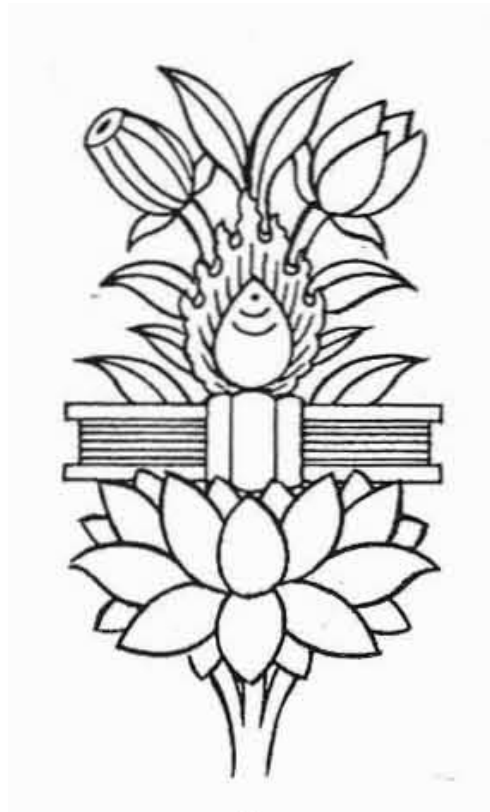


ABHISAMAYALAMKARA
THE ORNAMENT OF HIGHER REALIZATION
BY MAITREYA
~
AN INTRODUCTION



SOURCE BOOK

RIME SHEDRA NYC SMCNY ADVANCED BUDDHIST STUDIES

CHANTS

ASPIRATION

In order that all sentient beings may attain Buddhahood,
From my heart I take refuge in the three jewels.

This was composed by Mipham. Translated by the Nalanda Translation Committee

MANJUSHRI SUPPLICATION

Whatever the virtues of the many fields of knowledge
All are steps on the path of omniscience.
May these arise in the clear mirror of intellect.
O Manjushri, please accomplish this.

This was specially composed by Mangala (Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche). Translated by the Nalanda Translation Committee

DEDICATION OF MERIT

By this merit may all obtain omniscience
May it defeat the enemy, wrong doing.
From the stormy waves of birth, old age, sickness and death,
From the ocean of samsara, may I free all beings

By the confidence of the golden sun of the great east
May the lotus garden of the Rigden's wisdom bloom,
May the dark ignorance of sentient beings be dispelled.
May all beings enjoy profound, brilliant glory.

Translated by the Nalanda Translation Committee

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THE ABHISAMAYALAMKARA

THE ORNAMENT OF HIGHER REALIZATION BY MAITREYA

AN INTRODUCTION

Who Knows What, Where, When, and How

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THE ABHISAMALAMKARA

THE ORNAMENT OF HIGHER REALIZATION: AN INTRODUCTION

Who Knows What, Where, When, and How

Syllabus

Sources:

- The Ornament of Clear Realization: A Commentary on the Prajnaparamita of the Maitreya Buddha, Thrangu Rinpoche, Trs. by Ken and Katia Holmes and Cornelia Weishaar-Gunter
- Abhisamayalamkara - Ornament of Higher Realization: An Introduction, A Rime Shedra Sourcebook

Readings:

1) Class One: Introduction to the AA

- a) Talk Two, Commentary on The Perfection of Supreme Knowledge: Chapters Two and Three, by The Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche, pp. 5-12
- b) Abhisamayalankara, from Wikipedia, pp. 1-14

2) Class Two : Overview of the Eight Topics & Seventy Points of the AA

- a) Homage and Overview, from the *Abhisamayalamkara*
- b) Contextual and Doctrinal Presumptions, *Stairway to Nirvana*, by James Apple, pp. 47-55
- c) *A Commentary*, by Thrangu Rinpoche:
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3) Class Three: Topic One - The Knowledge of all Phenomena

- a) Chapter One from the *Abhisamayalamkara*, verses I.17-38
- b) *A Commentary*, by Thrangu Rinpoche:
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 - ii) Practice Instructions, pp. 27-32
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- c) Relevant Sections from:
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 - ii) The Abhisamayalamkara and Its Contents, *Gone Beyond*, Volume One
- d) The Three Cycles of the Buddha's Teaching, *Gone Beyond, Volume One*, pp. 23-28

4) Class Four: Topic One - The Knowledge of all Phenomena (Cont'd)

- a) Chapter One from the *Abhisamayalamkara*, verses I.19-I.73
- b) *A Commentary*, by Thrangu Rinpoche:
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- c) Relevant Sections from:
 - i) Chapter Summaries of the *Ornament for Clear Realization*, FPMT Masters Courses
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- 5) Class Five: Topic Two - Knowledge of the Path**
- a) Chapter Two from the Abhisamayalamkara
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 - ii) The Bodhisattva Path of Insight, pp. 66-71
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 - ii) The Abhisamayalamkara and Its Contents, Gone Beyond, Volume One
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- a) Chapter Three from the Abhisamayalamkara
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 - ii) The Abhisamayalamkara and Its Contents, Gone Beyond, Volume One
 - d) The Prajnaparamita Sutras and Their Contents, Gone Beyond, Volume One, pp. 34-37
- 7) Class Seven: Topic Four - The Application of Realization of All Aspects**
- a) Chapter Four from the Abhisamayalamkara
 - b) *A Commentary*, by Thrangu Rinpoche:
 - i) The Application of Realization of All Aspects, pp. 95-108
 - ii) The Path of Junction, pp. 109-116
 - c) Relevant Sections from:
 - i) Chapter Summaries of the *Ornament for Clear Realization*, FPMT Masters Courses
 - ii) The Abhisamayalamkara and Its Contents, Gone Beyond, Volume One
 - d) Paths and Bhumis, Gone Beyond, Volume One, pp. 37-41
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 - c) Relevant Sections from:
 - i) Chapter Summaries of the *Ornament for Clear Realization*, FPMT Masters Courses

- ii) The Abhisamayalamkara and Its Contents, Gone Beyond, Volume One
- d) The Abhisamayalamkara in Its Traditional Setting, Gone Beyond, Volume One, pp. 93-106

9) Class Nine: Topic Six - Gradual Application of the Stages of the Bodhisattva Path

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- b) *A Commentary*, by Thrangu Rinpoche:
 - i) Gradual Application of the Bodhisattva Path, pp. 129-132
- c) Relevant Sections from:
 - i) Chapter Summaries of the Ornament for Clear Realization, FPMT Masters Courses
 - ii) The Abhisamayalamkara and Its Contents, Gone Beyond, Volume One
- d) Is there any Practical Relevance to the Abhisamayalamkara, Gone Beyond, Volume One, pp. 111-117

10) Class Ten: Topic Seven - Instantaneous Application

- a) Chapter Seven from the Abhisamayalamkara
- b) *A Commentary*, by Thrangu Rinpoche:
 - i) The Instantaneous Practitioners, pp. 133-135
- c) Relevant Sections from:
 - i) Chapter Summaries of the Ornament for Clear Realization, FPMT Masters Courses
 - ii) The Abhisamayalamkara and Its Contents, Gone Beyond, Volume One
- d) The Abhisamayalamkara as a Contemplative Manual, Gone Beyond, Volume One, pp. 119-127

11) Class Eleven: Topic Eight: The Dharmakaya

- a) Chapters Eight and Nine from the Abhisamayalamkara
- b) *A Commentary*, by Thrangu Rinpoche:
 - i) The Three Kayas, pp. 137-148
- c) Relevant Sections from:
 - i) Chapter Summaries of the Ornament for Clear Realization, FPMT Masters Courses
 - ii) The Abhisamayalamkara and Its Contents, Gone Beyond, Volume One
- d) The Mahayana Path of the Bodhisattva in the Ornament for Clear Realization, by James Apple, pp. 166-178

Outline of the Abhisamayalamkara by Maitreya

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- a) Seeing to Meditation
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- c) Verses VI.1

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RESULT 4



Path of Seeing

- | | | |
|---|---|----------------------------|
|  | = | uninterrupted path |
|  | = | liberated path |
|  | = | mundane path of meditation |
|  | = | supramundane path |

4 Results

- 1) Abandon 3 thorough entanglements
- 2) Abandon most of 5 partial concordances with the lower
- 3) Abandon all of 5 partial concordances with the lower
- 4) Abandon 5 partial concordances with the upper

OUTLINE OF THE ABHISAMAYALANKARA

I. The Object

A. Chapter One: The Knowledge of All Aspects – Ten Points

1. The Mind Generation
2. The Instruction
3. The Branches of Definite Differentiation
4. The Potential
5. The Observed Objects
6. The Dedication
7. The Armor-like Accomplishment
8. The Engagements of Accomplishment
9. The Accumulation of Accomplishment
10. Definite Emergence

B. Chapter Two: The Knowledge of the Path – Eleven Points

1. The Support for the arising of the knowledge of the path
2. The knowledge of the path of sravakas
3. The knowledge of the path of pratyekabuddhas
4. The knowledge of the mahayana path of seeing
5. What the Path of Development Does
6. Resolute Faith
7. Praise, Eulogy and Glorification
8. Turning Over
9. Rejoicing
10. Glorification of the Marks of Consummation
11. Absolute Purity

a) Where do these Go:

- (1) Mahayana Contaminated Path of Meditation: Eclipsed by light
- (2) Mahayana Contaminated Path of Meditation: Definite object
- (3) Mahayana Contaminated Path of Meditation: Inclusion
- (4) Mahayana Contaminated Path of Meditation: Nature
- (5) Mahayana Contaminated Path of Meditation: Activity
- (6) Mahayana Uncontaminated Path of Meditation
- (7) Mahayana Uncontaminated Path of Meditation

