to being obscured, not being seen due to a lack of quantity (such as a sesame seed in a heap of rice), and not being seen due to similarity (such as a lentil in a heap of peas).

All of these specifications are used in many places in various ways, but it is clearly said that, in terms of the actual heart of the matter, they are not to be imagined as anything whatsoever. Thus, no matter whether it is existence, nonexistence, permanence, impermanence, or anything else that one doggedly sticks to, such clinging always deprecates the ultimate. As *The Sūtra of the Great Nirvāṇa* declares:

O son of good family, one might say, “Definitely, Buddha nature exists in all sentient beings,” or one might say, “Definitely, Buddha nature does not exist.” No matter what you say, it is a deprecation of the Buddha, the dharma, and the spiritual community. O son of good family, therefore, I have taught in the sūtras that there are two types of people who deprecate the Buddha, the dharma, and the spiritual community: those who have no trust and a mind full of aversion, and those who have trust but do not understand the meaning.

Such sūtras as the *Āṅgulimāliyasūtra*, *The Great Drum Sūtra*, and others say that the Heart of the Thus-Gone Ones and Buddhahood are permanent, lasting, and changeless. However, this is in order to eliminate the clinging that the ultimate is utter nonexistence. As the Buddha says:

O Mañjuśrī, in the world, there are two types of persons who destroy the genuine dharma: those who have strong views about emptiness and those who propound a self. These two destroy the genuine dharma and turn the genuine dharma upside down.

Furthermore, it is generally asserted that the liberation of hearers and solitary realizers is the discontinuation of the five aggregates, just like the dying of a flame, and that the welfare of others cannot be promoted through the nirvāṇa without remainder. On the other hand, it is said that complete Buddhahood is adorned with all positive qualities and entails the feature of continuous and all-encompassing welfare for others. It is just in order to highlight this difference that the liberation of hearers and solitary realizers is presented as being a nonentity and without a self or form, while the liberation of the great vehicle is taught as an entity, a self, and something that has form. However, this is not a teaching that the liberation of the great vehicle is something material. Rather, it shows that an emptiness that is merely uttered and complete nonexistence cannot possibly be the emptiness of Centrists. Those who still have clinging to such nonexistence cannot realize emptiness. *The Fundamental Verses* says:

By the flaw of having views about emptiness,
Those of little understanding are ruined,
Just as when incorrectly seizing a snake
Or mistakenly practicing an awareness-mantra.¹⁰⁵⁰

Karmapa Mikyö Dorje explains that the teachings on Buddha nature being a self, permanent, substantial, really existent, indestructible, and so on are of expedient meaning.¹⁰⁵¹ The same is clearly expressed by Candrakīrti in his *Lucid Words* by extensively quoting that *The Sūtra of the Arrival in Lañka* itself takes Buddha nature as an expedient meaning.¹⁰⁵² The reason such teachings are of expedient meaning is that they entail the following:

- 1) a basis of intention
- 2) a specific purpose
- 3) the invalidation of their explicit statements through reasoning

1) As for the basis of intention, the Karmapa says that, in India, there obviously

have been various positions on this topic among Yogācāras and Centrists. Based on the meaning of what is said in such texts as *The Sūtra of Richly Adorned* and *The Sūtra of the Arrival in Lañka*, different Yogācāras make a number of assertions: Buddha nature is the ground consciousness; it is the seeds of purified phenomena within the ground consciousness; it is the entity of the perfect nature in the sense of the other-dependent nature being empty of the imaginary nature; or it is the stainless ninth consciousness.¹⁰⁵³ On the other hand, Centrists say that from the perspective of analysis or the seeing of the noble ones, all reference points, such as existence and nonexistence, have completely vanished. It is in this way that the suchness of Buddhas and ordinary sentient beings is equality in the sense of natural, complete purity. However, from the mundane perspective of no analysis, when the presentation of cyclic existence and nirvāṇa is taught, it is done by bearing in mind that the disposition to accomplish Buddhahood exists in the continua of sentient beings and that the Body of Perfect Buddhahood radiates from this disposition in accordance with the disciples to be guided. As *The Sublime Continuum* says:

Since the Body of Perfect Buddhahood radiates,
Since suchness is undifferentiable,
And since the disposition exists,
All beings are always endowed with the Buddha-Heart.¹⁰⁵⁴

2) As for the specific purpose of teaching Buddha nature as permanent and so on, it is necessary to present it in this way for the sake of gradually guiding certain disciples who still entertain various levels of reification. As Nāgārjuna's *Precious Garland* says:

Just as grammarians introduce you [to grammar]
By reading the fundamentals of the alphabet,
The Buddha teaches his disciples
The dharma to the degree they can bear.¹⁰⁵⁵

Āryadeva's *Four Hundred Verses* agrees:

First, one should explain
Whatever is pleasant to specific people.
There is no way that someone who is repelled
Can be a suitable receptacle for the genuine dharma.¹⁰⁵⁶

In particular, *The Sublime Continuum* says:

Why did the Victors teach here
That the Buddha-Heart exists in all sentient beings?

They taught this in order to eliminate

The five faults in those in whom they exist.

These are faintheartedness, denigrating inferior sentient beings,

Clinging to what is not the actual, denying the actual dharma, and
excessive attachment to oneself.¹⁰⁵⁷

3) In the literal sense of being taught as permanent and such in the sūtras, this Buddha nature is not established even conventionally, let alone ultimately, since the Buddha himself refuted all of this. In addition, such sūtras as *The Sūtra of the Great Nirvāṇa*¹⁰⁵⁸ say again and again that the qualities of the major and minor marks of a Buddha do not exist in any sentient being. The same sūtra, *The Sūtra of the Lion's Roar of Queen Śrīmālā*,¹⁰⁵⁹ as well as *The Sublime Continuum* together with its commentary by Asaṅga and other texts repeatedly state that such permanence, self, bliss, and complete purity do not exist in the impure phase of sentient beings. For example, *The Sublime Continuum* explicitly says:

Since Buddha wisdom is present in [all] kinds of sentient beings,

Since its stainlessness is by nature without duality,

And since the Buddha disposition is metaphorically referred¹⁰⁶⁰ to
[by the name of] its fruition,

All sentient beings are said to possess the Buddha-Heart.¹⁰⁶¹

Moreover, if the Buddha-Heart were asserted as a self and an uncreated entity, all Buddhist refutations of the notions of a self as entertained by non-Buddhists would be pointless. In some sūtras, such as *The Sūtra of the Arrival in Lanka*, the Buddha even taught that our ordinary mind, the ground consciousness, is the Buddha-Heart:

Mahāmātī, what is positive and negative is as follows: It is [nothing but] the eight consciousnesses. What are these eight? [First,] the Heart of the Thus-Gone Ones is proclaimed as “the ground consciousness.”¹⁰⁶²

Thus, since this Buddha-Heart itself is taught to be of expedient meaning in this sūtra, the ground consciousness also is taught as an expedient meaning. Likewise, through this passage from *The Sūtra of the Arrival in Lanka*, all scriptural passages that teach about the cut-off disposition; the absolutely definite dispositions of hearers, solitary realizers, and bodhisattvas; the certainty of three vehicles

in the final sense; other-emptiness; and self-awareness are shown to be of expedient meaning.

❧ *The Yogācāra System in General*

The Tibetan tradition divides the great vehicle into the lineage of profound view and the lineage of vast activity. The former refers to the Madhyamaka system as transmitted by Mañjuśrī to Nāgārjuna, and the latter is the Yogācāra system as presented by Maitreya, Asaṅga, and Vasubandhu. Since the overall tradition that is generally called Yogācāra contains a number of different philosophical streams that may even overlap among various masters, it is impossible to determine *the* single philosophical system of this school, and even a rough outline is certainly beyond the scope of this book.¹⁰⁶³ What follows is a brief sketch of the school, its history, and some of its positions.

In general, the masters of the Yogācāra tradition saw their system as a continuation of all the preceding developments in Buddhism (be it in terms of Abhidharma or Centrism) and not as a radical departure from them or even as a distinct new school per se.¹⁰⁶⁴ They tried to retain what was useful in other traditions of Buddhism, but in a way that was not ignorant of Centrist warnings against reifications of any kind.¹⁰⁶⁵ Thus, Yogācāra writings incorporate virtually everything that previous Buddhist schools developed, including intricate abhidharmic systems, detailed explications of the many stages on the different paths of the three vehicles, subtle descriptions of the processes in meditation, explorations of mind and its manifestations on the levels of both ignorance and enlightenment, as well as commentaries on major sūtras, such as the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*¹⁰⁶⁶ and those related to the third turning of the wheel of dharma.¹⁰⁶⁷ In addition, such masters as Dignāga and Dharmakīrti developed an extensive system of epistemology and reasoning.

Specifically, Asaṅga's hermeneutic framework of the three natures is not at all put forward to contradict the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* and Nāgārjuna. Rather, it interprets emptiness within this framework. This is also expressed in Aśīśa's auto-commentary on *The Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*:

The learned in the world say the following: Noble Asaṅga's specific way of explaining the teachings speaks about the meaning of prajñāpāramitā as mere cognizance. At present, this is also what my gurus Suvarṇadvīpa and Ratnākaraśānti think.¹⁰⁶⁸

Asaṅga's approach may be seen as a contextualizing comment on the sūtras and

Kamalaśīla's *Illumination of Centrist* explains:

Thus, those who cannot understand all at once that all phenomena lack a nature, for the time being, gradually engage in the lack of nature of outer objects on the basis of [them being] mere mind. Therefore, [*The Sūtra of the Arrival in Lañka* X.154ab] says:

Apprehender and apprehended cease
In those who look with reasoning.

Following this, by gradually examining the nature of that mind, they understand that also the [mind] is without identity and thus engage in the profound way of being.¹²³²

A similar approach is found in Haribhadra's *Illumination of The Ornament of Clear Realization*.¹²³³

In brief, it appears that most Centrists clearly distinguish between accepting a nonreifying notion of mere mind as a step in the more practical context of the progressive stages of meditation on emptiness and refuting any reifying interpretation of mind in the more theoretical context of philosophical analysis.

❧ *The Treatment of Yogācāra and the Rangtong-Shentong Controversy in Tibet*

Common Tibetan Systems of Classifying Yogācāra

The later Tibetan tradition in particular deals with the Indian Yogācāra tradition in a somewhat peculiar manner. Most Tibetan schools seem to distinguish between the first and third streams of Yogācāra, that is, the systems of Maitreya/Asaṅga (stream 1) and Dignāga and Dharmakīrti (stream 3). However, sometimes the third stream is placed outside of the Yogācāra system by relating it to the system of the Sūtra Followers. In addition, later Yogācāras, such as Dharmapāla (stream 2), are either conflated with the first stream or distinguished from it as Mere Mentalists. In the latter case, the first stream is then called Shentong-Madhyamaka.

Thus, two main ways of dealing with the various streams within Yogācāra can be distinguished.

In the first case, particularly in the Gelugpa school, often streams 1 and 2 are categorically referred to as Mere Mentalism or Mind Only. Stream 3 is regarded as the basis for both of the Gelugpa doxographical categories of “the Sūtra Followers Following Reasoning” and “the Mere Mentalists Following Reasoning.”