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1. The knowledge of the bases which does not abide in existence, samsara
2. The knowledge of the bases which does not abide in peace, nirvana
3. The knowledge of the bases that is distant to the result
4. The knowledge of the bases that is close to the result

5. The knowledge of the bases in terms of discordant factors
6. The knowledge of the bases that is the remedy
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3. The paramita of Patience
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6. The paramita of Wisdom
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8. The recollection of the dharma
9. The recollection of the sangha
10. The recollection of the right conduct
11. The recollection of giving
12. The recollection of the divine state

13. The true nature of phenomena

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2. With regard to all dharmas without outflows which have reached the state where their karmic result has matured
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A Detailed Outline of the Abhisamayalamkara

The Ornament of Clear Realization:

A Commentary on the Prajnaparamita of the Maitreya Buddha

By Thrangu Rinpoche

Oral Translation by Ken and Katia Holmes

Final Translation by Dr. Cornelia Weishaar-Gunter

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 - (3) The very best attitude (bsam pa phun sum tshogs pa)
 - (4) Nonconceptual Samadhi (rnam par mi rtog pa'i ting nge tdzin)
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 - iv) Equality in doing no harm (rnam par 'tshe ba med pa'i mnyam pa)
 - v) Equality in no harm speech (tshig rtsub mi smra ba'i mnyam pa)
 - vi) Regarding beings as fathers and mothers (pha dang ma'i sems)
 - vii) Regarding beings as brothers and sisters (spun dang srin mo'i sems)
 - viii) Regarding beings as sons and daughters (bu dang bu mo'i sems)
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Definitions of the 8 Categories

	Definiendum	Definition (<i>Seventy Topics</i>)	Boundary		Topics
1	Exalted knower of aspects	A fully developed exalted wisdom directly realizing the ten topics, mind generation and so forth.	Only on the buddha ground	10	1) Mind Generation 2) Precepts 3) Four branches of definite discrimination 4) Naturally abiding lineage, the basis of mahayana achieving 5) Observed objects 6) Object of intent 7) Achieving through armor 8) Achieving through engagement 9) Achieving through the collections 10) Definitely issuing achieving
2	Knower of paths	A mahayana superior's clear realization conjoined with the wisdom directly realizing emptiness within the continuum of the person who possesses it.	Mahayana path of seeing through the buddha ground	11	1) Limbs of knower of paths 2) Knower of paths that knows hearer paths 3) Knower of paths that knows solitary realizer paths 4) Mahayana path of seeing 5) Function of mahayana path of meditation 6) Mahayana path of meditation of appreciation 7) Beneficial quality of a mahayana path of meditation 8) Path of meditation of dedication 9) Path of meditation of admiration 10) Path of meditation of achieving 11) Completely pure path of meditation
3	Knower of bases	An exalted wisdom conjoined with the wisdom directly realizing selflessness within the continuum of the person who possesses it and abiding within a lesser vehicle class of realizations.	Exists in the continuum of all superiors	9	1) Knower of paths not abiding in cyclic existence through knowing 2) Knower of paths not abiding in the solitary peace through compassion 3) Knower of bases that is distant from an effect mother 4) Knower of bases that is close to an effect mother 5) Knower of bases that is classed as discordant 6) Knower of bases that is classed as antidote 7) Training of a knower of bases 8) Equality of a training of a knower of bases 9) Mahayana path of seeing
4	Complete training in the aspects	A bodhisattva's yoga that is conjoined with the wisdom meditating a compendium of the aspects of the 3 exalted knowers.	Mahayana path of accumulation through the end of the continuum (of the sentient being)	11	1) Knower of the aspects that is classed as an antidote 2) Training 3) Qualities of training 4) Faults of training 5) Characteristics of training 6) Aid to liberation 7) Aid to definite discrimination 8) Irreversible aspirants to virtue 9) Equality of cyclic existence and solitary peace 10) Training of a pure land 11) Training in skillful means
5	Peak training	A bodhisattva's yoga that is conjoined with the wisdom which is highly transformed from the Mahayana path of accumulation and that meditates a compendium of the aspects of the 3 exalted knowers.	Heat level of mahayana path of preparation through the end of the continuum (of the sentient being)	8	1) Peak training of heat 2) Peak training of peak 3) Peak training of forbearance 4) Peak training of highest mundane dharma 5) Peak training of a path of seeing 6) Peak training of a path of meditation 7) Uninterrupted peak training 8) Perverse achieving

6	Serial training	A bodhisattva's yoga that is conjoined with the wisdom which meditates serially on the aspects of the 3 exalted knowers for the sake of attaining steadiness with respect to the aspects of the 3 exalted knowers.	Mahayana path of accumulation up to just prior to the end of the continuum (of the sentient being)	13	1-6) 6 perfections 7-12) 6 recollections (buddha, dharma, sangha, ethics, generosity, and gods) 13) Entitledness of phenomena
7	Momentary training	A bodhisattva's final yoga that has attained steadiness with respect to the aspects of the 3 exalted knowers.	Exists only at the end of the continuum of a sentient being.	4	1) Non-fully ripened momentary training 2) Fully ripened momentary training 3) Momentary training without characteristics 4) Non-dual momentary training
8	Resultant truth body	The final result that is attained by the power of meditating on the aspects of the 3 exalted knowers which is the method for its own attainment.	Only on the buddha ground	4	1) Nature body 2) Wisdom truth body 3) Complete enjoyment body 4) Emanation body

CATEGORY 1: Exalted knower of aspects (10 Topics)

	Topic Definiendum	Definition (Seventy topics)	Boundary	Divisions
1	Mind generation	A special main mental knower particularly distinguished by abiding in the type of a path that serves as the door of entry to the mahayana, and arises concomitant with the accompanying aspiration observing complete enlightenment for the welfare of others.	Mahayana small path of accumulation through the buddha ground	1) Wishing & 2) Practical <u>22 Divisions</u> 1) Earth, 2) Gold, 3) New moon, 4) Fire, 5) Treasure, 6) Jewel mine, 7) Ocean, 8) Vajra, 9) King of mountains, 10) Medicine, 11) Spiritual guide, 12) Wish-granting jewel, 13) Sun, 14) Pleasant song of dharma, 15) King, 16) Treasury, 17) Highway, 18) Mount, 19) Spring, 20) Pleasant Sound, 21) River, 22) Clouds
2	Precept	Mahayana speech that teaches a method for attaining the objects of striving of a mahayana mind generation.	From before the mahayana path of accumulation through the buddha ground	<u>10 Divisions</u> Precepts on: 1) Achieving, 2) The 4 truths, 3) The three jewels, 4) Non-clinging, 5) Tireless, 6) Thoroughly maintaining the path, 7) Five eyes, 8) Six excellent qualities of clairvoyance, 9) Path of seeing, 10) Path of meditation
3	Four branches of definite discrimination	A mahayana mundane path that is concordant with a clear realization of truth and abides in class of clear realizers that arise subsequent to the completion of the partial concordance with liberation.	Path of preparation only	<u>4 Divisions:</u> 1) Heat 2) Peak 3) Forbearance 4) Supreme mundane quality
4	Naturally abiding lineage, the basis of mahayana achieving	The common locus of that which is the very reality within the continuum of a bodhisattva and that which serves as the actual basis of mahayana achieving.	Heat level (of the path of preparation) through the end of the continuum of a sentient being	<u>13 Divisions</u> (1-4) 4 levels of path of preparation, 5) Path of seeing, 6) Path of meditation, 7) Achieving of antidotes, 8) Achieving of abandonments, 9) Achieving of the thorough attainment of those, 10) Achieving of wisdom together with compassion, 11) Achieving of an uncommon learner, 12) Achieving which gradually enacts the welfare of others, and 13) Achieving which effortlessly engages wisdom
5	Observed objects	A basis of elimination of superimpositions by a mahayana practice. (Syn: object of knowledge)	It extends to all established bases.	<u>11 Divisions</u> 1) Virtue, 2) Non-virtue, 3) Unspecified, 4) 5 mundane aggregates, 5) 4 supermundane concentrations, 6) 5 contaminated appropriated aggregates, 7) 4 uncontaminated close establishments of mindfulness, 8) 3 conditioned realms, 9) Unconditioned suchness, 10) 4 common concentrations, 11) 10 exclusive powers of a subduer.

6	Object of intent	The final result, the intended object for which (a bodhisattva) engages (in practice)	Exists only on the buddha ground.	<u>3 Divisions</u> 1) Great heroic mind, 2) Great abandonment, 3) Great realization
7	Achieving through armor	A bodhisattva's yoga that is conjoined with the thought of extensive deeds desiring to practice inclusively the complete six perfections such as generosity within each of the six perfections.	From the mahayana path of accumulation through the end of the continuum (of the sentient being)	<u>36 Armor-like Achievements</u> 1-6) Generosity, 7-12) Ethics, 13-18) Tolerance, 19-24) Effort, 25-30) Concentration, 31-36) Wisdom
8	Achieving through engagement	A bodhisattva's yoga that practices a training in any of the doctrines of mahayana cause and effect mainly through joyous effort.	From the heat level of the mahayana path of preparation through the end of the continuum (of the sentient being)	<u>9 Divisions</u> 1) In the concentrations and formless (absorptions), 2) In the 6 perfections such as generosity, 3) In the superior paths of seeing, meditation, and no more learning, 4) In the four immeasurables such as love, 5) In possessing a non-observable object, 6) In the pure aspects of the 3 spheres, 7) In the objects of intent
9	Achieving through collections	A bodhisattva's yoga that issues forth great enlightenment as its result and surpasses the middling level of supreme mundane quality of the mahayana path of preparation by way of being conjoined with the vast two collections.	From the great level of supreme mundane quality of the mahayana path of preparation through the end of the continuum.	<u>17 Divisions</u> 1) Great compassion, 2) Generosity, 3) Ethics, 4) Tolerance, 5) Joyous effort, 6) Concentration, 7) Wisdom, 8) Calm abiding, 9) Special insight, 10) Path of union, 11) Skill in means, 12) Exalted wisdom, 13) Merit, 14) Paths, 15) Retentions, 16) Grounds, and 17) Antidotes
10	Definitely issuing achieving	A yoga of the pure grounds that definitely issues forth without doubt the exalted knower of aspects.	It exists on the three pure grounds	<u>8 Divisions</u> 1) Objects of intent, 2) Equality, 3) Welfare of sentient beings, 4) Effortless spontaneity, 5) Passed beyond the extremes of permanence and annihilation, 6) Attaining the aims of the 3 vehicles, 7) The very exalted knower of all aspects, and 8) That which possesses the object of the path.