Usually, the system of epistemology and reasoning of stream 3 is treated separately from the doxographic presentations of Yogācāra as the distinct curricular topic of valid cognition, which is understood as being based on the system of the Sūtra Followers. Tsongkhapa's version of Centrist attempts to incorporate this system into Candrakīrti's Consequentialism. By following Tsongkhapa and looking for certain key terms—such as the three natures and the ground consciousness—in the scriptures, the Gelugpa school also subsumes certain sūtras, all texts of Vasubandhu, and all but two texts of Maitreya/Asaṅga under the label of Mere Mentalism. Nevertheless, in an attempt to claim the generally esteemed bodhisattva Asaṅga for the distinct interpretation of Consequentialism in the Gelugpa school, it is asserted that, in his final view, Asaṅga is a Consequentialist Centrist. This leads to classifying *The Sublime Continuum* as a Consequentialist text and—except for *The Ornament of Clear Realization*¹²³⁴—all other texts of Maitreya and Asaṅga as Mere Mentalism. In terms of doxography, all that is labeled Mere Mentalism is considered inferior to Centrist, and the existence of a Shentong-Madhyamaka is categorically denied in terms of both terminology and content. Rather, it is said that “Shentong” is nothing but “False Aspectarian Mere Mentalism.”^{21, 235}

The other common Tibetan classification scheme is to label streams 2 and 3 as Mere Mentalism and place them doxographically below Centrist, which is then called “the system of self-emptiness” (*rangtong*). The system of Maitreya, Asaṅga, and Vasubandhu is labeled “the Centrist of other-emptiness” (*shentong*) and categorized under Centrist. This approach is usually taken by the followers of Shentong-Madhyamaka, such as Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Taye. Often then, this latter form of “Centrist” is considered to be superior to the former. In this approach too, the system of epistemology and reasoning of stream 3 is usually treated separately as the distinct topic of valid cognition.

To reiterate, no such divisions existed in India. Some Tibetans, such as Mikyö Dorje and Pawo Rinpoche, refused to follow either of these later doxographical approaches. Rather, they insisted on treating the lineage of profound view and the lineage of vast activity on their own grounds and did not simply equate the latter with Mere Mentalism. In this, they agreed with other Tibetan masters, such as Śākya Chogden and Mipham Rinpoche, as well as with many modern scholars.

The Development of the Rangtong-Shentong Controversy

Why did the divisions into Mere Mentalism, self-empty, and other-empty originate and become so widespread in Tibet? Throughout Tibetan dharma history (particularly after the fourteenth century), to a greater or lesser extent, there was a tendency to neglect the Yogācāra tradition as a whole and treat it mainly through its refutations in Centrist texts. This tendency started at the outset of the spread of dharma in Tibet, since, in terms of the sūtra view, all the major Indian

masters, such as Śāntarakṣita, Kamalaśīla, and Atiśa, who were involved in bringing the Buddha's teaching to Tibet were Centrists. Although the first two masters incorporated some Yogācāra elements in their Yogācāra-Madhyamaka synthesis, the transmission of the entire lineage of vast activity was clearly secondary. A clearly traceable stream was the transmission from Sajjana to Dsen Kawoche and Zu Gaway Dorje, which was, however, more or less limited to the five texts by Maitreya/Asaṅga. Except for Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Abhidharma* (which is not a Yogācāra work anyway) and—to a lesser degree—Asaṅga's *Compendium of Abhidharma*, the other works of these two masters, let alone of other Yogācāras (such as Śhūratami or Dharmapāla), were usually not studied much in Tibet.

The neglect of Yogācāra is also reflected in the traditional curriculum of the five major topics of sūtra studies as it developed in Tibetan monastic colleges: Vinaya, Abhidharma, Pramāṇa (Tib. tshad ma; valid cognition), Prajñāpāramitā, and Madhyamaka. In the traditional approaches of presenting this curriculum, the Yogācāra system or the lineage of vast activity is hardly represented, if at all. Abhidharma is studied solely through Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Abhidharma* (which treats the systems of the Followers of the Great Exposition and the Sūtra Followers). Pramāṇa is based on the epistemological texts of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti as being mainly an expression of the system of the Sūtra Followers, without much reference, if any, to the Yogācāra system. The hidden meaning of paths and grounds in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* is studied through Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realization*, but this text is commonly considered to present the view of Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Madhyamaka. Finally, Madhyamaka, which mainly treats emptiness as the explicit meaning of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, is usually studied solely through a Consequentialist text, Candrakīrti's *Entrance into Centrism*.¹²³⁶

This core curriculum is supplemented by systematic studies of the four Buddhist philosophical systems according to Tibetan categorization. It is here that the two classification schemes outlined above are treated in detail. These doxographical classifications, in particular the issue of how Mere Mentalism is treated and whether a Shentong-Madhyamaka is accepted, inform and shape the studies of the core curriculum to a high degree.

Dölpopa was one of the first Tibetans to vehemently deny that the lineage of vast activity is Mere Mentalism. He often called these two streams “ultimate Cittamātra” and “seeming Cittamātra” respectively. He greatly stressed the unity of the lineages of profound view and vast activity and disclaimed that the latter is inferior to Centrism. Instead, he asserted that Indian masters such as Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, and Dignāga all belong to the tradition that he called “Great Madhyamaka.” Dölpopa also elaborated on the correct understanding of the framework of the three natures, largely following Vasubandhu's Prajñāpāramitā commentary *Bhāṣṭikā*. Consequently, he criticized the position that all

scriptures in which the three natures appear are just Mere Mentalism. As for the distinction between “self-empty” and “other-empty,” Dölpopa said that seeming reality is self-empty, while ultimate reality—Buddha nature or the nature of mind—is other-empty, that is, empty of adventitious stains but not empty of Buddha qualities. It is moreover asserted to be the genuine self, which is permanent and pure.¹²³⁷

As Stearns puts it, for many of Dölpopa's contemporaries as well as later masters, his entire system including the novel use of terminology came as a “hermeneutical shock.”¹²³⁸ It was first severely criticized during Dölpopa's time by parts of the Sakya school. Later, Tsongkhapa rejected Dölpopa in all aspects, and this rejection persisted throughout the Gelugpa school. The critiques by the Eighth Karmapa and Pawo Rinpoche were explained at the beginning of the chapter.

Following the unfortunate but common pattern throughout Tibetan history of mingling politics, religious patronage, and monastic rivalries, the gradual growth of the Gelugpa school's spiritual influence was coupled with an increase in its political power. This culminated in the Fifth Dalai Lama's installation as the supreme ruler of all Tibet and the Tibetan government being run exclusively by Gelugpa authorities. Eventually, as a consequence of the total rejection of the view of Dölpopa's school of Jonang by Tsongkhapa and his followers and the ascendance of the Gelugpa school to a kind of state church, all texts by Dölpopa and other Jonangpas were forbidden and their printing blocks sealed and locked away. Gradually, all Jonangpa monasteries (as well as a considerable number of Nyingma and Kagyü monasteries) were converted into Gelugpa monasteries, the last one being Taranātha's monastery in 1650. From 1685 onward, the Jonangpa lineage was completely suppressed as an independent school in western and central Tibet, although its teachings were still practiced in secrecy. The only openly Jonang establishment at that time was the monastery of Dzamthang and its affiliates in a remote area of Amdo in eastern Tibet.

The ensuing revival of the Jonangpa system, however, came about through a number of prominent masters of the Kagyü and Nyingma lineages in eastern Tibet. It started with Katog Rigdzin Tsewang Norbu (1698–1755) and his student, the Eighth Situpa Chökyi Jungnay (1699–1774), who promoted and further developed these teachings. Apart from the mere doctrinal differences between the predominant Gelugpa school on the one side and the Sakya, Nyingma, and Kagyü schools on the other, as a result of the conflicts described above, the Rang-tong-Shentong controversy definitely came to assume a political dimension too. The Shentong view increasingly served as a kind of common “corporate identity” for those schools that were opposed—both doctrinally and politically—to the Gelugpas, whose institutional identity naturally lies in the unique system of Tsongkhapa. The sense of a common doctrinal ground was also one of the underlying forces of the nineteenth-century nonsectarian Rime movement in eastern

Tibet, which included many Sakya, Nyingma, and Kagyü masters.

Moreover, since Centrism was universally accepted in Tibet as the highest philosophical system on the sūtra level, it was clear that any claim to the superiority of a certain view could be made only from within this system. Therefore, for many who rejected Tsongkhapa's interpretation of Centrism, it seemed mandatory not only to counterbalance his interpretation but in addition to promote the lineage of vast activity by referring to it as "Shentong-Madhyamaka" or "Great Madhyamaka." Usually, the latter was then claimed as the superior type of Centrism, while "Mere Mentalism" was declared to be inferior to Centrism in general.

Of course, such a Shentong-Madhyamaka or even Great Madhyamaka superior to Candrakīrti's and Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka—which is then called "Rangtong" in an often pejorative sense—is fiercely opposed by the Gelugpa school. It is completely rejected as a continuation of Dölpopa's censored views, which are even denied to be Buddhist and instead equated with Hindu views on a really existent, permanent ātman. Another response is to categorize the teachings of Shentong-Madhyamaka as Mere Mentalism (usually of the False Aspectarian brand). In both cases, it is merely seen as a convenient target for Centrist refutations.

Thus, over the centuries, there were many polemics from both sides. A natural part of this process was the attempt to claim the most prominent figures of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism for one's own side in this controversy. For example, the followers of Shentong-Madhyamaka claim not only Maitreya, Asaṅga, and Vasubandhu as their roots, but also many masters such as Nāgārjuna (through his *Collection of Praises*), all the mahāsiddhas (such as Saraha and Maitripa), Longchen Rabjam, Karmapa Mikyö Dorje, and Mipham Rinpoche.¹²³⁹ Conversely, the Gelugpas hold that Maitreya and Asaṅga are Consequentialists in their final view and usually even claim Rendawa and Sakya Paṅḍita as being in accord with Tsongkhapa's interpretation of Centrism, which is clearly not the case.¹²⁴⁰

This controversy was one of the ways in which strong rival group identities developed in the four Tibetan schools. Often, this even led to severe criticism of their members from within these schools, if they seemed to deviate from the official party line. Examples can be found in a certain opposition even within the Kagyü school to the Eighth Karmapa's interpretation of Centrism with its rejection of a Shentong-Madhyamaka. Conversely, Sakya Chogden received fierce criticisms from others in the Sakya school for his sympathies for the other-empty approach and his attempts to show the final unity of Nāgārjuna's and Asaṅga's systems. In the Gelugpa school, Gendün Chöpel became persona non grata for refuting Tsongkhapa's interpretation of Centrism.

I think one of the big opportunities in the spread of Buddhism to the West is that Western students of Buddhism, especially in its Tibetan form, now have

the chance to take a fresh look at the original Indian and Tibetan sources and to reevaluate the various Indo-Tibetan controversies without immediately getting caught up in centuries-long entrenchments of sectarian polemics. Fortunately, some signs of such a development are to be found.

What If the Buddha and Nāgārjuna Were Mere Mentalists?

As has been shown, to categorically label the lineage of vast activity "Mere Mentalism" with the typical assumed refutations and to regard it as inferior to Centrism is in outright contradiction to the Indian sources. Thus, a few words seem appropriate with regard to the treatment of this lineage by Tsongkhapa and his followers.

By and large, in the Gelugpa school, the views of Yogācāras in general and the masters of the lineage of vast activity in particular are only consulted for the sake of studying epistemology and logic through the system of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti as well as for describing some aspects of conventional reality. The views of these masters on ultimate reality are either studied only to be refuted or not studied at all. If there seem to be inconsistencies, the overall context is often not considered, but statements are taken in a limited and literal way. Not only with regard to the Yogācāra school but in general, the monastic colleges almost exclusively use the digests of their own textbooks, largely based on the views of Tsongkhapa and his followers, and hardly ever consult the original Indian sources. Asaṅga is traditionally venerated as one of the two supreme system founders in the great vehicle along with Nāgārjuna, but this is merely lip service. In reality, he is either refuted, downgraded, or silenced. In the same vein, Tsongkhapa's early work *Ocean of Good Explanations*,¹²⁴¹ in which he explains the ground consciousness and the afflicted mind according to Asaṅga, is consequently considered by Gelugpa authorities not to represent Tsongkhapa's "mature view."