CATEGORY 2: Knower of Paths (11 Topics)

	Topic Definiendum	Definition ("Seventy topics")	Boundary	Divisions
1	Limbs of knower of paths	A special quality conjoined with great compassion that is included in either the cause, entity, or result of a knower of paths.	From the activation of mahayana lineage through the buddha ground.	<u>5 Divisions</u> 1) A limb of a knower of paths that is separated from the obstacle of arrogance, 2) The activation of the mahayana lineage, the original cause, 3) Generation of a mind towards enlightenment, a necessary condition, 4) The nature of knower of paths, and 5) The function of knower of paths.
2	Knower of paths that knows hearer paths	A mahayana superior's exalted knower that, in a manner of being conjoined with mind generation, dedication and the wisdom realizing emptiness, is included in a class of clear realizations of what is to be known in order to lead trainees possessing a hearer's lineage.	Mahayana path of seeing through the buddha ground	<u>2 Divisions</u> 1) A knower of paths that knows hearer paths in the continuum of a bodhisattva superior, 2) A knower of paths that knows hearer paths in the continuum of a buddha superior.
3	Knower of paths that knows solitary realizer paths	A mahayana superior's exalted knower that, in a manner of being conjoined with the three attributes, is included in a class of clear realizations of what is to be known in order to lead trainees possessing a solitary realizer's lineage.	Mahayana path of seeing through the buddha ground.	<u>2 Divisions</u> 1) A knower of paths that knows solitary realizer paths in the continuum of a bodhisattva superior 2) A knower of paths that knows solitary realizer paths in the continuum of a buddha superior.
4	The mahayana path of seeing	A mahayana clear realization of truth conjoined with the wisdom directly realizing emptiness in the continuum of the person who possesses it.	Only on the mahayana path of seeing	<u>3 Divisions</u> 1) The exalted wisdom of meditative equipoise of the mahayana path of seeing, 2) The exalted wisdom of subsequent attainment of the mahayana path of seeing, 3) The mahayana path of seeing that is neither of these two.
5	The function of the mahayana path of meditation	The beneficial qualities attained through the force of cultivating a mahayana path of meditation that is the method for their attainment.	The 2nd moment of cultivating the mahayana path of meditation through the buddha ground.	<u>6 Divisions</u> Function of the mahayana path of meditation - 1) Which brings the mind under control 2) Respects all beings 3) Is victory in the battle against afflictions 4) Is never dominated by the harm of suffering 5) Which possesses the ability to achieve enlightenment 6) Which transforms the place where a (practitioner of) the path of meditation resides into an object of worship.
6	Mahayana path of meditation of belief	A mahayana subsequent clear realizer convinced that the mothers are the source of the three aims.	The 1st ground through the end of the continuum	<u>3 Divisions when basically divided:</u> 1) Mahayana path of meditation of belief of one's own aims, 2) Mahayana path of meditation of belief of both aims, 3) Mahayana path of meditation of belief of others' aims. When divided by way of branches there are <u>nine</u> ; when divided by way of secondary branches there are <u>27</u> .
7	Benefits of the path of meditation of belief	An excellent quality that is attained through the force of cultivating the path of meditation of belief which is the means for its attainment.	The 2nd moment of cultivating the path of meditation through the buddha ground.	<u>27 divisions</u> - 9 praises - 9 venerationes - 9 laudations
8	Path of meditation of dedication	A mahayana subsequent clear realizer that is conceptual, apprehending a meaning and sound (generality) as suitable to be associated, that transforms either one's own or others' roots of virtue into a factor of complete en-	The 1st ground through the end of the continuum.	<u>12 Divisions:</u> 1) Possessing special dedication, 2) Possessing the aspect of non-observation, 3) Possessing the characteristic of non-perversity, 4) Devoid, 5) Recollection of the nature of the merits of buddhas, 6) Possessing skillful means, 7)

		lightenment.		Signless, 8) Rejoiced in by the buddhas, 9) Not included in the three realms, 10) Small dedication, 11) Middling dedication, 12) Great dedication.
9	The path of meditation of admiration	A mahayana subsequent clear realizer that is conceptual, apprehending a meaning and sound (generality) as suitable to be associated, that cultivates joy in either one's own or others' roots of virtue.	The 1st ground through the end of the continuum	<u>2 Divisions</u> 1) A path of meditation of admiration that cultivates joy in one's own roots of virtue 2) A path of meditation of admiration that cultivates joy in others' roots of virtue.
10	Path of meditation of achieving	An uncontaminated mahayana subsequent clear realizer that establishes the imprint of the final realization which is its attainment.	The 1st ground through the 10th ground	<u>5 Divisions</u> The path of meditation of achieving - 1) Distinguished by entity, 2) Distinguished by supreme result, 3) Distinguished by function, 4) Distinguished by temporal excellent qualities, 5) Great aim - the final excellent qualities and results.
11	The completely pure path of meditation	An uncontaminated mahayana subsequent clear realizer that establishes the imprint of the final abandonment which is its attainment.	The 1st ground through the 10th ground	<u>9 Divisions</u> The nine grounds of the completely pure path of meditation that directly realize emptiness.

CATEGORY 3: Knower of Bases (9 Topics)

	Topic Definiendum	Definition ("Seventy topics")	Boundaries	Divisions
1	Knower of paths that does not abide in cyclic existence through knowledge	A mahayana superior's exalted knower included in a type of realizer that ceases the extreme of cyclic existence in reliance upon a conventional base. <i>(Mutually inclusive with a knower of paths that knows hearer paths).</i>	Mahayana path of seeing through the buddha ground	<u>3 Divisions</u> 1) Mahayana path of seeing 2) Mahayana path of meditation 3) Mahayana path of no-more-learning that are included in a type of hearer's realizer.
2	Knower of paths that does not abide in peace through compassion	A mahayana superior's exalted knower included in a type of realizer that ceases the extreme of peace in reliance upon a conventional base. <i>(Mutually inclusive with mahayana superior's exalted knower that is included in a type of realizer of special method).</i>	Mahayana path of seeing through the buddha ground	<u>3 Divisions</u> 1) Mahayana path of seeing 2) Mahayana path of meditation 3) Mahayana path of no-more-learning that are included in a type of mahayana realizer.
3	Knower of bases that is distant from the effect mother	A knower of bases that is devoid of great compassion and bound by the conception of true existence. <i>(Mutually inclusive with knower of bases that is of the discordant class)</i>	Hinayana path of seeing through the hinayana path of no more learning	
4	Knower of bases that is close to the effect mother	An exalted knower in the continuum of a mahayana superior included in a type of hinayana realizer and is conjoined with great compassion and the wisdom directly realizing emptiness. <i>(Mutually inclusive with knower of bases that is of the antidote class)</i>	Mahayana path of seeing through the buddha ground	
5	Knower of bases that is of the discordant class	A knower of bases devoid of special method and wisdom. <i>(Mutually inclusive with a knower of bases that is bound by the conception of true existence in the continuum of a hinayana superior)</i>	Hinayana path of seeing through the hinayana path of no more learning.	
6	Knower of bases that is of the antidote class	An exalted wisdom in the continuum of a mahayana superior included in a class of hinayana realizers and is conjoined with special method and wisdom. <i>(Mutually inclusive with knower of bases in the continuum of a mahayana superior)</i>	Mahayana path of seeing through the buddha ground	
7	Trainings of knower of bases	A bodhisattva's yoga that cultivates an antidote to either the perverse conceptions about the entity and attributes of the mode of subsistence of conventional bases or the perverse conceptions about the entity and attributes of the mode of subsistence of the ultimate.	Mahayana path of accumulation through the end of the continuum (of the sentient being)	<u>10 Divisions</u> <i>See back</i>
8	Equality (of) training of a knower of bases	A bodhisattva's yoga conjoined with the wisdom which stops the conception of true (existence) with regard to the divisions of bases, definitions, definienda, objects, and subjects.	Mahayana path of accumulation through the end of the continuum (of the sentient being)	<u>4 Divisions:</u> Equality of training in non-attachment to true (existence) with regard to: 1) the entity of form and so forth 2) definitions and definienda of those, 3) divisions of that, and 4) objects and subjects of that

9	Mahayana path of seeing	A mahayana clear realization of the truth which directly realizes freedom from elaboration as explicitly explained in this context.	Mahayana path of seeing only	16 moments of knowledge and forbearance of the mahayana path of seeing which are explained in this context.
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CATEGORY 3: Knower of Bases