The standard Gelugpa claim that certain texts are Mere Mentalism and thus only of expedient meaning is put forward on the grounds that certain key terms, such as the three natures, mere mind, or the ground consciousness, appear in these texts. However, this approach does not properly consider how such terms are explained in the Yogācāra system itself and what they mean in a variety of contexts. Consequently, not only the works of Maitreya, Asaṅga, and Vasubandhu but also certain sūtras and even the entire third turning of the wheel of dharma by the Buddha are classified as teaching Mere Mentalism. This resembles the approach of a child who is asked to describe an elephant concealed behind a high wall and tries to do so by peeping through a small hole in the wall. Seeing only the end of the elephant's tail, the child exclaims, "An elephant looks like a paintbrush!"

Such a "hermeneutic approach" leads to a considerable number of exegetical convolutions, inconsistencies, and absurd consequences. If Maitreya and Asaṅga

are deemed Mere Mentalists simply because the terms of the three natures and such appear in their texts, it follows that the Buddha himself was a Mere Mentalist, since he teaches mere mind, the three natures, and so on in many sūtras. It also follows that even some of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*—which according to the Gelugpa classification are of definitive meaning—are only Mere Mentalism and thus of expedient meaning, since the three natures are taught in them. Similarly *The Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* must then be a text of Mere Mentalism, since it—just like *The Sūtra of the Arrival in Lañkā*—says, “These three realms are merely mind.” However, since this text is one of the two universally acknowledged foundations (along with *The Fundamental Verses*) of Candrakīrti’s *Entrance into Centristism*, what light does that throw on Candrakīrti’s text itself? If one is only looking for certain key terms, many tantras too may well be regarded as teaching Mere Mentalism. For the same reason, all texts by Centrists such as Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla would belong to that category, as would certain texts by Nāgārjuna. For example, his *Twenty Verses on the Great Vehicle* says, “All of this is mere mind.”¹²⁴² *The Praise to the Inconceivable* uses the terminology of the three natures.¹²⁴³ *The Praise to the Expanse of Dharmas* employs the typical Yogācāra term “complete change of state”¹²⁴⁴ and even says that Buddha nature is not affected by the teachings on emptiness.¹²⁴⁵

If the same narrow approach to determine the content of scriptures merely on the basis of certain key words is equally applied to the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* and Centrist texts with their relentless negations, it is very easy—as many people did and still do—to wrongly categorize them as plain nihilism, especially when they are not read in their own context (such as their frequent warnings against nihilism and the careful explanations of what “the lack of nature” means).

Out of context, at certain points, Centrist texts seem to assert the fourth extreme of neither existent nor nonexistent that is typically negated. For example, Nāgārjuna’s *Fundamental Verses* says:

Therefore, it is suitable that nirvāṇa

Is neither an entity nor a nonentity.¹²⁴⁶

Now consider the following verses:

Just as phenomena are not existent

And just as they appear in various ways,

Thus they are neither phenomena nor the nonexistence of phenomena.

[The Buddha] taught them as the actuality of nonduality.

From certain single perspectives,

He taught them as either “nonexistent” or “existent.”

From both perspectives,

He expressed them as “neither existent nor nonexistent.”

Since they do not exist as they appear,

He talked about their “nonexistence.”

Since they appear in such ways,

He spoke about their “existence.”

Since they do not have any intrinsic character,

Since they do not abide as their own entities,

And since they do not exist as they are apprehended,

He presented them as the lack of nature.

As each [of the following] is the basis for the next,

Their lack of nature establishes them

As being without arising, without ceasing,

Primordial peace, and natural nirvāṇa.

Where do you think these verses come from? As they stand, there is no reason to assume that they were not written by a Centrist master such as Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, or Śāntideva. Sorry, wrong guess. They come from Asaṅga’s *Synopsis of the Great Vehicle*.¹²⁴⁷ Thus, if certain texts are claimed to be Mere Mentalism just because they contain a certain terminology, this example—among many others—shows that it is very easy to equally claim that all texts that use Centrist style or terminology, such as “the lack of nature” or “being without arising,” are Centrist texts too. Further examples include many sūtras of the lesser vehicle (such as the *Kaccāyanagottasutta*), Maitreya’s *Distinction between the Middle and Extremes*, and Sthīramati’s commentary on Vasubandhu’s *Thirty Verses*, which may all be considered Centrist texts, because they use terms such as “the middle,” “the middle path,” and “emptiness” and also describe the elimination of various sets of extremes.

The Gelugpa claim that Asaṅga in his final view is a Consequentialist—which is based only on *The Sublime Continuum* of all texts—is completely unfounded. First of all, as generally accepted, *The Sublime Continuum* is by Maitreya and not by Asaṅga. Everybody who reads this text cannot but notice the completely different approach in terms of both style and content in comparison to anything written by Consequentialists such as Candrakīrti. Likewise, Asaṅga’s *Exposition of The Sublime Continuum* does not exhibit any trace of Consequentialism. Thus, the claim that Asaṅga is a Consequentialist is based solely on a complete reinterpretation of the straightforward verses of *The Sublime Continuum* in typical Gelugpa commentaries, which tortuously force these verses into the framework

of their own version of Consequentialism, thus interpreting Buddha nature as simply being emptiness in the sense of a nonimplicative negation.¹²⁴⁸

Moreover, if—according to this claim—Buddha nature refers to nothing other than the emptiness that is a nonimplicative negation, why would the Buddha have bothered to elaborate on merely this emptiness through abundant words in many sūtras of the third turning of the wheel of dharma, when he had already taught the emptiness of all phenomena at length in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* of the second turning? If—as per the Gelugpas—the third turning only teaches Mere Mentalism, then it is definitely contradictory that this very turning teaches the emptiness as found in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* (that is, also Buddha nature being nothing but a nonimplicative negation), which they themselves consider the definitive meaning. But if the third turning indeed teaches this emptiness, then it must be of definitive meaning too. Furthermore, if Buddha nature is nothing but emptiness in the sense of a nonimplicative negation, how should such a negation alone serve as the potential or basis for Buddhahood with all its qualities and enlightened activity? And since such an emptiness is present in all phenomena in an equal way, why couldn't stones and books become enlightened too?

If, based on *The Sublime Continuum*, Asaṅga were a Consequentialist, then Maitreya as its actual author must certainly be one too. However, at the same time, the Gelugpas claim that Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realization* represents the view of the Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Madhyamaka. They also say that the remaining texts of Maitreya and Asaṅga are the foundation of Mere Mentalism. Even for the Gelugpas themselves, there is no case of any other master in Buddhism being claimed as featuring in three different schools. It does not make much sense to regard Asaṅga as not just one of the followers of Mere Mentalism but as its very founder and still to say that he actually is a Consequentialist, on the basis of a single text that is not even his. Do we know of any other Consequentialist who founded a non-Consequentialist, even non-Madhyamaka school?

Why not equally say then that Nāgārjuna's final view is Shentong-Madhyamaka (based on his *Praise to the Expanse of Dharmas*), while he is also the founder of the inferior, provisional Rangtong-Madhyamaka based on his other texts, such as *The Fundamental Verses*? In fact, *The Praise to the Expanse of Dharmas* provides a much better basis for someone wanting to interpret it as Shentong-Madhyamaka than *The Sublime Continuum* does for regarding it as a Consequentialist text. In the same vein, one could very well claim that Tsongkhapa's final view was Mahāmudrā, since the Gelugpa tradition itself reports him as having given restricted talks on Mahāmudrā as well as having said to his early teacher Rendawa that he had uncommon guiding instructions based on the Mahāmudrā explanations of the Great Madhyamaka, but it was not yet time to propagate it widely.¹²⁴⁹

Instead, one may say, he just outwardly founded the new lineage of his own particular version of Consequentialism and propagated it widely.

Actually, if Maitreya and Asaṅga were indeed Consequentialists and thus Centrists, then this would in effect serve to support the proponents of other-emptiness who regard the lineage of Maitreya and Asaṅga as Centristism.

As for Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realization*, even today, the whole curriculum of the hidden meaning of grounds and paths in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* in Tibetan monastic colleges is based solely on this text. As for categorizing this text, either one accepts it as a Yogācāra text, which means that the study of the hidden meaning of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* is based on a work of the Yogācāra system (or even Mere Mentalism)—a position that is, of course, completely unacceptable to the Gelugpas—or, as they prefer, one considers this work a Centrist text of the “Yogācāra-Svātantrika” branch. The latter then leads to the wonderfully simple and elegant exegetical situation that Maitreya—an actual Consequentialist who nevertheless mainly teaches Mere Mentalism—also composed an Autonomist text. Even more amazing, he did so many centuries before any division between Autonomists and Consequentialists occurred, let alone one between so-called Yogācāra-Svātantrika and Sautrāntika-Svātantrika.

There are further inconsistencies in this Gelugpa position. Like all other Tibetan schools, the Gelugpas accept *The Ornament of Clear Realization* as the final authority on the hidden meaning of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, that is, the progressive stages of a bodhisattva's supreme knowledge realizing emptiness. At the same time, however, they say that it represents the Autonomist view. From this, it absurdly follows that the hidden meaning of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* is Autonomism. Moreover, the explicit meaning of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*—emptiness—is said to be taught in Centristism, which is divided into Autonomism and Consequentialism. Among these, Consequentialism is regarded as providing the supreme presentation of emptiness. The Consequentialists themselves do not give a presentation of the hidden meaning of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* different from the—allegedly—Autonomist explanation in *The Ornament of Clear Realization*. Therefore, it absurdly follows that the supreme knowledge that realizes emptiness corresponds to Autonomism and thus does not concord with what it realizes, which is emptiness as understood in Consequentialism, since in the Gelugpa presentation Autonomism and Consequentialism have many essential differences. For example, Autonomism is claimed to still entail some remainder of discursiveness and reference points, while Consequentialism is utter freedom from these. From this, it absurdly follows that the supreme knowledge that realizes freedom from discursiveness and reference points itself entails discursiveness and reference points. Gelugpas also claim that emptiness is only partially understood and realized in Autonomism, since the object of negation—real existence—is not fully negated. Thus, it follows that the supreme

knowledge that is described in detail in the Autonomist *Ornament of Clear Realization* is not the final remedy for the object of negation and thus does not fully realize emptiness.

Traditionally, there is no dispute in Tibetan Buddhism that Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga as the founders of the two great philosophical systems of the great vehicle are “the two most supreme ones” in Indian Buddhism. However, if Asaṅga really were a Consequentialist, then both founders of these two systems would be Centrists, the one being only disguised as a Mere Mentalist. So why continue to talk about two founders of two distinct systems? And how could Asaṅga be one of the two “supreme ones” side by side with Nāgārjuna, if the Gelugpas consider all his own works to be “Mere Mentalism” and thus inferior to Centristism? According to their understanding of supremacy, it would make much more sense to put Candrakīrti or even Bhāvaviveka in Asaṅga’s place. At the same time, according to several of the Buddha’s prophecies in the sūtras and tantras, all Tibetan schools hold that Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga were bodhisattvas on the first and third bodhisattva grounds respectively. Maitreya is even regarded as the highest of all bodhisattvas who dwell on the tenth ground, being Buddha Śākyamuni’s regent and the coming fifth Buddha to manifest on earth in this present eon. To dwell on lower or higher bodhisattva grounds is not just a matter of ranking among the “top ten” of bodhisattva celebrities, but the Buddhist teachings contain detailed descriptions of the exponential increase in wisdom and positive qualities while progressing through these grounds. In particular, the full capacity to reach the dharma in a completely perfect way to any kind of audience is only accomplished on the ninth ground. Within such a framework, it could very well be argued then that it makes much better sense to regard the texts by Asaṅga and the coming Buddha Maitreya as being more authoritative in explaining the final purport of Buddha Śākyamuni’s teachings than the works of Nāgārjuna.