7	Trainings of knower of bases	A bodhisattva's yoga that cultivates an antidote to either the perverse conceptions about the entity and attributes of the mode of subsistence of conventional bases or the perverse conceptions about the entity and attributes of the mode of subsistence of the ultimate.	Mahayana path of accumulation through the end of the continuum (of the sentient being)	<p><u>10 Divisions</u></p> <p><u>By way of object:</u></p> <p><i>Conventional</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Training that stops the conception of true (existence) with respect to the bases of the attributes, form and so forth; 2) Training that stops the conception of true (existence) with respect to the attributes, impermanence and so forth; 3) Training that stops the conception of true (existence) with respect to the completion or non-completion of bases of excellent qualities; <p><i>Ultimate</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4) Training that stops the application of the conception of true (existence) by means of abiding in the very non-attachment to true (existence). <p><u>By way of entity:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5) Training of unchangeability which stops the conception of true (existence) with respect to the three: actions, agents, and results of actions; 6) Training that stops the conception of true (existence) with respect to the non-existence of agents as ultimate; 7) Training that stops the conception of true (existence) with respect to the three: difficult objects of intention, trainings difficult to undertake, and actions difficult to do. <p><u>By way of activity:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8) Training that stops the conception of true (existence) with respect to the existence of attained fruits which are results according to one's fortune; 9) Training that stops the conception of true (existence) with respect to non-reliance upon other. <p><u>By way of simile:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10) Training that stops the conception of true (existence) with respect to the seven types of appearances that are known by way of similes.
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CATEGORY 4: Complete Training in Aspects (11 Topics)

	Topic Definiendum	Definition ("Seventy topics")	Boundaries	Divisions
1	Subjective aspects of the antidote class that are explained in this context	An exalted knower that is able to overcome its own discordant class.	1) Exists in the continuum of all superiors 2) Exists in the continuum of mahayana superiors 3) Exists only in the continuum of buddha superiors	<u>3 Divisions</u> 1) subjective aspects of knower of bases (27) 2) subjective aspects of knower of paths (36) 3) subjective aspects of exalted knower of aspects (110) a) 37 aspects similar to those of hearers b) 34 aspects similar to those of bodhisattvas c) 39 aspects that are uncommon
2	Principal trainings explicitly taught in this context	A bodhisattva's yoga that is conjoined with the wisdom of a union of calm abiding and special insight observing emptiness which is explicitly taught in this context.	Mahayana path of preparation through the end of the continuum	<u>19 Divisions</u> trainingÑ <u>Entity of the trainings</u> 1) that does not abide on form and so forth, 2) that stops abiding, 3) of profundity, 4) of the difficult to fathom, 5) of the immeasurable, <u>Divisions by way of the person who is the support</u> 6) of (one who) attains prophesy, 7) of (one who) is irreversible, 8) of definite emergence, 9) without interruption, 10) near to enlightenment, 11) of (one who) will quickly become a buddha, 12) of others welfare, <u>Divisions by way of the means of completing the training</u> 13) of realizing that increase and decrease do not ultimately exist, 14) in not seeing dharma and non-dharma as ultimate, 15) of not seeing inconceivable forms and so forth, 16) of not conceiving aspects as truly (existent) with respect to the entity of definitions and definien-da of form and so forth, <u>Posited by way of result</u> 17) of issuing forth the precious fruits, 18) of complete purity, and <u>Posited by way of time</u> 19) of boundaries.
3	Excellent qualities of training	A benefit attained through the power of having cultivated a mahayana training which is the means of attaining it.	Mahayana path of accumulation through the buddha ground.	<u>14 Divisions</u> quality ofÑ 1) overcoming the strength of <i>maras</i> through the power of having cultivating a training, 2) a buddha's insight and knowledge, 3) a buddha making (themselves) manifest, 4) nearing complete enlightenment, 5) great fruitions and so forth regarding great meaningfulness, great fruit, and great benefit,

				6) making use of areas, 7) fulfilling all non-contaminated qualities, 8) being a person who propounds, 9) indivisibility by adversaries, 10) generating uncommon roots of virtue, 11) accomplishing aims exactly as promised, 12) thoroughly holding great, vast fruits, 13) accomplishing the welfare of sentient beings, and 14) definitely attaining the mother.
4	Faults of training	<i>Mara's</i> actions that are an interference to either the production, abidance, or completion of a training.	From prior to entering a path through the 7th ground.	<u>46 Divisions</u> -20 adverse conditions of training based on oneself, -23 incomplete conducive conditions based on either oneself or others, and -3 adverse conditions based on others.
5	Characteristics of training	A bodhisattva's yoga conjoined with a union of calm abiding and special insight that is the means for attaining a resultant perfection of wisdom, its object of attainment.	Mahayana path of accumulation through the end of the continuum	<u>4 Divisions</u> 1) knowledge characteristics (48) 2) differentiating characteristics (16) 3) functional characteristics (11) 4) entity characteristics (16)

	Topic Definiendum	Definition ("Seventy topics")	Boundaries	Divisions
6	Mahayana partial concordance with liberation	A clear realizer of dharma in the continuum of a bodhisattva skilled in achieving an exalted knower of aspects in his own continuum.	Only on the mahayana path of accumulation	<u>3 Divisions</u> 1) small, 2) middling, and 3) great partial concordances with liberation explicitly taught in this context.
7	Mahayana partial concordance with definite discrimination	A clear realizer of the mahayana meaning explicitly taught in this context which is mainly qualified by method.	Mahayana path of preparation	<u>4 Divisions</u> 4 levels of the mahayana path of preparation taught here
8	Bodhisattva sangha who has attained the sign of irreversibility	A bodhisattva who has attained any of the 44 signs such as having turned away from strong settling on true (existence) with regard to form and so forth.	Mahayana heat level of path of preparation through the end of the continuum	<u>3 Divisions</u> 1) sangha on the path of preparation who has attained a sign of irreversibility 2) sangha on the path of seeing who has attained a sign of irreversibility, and 3) sangha on the path of meditation who has attained a sign of irreversibility.
9	Training of the equality of mundane existence and peace	A yoga of the pure grounds which completely quells the chance of the manifest generation of the conception of true (existence) in states of subsequent attainment by way of being conjoined with the wisdom that directly realizes the emptiness of true (existence) of mundane existence and peace.	Three pure grounds.	<u>3 Divisions</u> the exalted wisdoms of the three pure grounds which directly realize emptiness.
10	Training of a pure land	A yoga of the pure grounds which is a powerful potency in one's continuum, being a root of virtue of prayer and so forth that establishes the special land where one will become a buddha.	Three pure grounds	<u>3 Divisions</u> the exalted wisdoms of the three pure grounds which directly realize emptiness.

11	Training in skillful means	A yoga of the pure grounds that spontaneously accomplishes enlightened activities by way of the quiescence of coarse exertion.	Three pure grounds	<p><u>10 Divisions</u> training in skillful means</p> <p>1) that is victorious over the four <i>maras</i>, 2) that abides nominally and does not abide ultimately, 3) that enacts the welfare of others impelled by the force of previous prayers, 4) that is uncommon (with hearers and solitary realizers), 5) that is without a nature of (attachment to) true (existence) with respect to all phenomena, 6) that does not observe true (existence) 7) that is without the sign (of true existence) 8) that is wishless, 9) through the sign of irreversibility, and 10) that is immeasurable.</p>
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CATEGORY 5: Peak training (8 Topics)

Peak training: a bodhisattva's yoga that is conjoined with the wisdom which is highly transformed from the mahayana path of accumulation and that meditates a compendium of the three exalted knowers. (updated translation from *70 topics*).

	Topic Definiendum	Definition ("Seventy topics")	Boundaries	Divisions
1	Peak training of heat	The first mahayana partial concordance with definite discrimination which has attained any of the twelve signs of attaining peak training.	Heat of the mahayana path of preparation	<u>3 Divisions</u> small, middling, and great peak training of heat.
2	Peak training of peak	The second mahayana partial concordance with definite discrimination which has attained increases in types of merit such as (merit) exceeding worshipping buddhas equal (in number) to the sentient beings of the three thousand (worlds).	Peak of the mahayana path of preparation	<u>3 Divisions</u> small, middling, and great training of peak.
3	Peak training of tolerance	The third mahayana partial concordance with definite discrimination which has attained firmness of wisdom that is a complete similitude of the three exalted knowers and indivisibility from the welfare of others.	Tolerance of the mahayana path of preparation	<u>3 Divisions</u> small, middling, and great training of tolerance.
4	Peak training of supreme mundane quality	The fourth mahayana partial concordance with definite discrimination which has attained thorough stability of mind with respect to limitless meditative stabilizations, factors that ripen the capacity to generate the mahayana path of seeing, which is its own result.	Supreme mundane quality of the mahayana path of preparation	<u>3 Divisions</u> small, middling, and great training of tolerance.
5	Peak training of the path of seeing	A clear realizer of mahayana truth abiding in a type of direct antidote to the seeds of the conceptions that are (path of) seeing abandonments	Mahayana path of seeing	<u>2 Divisions</u> 1. exalted wisdom of meditative equipoise 2. exalted wisdom of subsequent attainment of the mahayana path of seeing
6	Peak training of the path of meditation	A mahayana subsequent clear realizer abiding in a type of direct antidote to the seeds of the conceptions that are (path of) meditation abandonments.	(Mahayana) path of meditation	<u>9 Divisions</u> small of the small and so forth
7	Non-interrupted peak training	A bodhisattva's final yoga that is conjoined with a wisdom heightened in dependence on the mahayana path of accumulation that meditates a compendium of the aspects of the three exalted knowers and acts to directly produce an exalted knower of aspects which is its own result.	At the end of the continuum of the sentient being	
8	Perverse achievings to be eliminated (indicated here)	Comprised of any type of seed or manifest conceptions regarding the unsuitability of the two truths to be contained in a single entity and indicated here.	From before entering a path through the seventh ground.	<u>16 Divisions</u> . perverse conceptions regarding - 1. acceptable observed objects 2. definitely apprehended entity of observed objects 3. exalted wisdom that knows all aspects 4. the two truths 5. trainings 6. the three jewels -

				<p>Buddha 7. Dharma 8. Sangha 9. skillful means 10. clear realizations of a muni 11. the perverse 12. paths 13. the discordant class 14. antidotes 15. characteristics of phenomena 16. meditation.</p>
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CATEGORY 6: Serial application (13 Topics)

Serial application: a bodhisattva's yoga conjoined with the wisdom which cultivates serially the aspects of the three exalted knowers for the sake of attaining steadiness with respect to the aspects of the three exalted knowers. ("70 topics").

	Topic Definiendum	Boundaries
1	Perfection of generosity	From the mahayana path of accumulation up to (but not including) the end of the continuum
2	Perfection of ethics	From the mahayana path of accumulation up to (but not including) the end of the continuum
3	Perfection of tolerance	From the mahayana path of accumulation up to (but not including) the end of the continuum
4	Perfection of joyous effort	From the mahayana path of accumulation up to (but not including) the end of the continuum
5	Perfection of meditative stabilization	From the mahayana path of accumulation up to (but not including) the end of the continuum
6	Perfection of wisdom	From the mahayana path of accumulation up to (but not including) the end of the continuum
7	Recollection of the Buddha	From the mahayana path of accumulation up to (but not including) the end of the continuum
8	Recollection of the Dharma	From the mahayana path of accumulation up to (but not including) the end of the continuum
9	Recollection of the Sangha	From the mahayana path of accumulation up to (but not including) the end of the continuum
10	Recollection of ethics	From the mahayana path of accumulation up to (but not including) the end of the continuum
11	Recollection of giving	From the mahayana path of accumulation up to (but not including) the end of the continuum
12	Recollection of gods	From the mahayana path of accumulation up to (but not including) the end of the continuum
13	Entity of non-true existence	From the mahayana path of accumulation up to (but not including) the end of the continuum

CATEGORY 7: Momentary application (4 Topics)

Momentary application: a bodhisattva's final yoga that has attained steadiness with respect to the aspects of the three knowers. ("70 topics").

	Topic Definiendum	Definition ("Seventy topics")	Boundaries
1	Non-fully matured momentary application	A bodhisattva's yoga that is a direct antidote to the knowledge obstructions in a manner of being conjoined with the wisdom that, when one uncontaminated non-fully ripened quality is actualized, those similar in type are also actualized in the shortest moment in which an action is completed.	Only at the end of the continuum of the sentient being
2	Fully matured momentary application	A bodhisattva's yoga that is a direct antidote to the knowledge obstructions in a manner of being conjoined with the wisdom that, when one uncontaminated fully ripened quality is actualized, those similar in type are also actualized in the shortest moment in which an action is completed.	Only at the end of the continuum of the sentient being
3	Momentary application without characteristics	A bodhisattva's yoga that is a direct antidote to the knowledge obstructions in a manner of being conjoined with the wisdom directly realizing emptiness.	Only at the end of the continuum of the sentient being

4	Non-dual momentary application	A bodhisattva's yoga that is a direct antidote to the knowledge obstructions in a manner of being conjoined with the wisdom directly realizing the apprehended and apprehender as empty of being different substances.	Only at the end of the continuum of the sentient being
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CATEGORY 8: Resultant truth body (4 Topics)

Resultant truth body: the final result attained by the force of cultivating the aspects of the three exalted knowers which is the means of attaining it. ("70 topics").

	Topic Definiendum	Definition ("Seventy topics")	Boundaries	Divisions
1	Nature body	A final sphere possessing the two purities	Only on the buddha ground	1. nature body that is a factor of intrinsic purity 2. nature body that is a factor of adventitious purity
2	Wisdom truth body	An exalted knower that is final insight regarding modes and varieties.	Only on the buddha ground	21 uncontaminated exalted wisdoms (see chart entitled "21 Sets of Exalted Wisdom")
3	Enjoyment body	A final form body possessing the five certainties. (1. certainty of abode - abiding in Highest Pure Land 2. certainty of body - complete set of signs and marks 3. certainty of retinue - only bodhisattva superiors 4. certainty of doctrine - teaching only mahayana doctrine 5. certainty of time - remaining as long as cyclic existence exists)	Only on the buddha ground	
4	Emanation body	A final form body distinguished by not possessing the five certainties.	Only on the buddha ground	1. artisan emanation body 2. creation emanation body 3. supreme emanation body

GONE BEYOND

The Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras,
The Ornament of Clear Realization,
and Its Commentaries in the Tibetan Kagyü Tradition

VOLUME TWO

Translated and introduced by
Karl Brunnhölzl

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Appendix VIII: The Abhisamayālaṃkāra

Abhisamayālaṃkāranāmaprajñāpāramitopadeśaśāstra

The Treatise on the Pith Instructions on Prajñāpāramitā, Called The Ornament of Clear Realization

She is the one who, through the all-knowledge, guides the śrāvakas who
search for peace to utter peace.

She is the one who, through the knowledge of the path, makes those who
promote the benefit of beings accomplish the welfare of the world.

Being united with her, the sages proclaim this variety endowed with all
aspects.

I pay homage to this mother of the Buddha with his assemblies of śrāvakas
and bodhisattvas.

So that the path of the knowledge of all aspects
That is explained here by the teacher,
Though not experienced by others,
Will be seen by the intelligent, [I.1]

And that, having committed to memory the meaning of the sūtras,
Which has the character of the ten dharma practices,
They may realize them in an easy way
Is the purpose of this undertaking. [I.2]

Prajñāpāramitā is proclaimed
By way of the eight topics.
The knowledge of all aspects, the knowledge of the path,
Then the all-knowledge, [I.3]

The full realization of all aspects,
The attainment of culmination, the serial one,
The full realization in a single instant,
And the dharmakāya—these are the eight. [I.4]

Generating bodhicitta, the instructions,
The four branches of penetration,
The foundation of practice,
Whose nature is the dharmadhātu, [I.5]

The focal object, the aim,
The activities of [donning] the armor and engaging,
The equipments, and final deliverance
Represent the knowledge of all aspects of the sage. [I.6]

Eclipsing and so on,
The paths of disciples and rhinos,
The path of seeing, which is of great benefit
By virtue of the qualities in this [life] and others, [I.7]

As well as function, aspiration,
Praise, eulogy, and laudation,
Dedication and rejoicing
(Both unsurpassable mental engagements), [I.8]

Accomplishment, and utter purity
(The path of familiarization)
Describe the knowledge of the path
Of skillful bodhisattvas. [I.9]

Not dwelling in existence through prajñā,
Not dwelling in peace through compassion,
Being distant due to lacking the means,
Not being distant due to the means, [I.10]

Antagonistic and remedial factors,
Training, its equality,
And the paths of seeing of śrāvakas and so on
Are asserted as the all-knowledge. [I.11]

Aspects, trainings,
Their qualities, flaws, and characteristics,
The factors conducive to liberation and penetration,
The assembly of irreversible learners, [I.12]

The equality of existence and peace,
And unsurpassably pure lands
Make up the full realization of all aspects,
Which includes skill in means. [I.13]

Its sign, increase,
Stability, continuous abiding of the mind,
The four conceptions'
Four kinds of remedy [I.14]

On the paths called “seeing”
And “familiarization,” respectively,
The uninterrupted samādhi,
And mistaken notions [I.15]

Represent the culminating clear realization.
The serial [training] is thirteenfold.
The full realization in a single instant
Is fourfold by way of characteristics. [I.16]

As svābhāvika[kāya], sambhoga[kāya],
And also as nairmāṇika[kāya], which is other,
The dharmakāya, together with its activity,
Is proclaimed to be fourfold. [I.17]

The knowledge of all aspects

The generation of bodhicitta is, for the welfare of others,
The desire for completely perfect enlightenment.
Briefly and in detail, this and that
Are expressed according to the sūtras. [I.18]

Earth, gold, moon, fire,
Treasure, jewel mine, ocean,
Vajra, mountain, medicine, friend,
Wish-fulfilling gem, sun, song, [I.19]

King, treasure-vault, highway,
Vehicle, fountain,
Pleasant melody, river, and cloud—
Through [being like] these, it is twenty-twofold. [I.20]

Practice, the realities,
The three jewels (such as the Buddha),
Nonclinging, being completely untiring,
Fully embracing the path, [I.21]

The five visions,
The six qualities of supernatural knowledge,
The path of seeing and the one called “familiarization”—
The instructions on these should be known as tenfold. [I.22]

Those of duller and sharper faculties,
 Those who attain through confidence and seeing, those from family to
 family,
 Those with a single interval, in the intermediate [state], after being born,
 With effort, without effort, who progress to Akaniṣṭha, [I.23]

Three leapers, those who progress to the highest peak of existence,
 Those who overcame attachment to form,
 [Attain] peace amidst visible phenomena, are a bodily witness,
 And the rhinos—these are twenty. [I.24]

By virtue of focal objects, aspects,
 Causes, and being mentored,
 Based on being associated
 With the four conceptions in due order, [I.25]

Compared to śrāvakas and rhinolike ones,
 A protecting bodhisattva's
 Lesser, medium, and great degrees
 Of heat and so on are more distinguished. [I.26]

The focal objects are impermanence and so on,
 Which are the substrates of the realities.
 Their aspects are to refrain from clinging and so on,
 The cause for attaining all three yānas. [I.27]

[The further ones] are the rising and falling of form and so on,
 Nonabiding, abiding, imputations, and being inexpressible.
 Not abiding in form and so on
 Is their lack of nature by virtue of being such. [I.28]