Why All the Fuss?

In an attempt to step outside of the well-established defense lines in the Rangtong-Shentong controversy, some fresh air might be provided by looking at the notions of self-emptiness and other-emptiness from a number of different perspectives.

For example, the Eighth Karmapa, Mipham Rinpoche, and other masters turn the tables on their Gelugpa opponents by saying that the term “other-emptiness” is equally applicable to how the followers of Tsongkhapa understand emptiness, since they claim that, for example, form is not empty of form but form is empty of real existence (Tib. bden grub). This means that form is not empty of itself but of something other, that is, real existence. However, the proponents of other-emptiness see a big difference between this kind of other-emptiness and its correct understanding as presented in the Shentong school. The latter is said to be

the actual “other-emptiness of the nature of phenomena,”¹²⁵⁰ while Tsongkhapa’s understanding of emptiness is called the limited “other-emptiness of what bears the nature of phenomena.”¹²⁵¹ This one is identified as “the emptiness of one not existing in an other,” which is regarded by all Tibetan schools as a mistaken emptiness that is to be rejected. As the second chapter of *The Sūtra of the Arrival in Lanika* says:

This emptiness of one [not existing in] an other, Mahāmāti, is very inferior, and you should abandon it.¹²⁵²

Perhaps a surprising aspect of the Rangtong-Shentong controversy is that it can be easily demonstrated that emptiness, Buddha nature, and ultimate reality are both self-empty and other-empty. In fact, the same applies to all phenomena in general. On the one hand, all phenomena are extensively shown to be empty of themselves (a table is empty of being a table). On the other hand, even conventionally, all phenomena are empty of something other, since there is no phenomenon that exists as something other than itself. Obviously, both ultimately and conventionally, a table is empty of everything that is other than this table, such as a chair. In this way, self-empty and other-empty are not at all contradictory or mutually exclusive. This stance does not contradict the Centrist teachings, since it is precisely what Nāgārjuna declares in his *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness*:

The eye is empty of an intrinsic identity of its own.
It is also empty of any other identity.
[Visible] form is empty in the same way,
And also the remaining sources are alike.¹²⁵³

In light of this, it is very hard to claim Nāgārjuna as an exclusive proponent of either self-emptiness or other-emptiness.

A related issue is that ultimately all phenomena lack a really existent, intrinsic nature of their own, but at the same time, on the level of mere appearances, individual phenomena can be clearly distinguished from others. This is expressed in *The Sūtra of the Arrival in Lanika*:

Mahāmāti, the learned should understand the meaning of my statement, “All phenomena are identityless.” Mahāmāti, identityless entities are identitylessness. Just like a horse and an ox [are distinct], all phenomena exist as their own entity, but not as an other entity. It is thus, Mahāmāti, the entity of an ox is not of the nature of a horse, and the entity of a horse is not of the nature of an ox. [It is in this way that] they exist and are not nonexistent. These two are not nonexistent in terms

of their specific characteristics. Rather, these two do exist in terms of their specific characteristics. Likewise, Mahāmāti, all phenomena are not nonexistent in terms of their specific characteristics, but do exist [in this respect]. Thus, naïve, ordinary sentient beings understand them as identityless by conceptually apprehending them, but not in a nonconceptual way. In the same way, all phenomena should be understood as emptiness, lacking arising, and lacking a nature.¹²⁵⁴

As for Buddha nature, there is no Indian text that describes it as either being self-empty or other-empty. It is only said that Buddha nature is both empty of adventitious stains—that is, distinguishable from them—and not empty of its qualities—that is, indistinguishable from them. *The Sublime Continuum* declares:

The basic element is empty of what is adventitious,

Which has the characteristic of being separable.

It is not empty of the unsurpassable dharmas,

Which have the characteristic of being inseparable.¹²⁵⁵

This is nothing extraordinary either. In a way, it is like saying that a book is empty of, or separable from, the dust that covers it. On the other hand, as long as one refers to a book at all, it is not empty of, or inseparable from, its pages and letters. Yet this does not necessarily imply that the book or its components are reified as ultimately identifiable entities. The same goes for Buddha nature, the Dharma Body, or nonconceptual wisdom. As *The Sūtra of the Arrival in Lāṅkā* says:

In the future, those who cling to non-Buddhist thinking will conceive of the wisdom of the noble ones as existing as an object of personal experience and as having the nature of an entity. . . . How could such notions operate in the noble ones? If such [notions] were entertained, they would be nothing but the clinging to an identity.

and

Mahāmāti, if various kinds of illusions are regarded as something other respectively, they are discriminated as [distinct] other appearances by naïve beings, but not by the noble ones.¹²⁵⁶

The last quote points to a very important factor as to why the terms “self-emptiness” and “other-emptiness” do not have to be contradictory. As Ruegg says:

[O]ne could assume an incompatibility, at one and the same level of reference, between two philosophical propositions, both of which cannot be true in accordance with the principle of contradiction. Alternatively, one might perhaps suppose a complementarity — perhaps even an incommensurability — between two doctrines that relate to different levels of reference or discourse, and which are accordingly not mutually exclusive or contradictory.¹²⁵⁷

In fact, this is precisely one of the major points in Dölpopa’s original presentation of self-emptiness and other-emptiness that was often overlooked by later proponents of other-emptiness as well as their opponents. Despite the claims of his opponents, Dölpopa’s use of this distinction is epistemological in nature and not ontological or reifying. In his main work, *A Mountain Dharma, The Ocean of Definitive Meaning*,¹²⁵⁸ he himself makes a clear distinction between a “philosophical system” (Skt. *siddhānta*, Tib. *grub mtha*) based on certain explanations and arguments and a “point of view” in the sense of an outlook (Skt. *darśana*, Tib. *lta ba*). For him, the latter is understood in the broad sense of including what is directly experienced in meditative equipoise. This is what he calls “Great Madhyamaka” and “other-emptiness,” the outlook of noble beings who see how things really are. As such, it is clearly contrasted with Madhyamaka as a mere philosophical system. Thus, on these two levels, the entire perspective of mind and, consequently, the way of discourse are quite different.