These two having a common nature,
 There is no abiding in their being impermanent and such.
 Their being empty of being that
 Is their common nature. [I.29]

There is no grasping at phenomena.
 Not seeing the characteristics of these,
 Prajñā investigates
 In terms of all being unobservable. [I.30]

Form and so on are without nature,
 Their nature being their nonbeing.
 They are without arising and without final deliverance,
 Are purity, and without characteristics. [I.31]

Not dwelling on their characteristics,
There is no aspiration and no discrimination.
Samādhi, its function,
Prophecy, termination of conceit, [I.32]

The common nature of the three,
And the nonconceptuality of samādhi—
These are the lesser, medium, and great degrees
Of the factors conducive to penetration. [I.33]

The conceptions about the apprehended are twofold
In terms of entities and their remedies,
Each of which is subdivided into nine
Based on ignorance, skandhas, and so on. [I.34]

Likewise, those about the apprehender are asserted as twofold,
Based on substance and imputation
In terms of the nature of an independent self and so on,
And what is based on the skandhas and so on. [I.35]

The mind not being intimidated and such,
Those who teach the lack of nature and so on,
And abandoning the antagonistic factors of these
Means being mentored in every way. [I.36]

The foundation for the six dharmas of realization,
Both remedy and relinquishment,
The complete consumption of these,
Prajñā with compassion, [I.37]

What is not in common with the disciples,
The progression of the welfare of others,
And the effortless operation of wisdom
Are called “the disposition.” [I.38]

Because the dharmadhātu is indivisible,
Divisions of the disposition are not tenable.
But by virtue of the divisions of the phenomena founded on it,
Its divisions are expressed. [I.39]

The focal object is all phenomena.
They are virtuous and so on,
Those called mundane realizations,
Those asserted to be supramundane, [I.40]

Contaminated and uncontaminated phenomena,
Those that are conditioned and unconditioned,

Phenomena in common with the disciples,
And the uncommon ones of the sage. [I.41]

This aim of the self-arisen ones,
By virtue of the three greatneses, should be known as threefold—
The mind of the highest state of all sentient beings,
Relinquishment, and realization. [I.42]

Armorlike practice is explained accordingly
Through six sets of six
By combining each one
Of the six, such as generosity. [I.43]

Dhyānas and formless states, generosity and such,
Path, love and so forth,
Not having anything as a focal object,
Purity of the three spheres, [I.44]

Aim, the six supernatural knowledges,
And the principle of the knowledge of all aspects—
One should know that the practice of engagement refers to these,
Which means mounting the mahāyāna. [I.45]

Loving-kindness, the six such as generosity,
Calm abiding with superior insight,
The path of union,
Skill in means, [I.46]

Wisdom, merit,
The path, dhāraṇī, the ten bhūmis,
And the remedies—these should be known
As the progression of the practice of the equipments. [I.47]

Through tenfold purification
The first bhūmi is attained.
Intention, beneficial things,
An equal mind toward sentient beings, [I.48]

Giving away, serving friends,
Searching for the genuine dharma as focal object,
A constant mindset of leaving,
Longing for the buddhakāya, [I.49]

Teaching the dharma, and true speech,
Which is asserted to be the tenth.
Through not observing any nature
These are to be understood as purifications. [I.50]

Ethics, gratitude, patience,
Utter joy, great compassion,
Respectful service, listening to the guru with reverence,
And the eighth, vigor for generosity and such. [I.51]

Insatiable desire to study,
Giving the dharma without expecting any reward,
Purification of the buddha realm,
Not being weary of saṃsāra, [I.52]

And shame and embarrassment
Represent the fivefold lack of conceit.
Dwelling in forests, having little desire, being content,
Resorting to strict abstinence, [I.53]

Not abandoning the training,
Despising sense pleasures,
Turning away, renouncing all there is,
Being uncowed, and disregard. [I.54]

Intimacy, jealousy in terms of families,
Places that invite crowds,
Praising oneself, disparaging others,
The ten paths of nonvirtuous actions, [I.55]

Conceit and arrogance, mistakenness,
Deficient states of mind, and tolerance for afflictions—
If these ten are relinquished,
The fifth bhūmi is attained. [I.56]

Through generosity, ethics, patience, vigor,
Dhyāna, and prajñā being perfected,
The mind of longing for the disciples and the rhinos
And being afraid are relinquished, [I.57]

One is uncowed by beggars,
Not sad even when one has given away everything,
And not rejecting beggars even when poor.
Through these the sixth bhūmi is attained. [I.58]

Clinging to a self, sentient being,
Soul, person, extinction, and permanence;
With regard to characteristics, causes, skandhas,
Dhātus, āyatanas, [I.59]

And the three realms, dwelling on,
Being attached to, and one's mind being cowed by them;

Clinging to views about the three jewels
And ethics as being such, [I.60]

Disputing emptiness,
And opposing it—
Those in whom these twenty flaws are removed
Attain the seventh bhūmi. [I.61]

Knowing the three doors to liberation,
Being pure of the three spheres,
Compassion, no conceit,
Knowing the equality of phenomena and the single principle, [I.62]

Knowing nonarising and poised readiness,
The single flow of dharmas,
Overcoming conceptions,
Relinquishing discriminations, views, and afflictions, [I.63]

Familiarizing with calm abiding,
Being skilled in superior insight,
A tamed mind, wisdom
Unobstructed in all respects, [I.64]

Not being a ground for attachment,
Going all at once to other realms as one pleases,
And displaying one's own being everywhere—
These are the twenty. [I.65]

Knowing the minds of all sentient beings,
Playing with supernatural knowledges,
Manifesting a superb buddha realm,
Tending to the buddhas in scrutiny, [I.66]

Knowing the faculties, purifying
The realm of a victor, dwelling in illusionlikeness,
And assuming existence at will—
These are said to be the eight activities. [I.67]

Infinite aspiration prayers,
Knowing the languages of gods and so on,
Streamlike eloquent presence,
Supreme descent into a womb, [I.68]

Excellency of family, descent, lineage,
Retinue, birth,
Renunciation, bodhi trees,
And perfection of qualities. [I.69]

Having passed beyond nine levels,
 This dwelling on the buddhabhūmi
 By virtue of wisdom should be known
 As the tenth bodhisattvabhūmi. [I.70]

One should know the eight kinds of remedies
 On the paths of seeing and repeated exercise
 In order to pacify the eight conceptions
 About the apprehended and the apprehender. [I.71]

Final deliverance in terms of the aim, equality,
 The welfare of sentient beings, effortlessness,
 And being beyond extremes,
 Final deliverance characterized by attainment, [I.72]

Final deliverance in terms of the knowledge of all aspects,
 And the one that has the path as its sphere.
 One should know that the practice of final deliverance
 Consists of these eight kinds. [I.73]

This is the first chapter, on the knowledge of all aspects, in *The Treatise on the Pith Instructions on Prajñāpāramitā, Called The Ornament of Clear Realization*.

The knowledge of the path

Eclipsing the gods through light
 So as to make them suitable,
 Definite object, pervasiveness,
 Nature, and its activity. [II.1]

Within the scope of the knowledge of the path,
 Through not observing the aspects
 Of the four realities of the noble ones
 This path of the śrāvakas is to be understood. [II.2]

Since form and so on are empty,
 By virtue of their emptinesses being undifferentiable
 This represents heat. Through not observing them
 This is asserted as having gone to the peak. [II.3]

The poised readinesses [arise] through preventing
 Any abiding in them by way of being permanent and so on.
 Starting with the ten bhūmis,
 Through the detailed teachings on nonabiding [II.4]

The supreme dharma is explained
On the path of the noble śrāvakas.
For what reason is that? Because the Buddha,
Upon realization, did not see any phenomena. [II.5]

They do not need instructions by others
Since they realize the self-arisen by themselves.
This expresses the profundity
Of the wisdom of the rhinos. [II.6]

In certain ones who wish to hear
Certain topics in certain ways,
Even without words, these very topics
Will appear in them accordingly. [II.7]

Through the conceptions about apprehended referents being relinquished,
Through the apprehender not being relinquished,
And through the foundation, the path of the rhinos
Should be understood to be encompassed. [II.8]

The aspect of pointing out that imputations
Do not contradict the nature of phenomena
Represents heat. Peak is distinguished by
Form and so on being without decrease and so on. [II.9]

Since form and so on are not apprehended
By virtue of the emptiness of the internal and so on,
This is poised readiness. The supreme dharma consists
Of the aspects of form and so on being without arising and so on. [II.10]

Through four moments of readiness and cognition
For each one of the realities,
The path of seeing and its benefit
Are explained within the knowledge of the path. [II.11]

Suchness and buddhahood
Not being accepted as synonyms
Because of their not existing as mutual support and supported,
Greatness, no valid cognition, [II.12]

No measure, no extremes,
Ascertaining the form and such
Of one who dwells in it to be buddhahood,
Nothing to be adopted or to be discarded and so on, [II.13]

Love and so on, emptiness,
Attaining buddhahood,

Laying hold of all that is purified,
Eliminating all fears and diseases, [II.14]

The grasping at nirvāṇa being at peace,
Being protected and so on by the buddhas,
Beginning with not killing sentient beings,
Oneself abiding in the principle of the knowledge of all aspects [II.15]

And establishing sentient beings [in it],
As well as dedicating generosity and such
For perfect enlightenment
Are the moments of the knowledge of the path. [II.16]

Being disciplined in every respect, bowing down
In all respects, victory over the afflictions,
Being invulnerable to attacks,
Enlightenment, and the foundation for worship. [II.17]

Aspiration is to be understood as threefold
In terms of one's own welfare, the welfare of oneself and others,
And the welfare of others, each one of them
Being regarded as threefold— [II.18]

Lesser, medium, and great.
Dividing these into the lesser of the lesser and so on
Makes them threefold too.
Thus, it is asserted as twenty-sevenfold. [II.19]

Praise, eulogy, and laudation
On the levels of aspiration
For prajñāpāramitā
Are considered through a triad of nines. [II.20]

As for special dedication,
Its function is supreme.
It has the aspect of nonreferentiality
And the characteristic of unmistakanness. [II.21]

It is free, the sphere of mindfulness about the nature
Of the abundance of merit of the buddhas,
Endowed with means, without characteristics,
Entails rejoicing by the buddhas, [II.22]

And is not included in the three realms.
The three other aspects of dedication
Lie in its character of producing great merit
To lesser, medium, and great degrees. [II.23]

Through both means and nonobservation,
One rejoices in roots of virtue.
The mental engagement in rejoicing
Is stated here to be familiarization. [II.24]

Its nature, supremacy,
Nonformation of anything,
Procuring without observing
Phenomena, and the great goal. [II.25]

Attending to the buddhas, generosity and such,
As well as skill in means
Are the causes for aspiration in this case.
The causes for being destitute of the dharma are [II.26]

Being under the power of māras,
Not aspiring for the profound nature of dharmas,
Clinging to the skandhas and so on,
And being seized by bad friends. [II.27]

The purity of the fruition is nothing but
The purity of form and such since these two
Are not different and are indivisible.
It is in this sense that purity is proclaimed. [II.28]

The purities of disciples, rhinos, and the children of the victors
Are due to their having relinquished
Afflictive, cognitive, and [the obscurations] of the three paths,
But the Buddha's [purity] is utterly so in all aspects. [II.29]

Purity is the path that consists
Of the lesser of the lesser remedies and so on
For the greater of the great degrees of the stains and so on
On the nine levels. [II.30]

Through removing qualms about this,
It is asserted that the path's
Equality of what verifies and what is to be verified
Is the remedy for the three realms. [II.31]

This is the second chapter, on the knowledge of the path, in *The Treatise on the Pith Instructions on Prajñāpāramitā, Called The Ornament of Clear Realization*.

The knowledge of entities

Not abiding on the near or the far shore,
Nor in between these two,
By virtue of understanding the times as equality,
She is asserted as prajñāpāramitā. [III.1]

Through lack of means she is distant
Because characteristics are observed.
Through skill in means
Her proper closeness is proclaimed. [III.2]

The antagonistic factors are discriminating notions about engaging
In the skandhas (such as form) being emptiness,
The phenomena included in the three times,
And the factors of enlightenment (such as generosity). [III.3]

No clinging to “me” with regard to generosity and such
And enjoining others to this
Stop the extreme of attachment.
Thus, attachment to the victors and so on is subtle. [III.4]

Since the path of dharma is free by nature,
This is its profundity.
The knowledge of phenomena being of a single nature
Is the relinquishment of attachment. [III.5]

By virtue of rejecting what is seen and such,
She is said to be difficult to realize.
Since she is not known as form and such,
She is asserted to be inconceivable. [III.6]

Thus, within the scope of the all-knowledge,
This entire division of
Antagonistic factors and remedies
Should be known as it was explained. [III.7]

The trainings that stop engaging in
Form and so on, their impermanence and so on,
Their being incomplete or complete,
And detachment from them, [III.8]

The trainings in terms of no change, no agent,
The three kinds of what is hard to do,
Wishing for fruitfulness,
Since fruitions are attained according to destiny, [III.9]

Being independent of others,
And what makes seven kinds of appearance understood.
The fourfold lack of conceit about form and such
Is asserted to be its equality. [III.10]

Within the scope of the all-knowledge, the path of seeing
Has the character of momentary readiesses and cognitions,
[Such as] dharma cognition and subsequent cognition,
With regard to the realities of suffering and so on. [III.11]

Form being neither permanent nor impermanent,
Beyond extremes, pure,
Neither arising nor ceasing and so on,
Like space, without contagion, [III.12]

Free from grasping,
Inexpressible through a nature of its own,
With its meaning thus being impossible
To convey to others through expressions, [III.13]

Not serving as a focal object,
Being utterly pure, no diseases arising,
The unpleasant realms being extinct,
Nonconceptuality with regard to manifesting the fruition, [III.14]

No connection with characteristics,
And no arising of any consciousness
With regard to both entities and names—
These are the moments of the all-knowledge. [III.15]

The three [knowledges] are this one,
Then this one, and next this one.
This announces the conclusion
Of these three topics. [III.16]

This is the third chapter, on the all-knowledge, in *The Treatise on the Pith Instructions on Prajñāpāramitā, Called The Ornament of Clear Realization*.

The complete training in all aspects

The specific instances of cognizing entities
Represent the defining characteristic of “aspects.”
By virtue of the three kinds of omniscience,
They are asserted as three kinds. [IV.1]

Beginning with the aspect of nonexistence
Up through the aspect of immovability,
Four for each one of the realities
And fifteen of them for the path are taught. [IV.2]

In terms of the cause, the path, suffering,
And cessation, in due order,
They are said to be eight, seven,
Five, and sixteen. [IV.3]

Starting with the foundations of mindfulness
And ending with the aspects of buddhahood,
In approximate concordance with the reality of the path,
And distinguished through the threefold omniscience [IV.4]

Of disciples, bodhisattvas,
And buddhas, in due order,
They are asserted as thirty-seven,
Thirty-four, and thirty-nine. [IV.5]

Those who lived up to their duties toward the buddhas,
Planted roots of virtue in relation to them,
And are protected by spiritual friends
Are the vessels for listening to her. [IV.6]

Since they attended to the buddhas, asked them,
And engaged in generosity, ethics, and so on,
These genuine beings are held to be the vessels
For taking her up, retaining her, and so on. [IV.7]

Because of not abiding in form and so on,
Because of having stopped involvement in them,
Because of their suchness being profound,
Because of their being difficult to fathom, [IV.8]

Because of their being immeasurable,
Because of realization being slow and full of hardships,
Because of the prophecy, irreversibility,
Final deliverance, no obstructions, [IV.9]

Being close to enlightenment, swift,
The welfare of others, without increase and decrease,
Not seeing dharma or nondharma and so on,
Not seeing the inconceivability of form and so on, [IV.10]

Because of not conceiving the characteristics
Or the being of form and such,

Bestowing precious fruitions,
Purity, and a set period of time. [IV.11]

The qualities are fourteenfold,
Such as vanquishing the power of māras.
The flaws are to be known
As four sets of ten plus six. [IV.12]

What defines should be known
As the defining characteristic, which is threefold
(Knowledge, distinctiveness, and activity),
And what is defined is the nature. [IV.13]

The Tathāgata appearing,
The world having the character of not being perishable,
The conduct of the minds of sentient beings,
Their being concentrated and moving outside, [IV.14]

The aspect of inexhaustibility,
Being endowed with attachment and so on, vast,
Great, immeasurable,
Consciousness being indemonstrable, [IV.15]

Mind being invisible,
Consciousnesses being discerned as coming forth and so on,
Knowing these as aspects
Of suchness, and furthermore [IV.16]

The sage realizing suchness
And communicating it to others—
These make up the defining characteristic of knowledge
In the context of the all-knowledge. [IV.17]

Emptiness, signlessness,
Relinquishment of desires,
No arising, no ceasing, and so on,
The nature of phenomena being unperturbed, [IV.18]

Nonformation, nonconceptualization,
Distinction, and nonexistence of defining characteristics—
These are asserted as the defining characteristic of knowledge
In the context of the knowledge of the path. [IV.19]

Abiding through relying
On one's own dharma, to be honored,
To be respected, to be pleased,
To be worshipped, lacking an agent, [IV.20]

Being the knowledge that engages everywhere,
 Showing what is invisible,
 The world's aspect of emptiness,
 The one who indicates, makes known, makes visible, [IV.21]

And shows inconceivability and peace,
 As well as the cessation of the world and discriminations—
 These are said to be the defining characteristic of knowledge
 In terms of the principle of the knowledge of all aspects. [IV.22]

The defining characteristic of distinctiveness
 Is explained by way of the sixteen moments
 That have the realities as their sphere and are distinguished
 Through the distinctive features of inconceivability and so on. [IV.23]

Being inconceivable, being incomparable,
 Transcending all measure and calculation,
 Incorporating all noble ones, being what the wise know,
 The knowledge not in common, [IV.24]

Swift knowledge, lacking decline and increase,
 Engaging, being completely accomplished,
 Focusing, foundation,
 Completeness, being held, [IV.25]

And lacking any relishing are to be known
 As the sixteen distinctive features
 Through which this special path
 Is distinguished from other paths. [IV.26]

Representing benefit, happiness, protection,
 The refuge and place of rest for humans,
 An aid and an island,
 Acting as the leader, [IV.27]

Being spontaneously present, having the character of not manifesting
 The fruition through the three yānas,
 And, lastly, the activity of being a resource—
 These represent the defining characteristic of activity. [IV.28]

Being devoid of afflictions, signs, characteristics,
 And antagonistic factors and remedies,
 Hard to be done, devoted in an exclusive manner,
 Aim, nonobservation, [IV.29]

Refraining from clinging,
 What is discerned as the focal object,

Being antagonistic, unobstructed,
Without ground, without going and arising, [IV.30]

And not observing suchness—
This sixteenfold nature
Is defined as something like a definiendum,
And thus is held to be the fourth defining characteristic. [IV.31]

Being skilled in the full accomplishment
Of signlessness, generosity, and so on,
Within this complete realization of all aspects,
Are asserted as the factors conducive to liberation. [IV.32]