For whatever reasons, many later proponents of other-emptiness and their opponents do not follow this epistemological distinction and often speak of both self-emptiness and other-emptiness as philosophical systems. Dölpopa himself never spoke about proponents of self-emptiness as opposed to proponents of other-emptiness. Rather, he sees self-emptiness as a philosophical system that he accepts himself as far as it goes, which is to say, by definition not applying to the level of direct meditative insight. Thus, a major part of the later controversy is due to the confusion as to whether the Rangtong-Shentong contrast pertains to the level of philosophical systems or the level of the direct insight in meditative equipoise. For Dölpopa, it clearly was the contrast between a philosophical system on the one hand and a direct vision of true reality on the other.

To sum up, it seems that the Rangtong-Shentong issue is only a problem if self-emptiness and other-emptiness are regarded as mutually exclusive on the same level of realization and discourse.

In the end, the whole controversy is highly dualistic in itself, since what is talked about—emptiness or ultimate reality—is in fact neither self-empty nor other-empty anyway. As the Eighth Karmapa Mikyö Dorje’s commentary on *The Ornament of Clear Realization* says:

This basis—the nature of phenomena—is neither other-empty nor self-empty, because it is not even suitable as a mere emptiness that is not specified as being empty or not empty of itself or something other. The reason for this is that it has the essential character of being the utter peace of all discursiveness of being empty and not being empty. Thus, from the perspective of the [actual] freedom from discursiveness, no characteristics whatsoever of being empty of itself or something other transpire within the basis that is the nature of phenomena.¹²⁵⁹

As for doxographical classifications in general, they may be helpful to gain an overview of the overwhelming amount and diversity of scriptural output of Indian and Tibetan masters. They may also be beneficially employed to refine one's own understanding against the background of ascending levels of analysis as presented in such classifications of hierarchic tenets. However, there is the danger in all broad categorizations, such as the classification of Buddhist teachings as self-empty or other-empty, that they obscure or prevent attempts to look seriously at the more subtle aspects of the issues at hand. In particular, to categorize certain masters as proponents of self-emptiness or other-emptiness may obstruct our view on the often individual and specific presentations of these masters. Moreover, such categorizations do not take into account that many masters comment on scriptures from different systems, such as Yogācāra and Madhyamaka, in quite different ways that accord with the backgrounds of these systems. Also, since the teaching styles of individual masters are usually adapted to the capacities and needs of individual disciples, they may teach very different things in different situations. After all, the teachings of the Buddha are always meant to be put into practice in order to remove mental afflictions and suffering, and not primarily as a philosophical system to be established in one way or another. Usually, in Buddhism, philosophical considerations come in response to practical and soteriological issues. In this sense, the question of the actual or ultimate view of a certain master is moot. The most obvious example is the Buddha himself, who gave an extremely wide range of teachings to many different beings in many different situations. Obviously, he cannot be categorized as being a proponent of Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, self-emptiness, other-emptiness, or anything else. As Kapstein rightly says:

I would suggest, therefore, that . . . doxographic labels such as *gzhan stong pa* and *rang stong pa* are best avoided, except of course where they are used within the tradition itself. Our primary task must be to document and interpret precise concepts and arguments, and in many cases the recourse to overly broad characterizations seems only to muddy the waters.¹²⁶⁰

Huntington agrees:

In working to develop a critical intellectual history of early Indian Mahāyāna, then, the focus of our attention must shift from “tenets” and “schools” . . . to individual authors and their own original words.¹²⁶¹

As for the soteriological efficacy of the Buddhist teachings, no matter which labels may be attached to them, what counts in the end is whether their practical application leads to freedom from ignorance, afflictions, and suffering. As Maitreya's *Sublime Continuum* says, this is the criterion for genuine dharma, no matter who teaches it.

The words that are endowed with welfare, are connected to the dharma,
Relinquish the afflictions of the three realms,
And teach the benefit of peace
Are the words of the Great Seer.¹²⁶² Their opposite is something else.

Whatever is explained by someone with an undistracted mind,
Inspired solely by the teachings of the Victor,
And in accordance with the path of attaining liberation
Is to be placed on your head just like the words of the Great Seer.¹²⁶³

❧ *The Single Final Intention of the Two Philosophical Systems of the Great Vehicle*

The Treasury of Knowledge confirms the universal acceptance in the great vehicle that the two great system founders Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga were prophesied by the Buddha and that both dwell on the levels of the noble bodhisattvas. In the sky of the Sage's teachings, they resemble the sun and the moon, and there are no other ornaments more supreme than these two great scriptural traditions. In their intention, there is no difference in terms of superior or inferior. Therefore, to realize the ways of the individual scriptural systems of these two system founders without intermingling them is to realize that their final intention constitutes a single meaning. Should this appear differently to some people, the reason lies only in their own limited understanding. By slavishly echoing minor texts of ordinary paṇḍitas who are like the dim light of stars and planets, such people only ripen trifling results. By following such an approach, they merely cultivate more discursiveness in terms of negations and proofs through many fictitious scriptures and reasonings. This only develops and fortifies biased clinging.