They are fivefold—the confidence of focusing on the Buddha and so on,
The vigor whose sphere consists of generosity and so on,
The mindfulness of the consummate intention,
Nonconceptual samādhi, [IV.33]

And the prajñā of knowing
Phenomena in all aspects.
It is held that perfect enlightenment is easy to realize
By those who are sharp, and hard to realize by the dull. [IV.34]

The focal object of heat here
Is praised as being all sentient beings.
This is described as ten aspects,
Such as an equal mind towards them. [IV.35]

Through oneself turning away from evil
And abiding in generosity and so on,
One establishes others in these two,
Praises them, and makes them conform, [IV.36]

Which represent reaching the peak. Likewise, poised readiness
Is the knowledge of the realities within oneself and others.
The supreme dharma is likewise to be understood
Through maturing sentient beings and so on. [IV.37]

Starting from the branches of penetration
Up through the paths of seeing and repeated exercise,
The bodhisattvas who dwell on these
Are the irreversible assembly here. [IV.38]

By virtue of speaking of twenty kinds of signs,
Such as turning away from form and so on,
[There are] the characteristics of irreversibility
Of those who dwell on the branches of penetration. [IV.39]

Turning away from form and so on,
Termination of doubt and unfavorable states,
Oneself abiding in virtue
And establishing others in it, [IV.40]

Generosity and so on that are based on others,
No indecisiveness even about profound actuality,
The body being loving and so on,
Not being associated with fivefold obscuration, [IV.41]

Overcoming all latencies,
Mindfulness and alertness,
Clean robes and so on,
The body not being infested with parasites, [IV.42]

Mind being without crookedness, assuming
Abstinence, lacking greed and so on,
Proceeding by being endowed with the nature of phenomena,
Searching for the hells for the welfare of the world, [IV.43]

Others being unable to lead one astray,
Realizing, “This is māra,”
When māra teaches another path,
And the conduct that pleases the buddhas— [IV.44]

By virtue of these twenty signs,
Those who dwell on heat, peak,
Poised readiness, and the supreme dharma
Do not turn away from perfect enlightenment. [IV.45]

The sixteen moments of readiness
And cognition on the path of seeing
Should be known as the characteristics
Of irreversible bodhisattvas. [IV.46]

Turning away from discriminating notions of form and so on,
Firmness of mind, turning away
From both the inferior yānas,
Dissolution of the branches of the dhyānas and so on, [IV.47]

Lightness of body and mind,
Skill in means in using what is desirable,
Constantly pure conduct,
Purity of livelihood, [IV.48]

With regard to the skandhas and so on, obstacles,
The accumulations, the battle

Of the faculties and so on, and greed and so on,
Stopping to dwell on [IV.49]

Connecting and being occupied with them,
Observing not the least phenomenon,
Certainty about one's own bhūmi
And dwelling on the triple bhūmi, [IV.50]

As well as renouncing one's life for the sake of the dharma—
These sixteen moments
Are the signs of irreversibility
Of the intelligent who dwell on the path of seeing. [IV.51]

The path of familiarization is profound
And such profundity is in terms of emptiness and so on.
This profundity is the state of being liberated
From the extremes of superimposition and denial. [IV.52]

The path of familiarization consists of the repeated
Reflections, verifications, and absorptions
During the branches of penetration,
The path of seeing, and the path of familiarization itself. [IV.53]

Because it is an uninterrupted continuum,
It is treated as ninefold
Through its lesser, medium, and great degrees
Being further divided into lesser and so on. [IV.54]

The descriptions as countless and so on
Do not hold out in terms of the ultimate.
In terms of the seeming, the sage asserted
Them to be the true natural outflows of compassion. [IV.55]

In the inexpressible entity
Decrease and increase are not tenable.
Through the progression called "familiarization,"
What could decrease and what could be obtained? [IV.56]

In the same way as enlightenment
This [path] accomplishes the desired goal.
Enlightenment has the defining characteristic of suchness,
Which is also asserted as the defining characteristic of this. [IV.57]

Enlightenment through an earlier mind
Is not reasonable, nor is it through a later one.
In accordance with the example of an oil lamp,
The eightfold nature of phenomena is profound. [IV.58]

Its profundity lies in arising, ceasing,
Suchness, what is to be cognized,
Cognition, engagement, nonduality,
And skill in means. [IV.59]

Since phenomena are dreamlike,
[Saṃsāric] existence and peace are not conceptualized.
The refutations of the qualms about karma
Not existing and so on are just as explained. [IV.60]

The world of sentient beings is impure,
And so is the world that is the environment.
By virtue of accomplishing the purity of those,
The purity of a buddha realm [appears]. [IV.61]

As for the object and this training,
Overcoming the hordes of enemies,
Not abiding, hitting just as [intended],
Uncommon characteristic, [IV.62]

Not becoming attached, not observing,
Having terminated characteristics and aspiration prayers,
The sign of this, and being unlimited
Represent the tenfold skill in means. [IV.63]

This is the fourth chapter, on the complete realization of all aspects, in *The Treatise on the Pith Instructions on Prajñāpāramitā, Called The Ornament of Clear Realization*.

The culminating training

Even in dreams, all phenomena
Are regarded as dreamlike and so on—
The signs of the training of having reached culmination
Are asserted as twelvefold. [V.1]

By comparing it in many ways,
Such as the virtue of worshipping as many buddhas
As there are beings in Jambudvīpa,
Increase is sixteenfold. [V.2]

The unsurpassable perfection
Of the dharmas of the three omnisciences
And the nonabandonment of the welfare of sentient beings
Are described as “stability.” [V.3]

By using the examples of a four-continent world,
A chiliocosm, a dichiliocosm, and a trichiliocosm,
This samādhi is expressed
Through the abundance of merit. [V.4]

One should know that the two conceptions about the apprehended—
In terms of engagement and withdrawal—
Are ninefold each and that their character
Is [to apprehend] objects not as they are. [V.5]

The two conceptions about substantially and imputedly existent sentient
beings
Are asserted as the ones about the apprehender.
Divided by ordinary beings and noble ones,
Each one of them is ninefold. [V.6]

If apprehended referents do not exist like that,
Can these two be asserted as the apprehenders of anything?
Thus, their characteristic is the emptiness
Of a nature of an apprehender. [V.7]

Nature, disposition,
Perfect accomplishment of the path,
Unmistakenness about the focal object of consciousness,
Antagonistic factors and remedies, [V.8]

One's own realization, agent,
Its activity, and the result of activity—
Being based on the factors of engaging in these,
Conceptions are asserted as ninefold. [V.9]

Realizations being deficient
Due to falling into existence or peace,
Lacking being mentored,
The aspects of the path being incomplete, [V.10]

Progressing by virtue of another condition,
Turning away from the aim,
Being limited, variety,
Being ignorant about abiding and engaging, [V.11]

And subsequent pursuing—
The conceptions about these are ninefold,
Being based on the factors of withdrawal
As they arise in the minds of śrāvakas and so on. [V.12]

The first about the apprehender should be known
 In terms of seizing and discarding,
 Mental engagement,
 Adhering to the three realms, [V.13]

Abiding, clinging,
 Imputing phenomenal entities,
 Attachment, remedy,
 And impairment of proceeding as one wishes. [V.14]

No final deliverance according to the aim,
 Identifying the path as not being the path,
 Ceasing and arising,
 Being conjoined and not being conjoined with entities, [V.15]

Abiding, destroying the disposition,
 The absence of striving and the cause,
 And observing opposing forces
 Are the other conceptions about the apprehender. [V.16]

Pointing out the enlightenment of others,
 Entrusting the cause for this,
 And the cause for its uninterrupted attainment
 With its characteristic of an abundance of merit. [V.17]

The wisdom of the termination and the nonarising
 Of the stains is called “enlightenment,”
 But these two should be understood, in due order,
 By virtue of the lack of termination and the lack of arising. [V.18]

In the nature without cessation,
 Through the path called “seeing,”
 What could be terminated that is born by conception
 And what nonarising could be attained? [V.19]

That phenomena exist and, at the same time,
 The cognitive obscurations of the teacher
 Are terminated—this claim by others
 I consider as amazing. [V.20]

There is nothing to be removed in this
 And not the slightest to be added.
 Actual reality is to be seen as it really is—
 Whoever sees actual reality is liberated. [V.21]

That in which generosity and so on
 Are mutually combined with each other

And which consists of poised readiness
In one single moment is the path of seeing here. [V.22]

Then, after having been absorbed
In the samādhi of the lion's sport,
Dependent origination is examined
In its progressive and reverse orders. [V.23]

After the twofold progressing and returning through
The nine absorptions, including cessation,
The intermittent consciousness belonging to the desire [realm],
Which is not in meditative equipoise, is assumed. [V.24]

Through crossing over one, two,
Three, four, five, six, seven, and eight,
The meditative absorption of crossing in one leap consists of
Proceeding up through cessation in disparate ways. [V.25]

With regard to being concise, detailed, not mentored
Through not being protected by the buddhas,
Lacking the qualities of the three times,
And the threefold excellent path— [V.26]

These first conceptions about the apprehended
Have the aspects of the training as their sphere.
It is asserted that the second ones have the engagements
Of minds and mental factors as their objects. [V.27]

These conceptions about the nonarising of the mind,
Not mentally engaging in the heart of enlightenment,
Mentally engaging in the hīnayāna,
Not mentally engaging in perfect enlightenment, [V.28]

Familiarizing, not familiarizing,
The opposites of these,
And not being in accord with true reality
Should be known as those on the path of familiarization. [V.29]

The first ones about the apprehender are to be known
In terms of having imputed sentient beings as their sphere,
Imputed phenomena, not being empty,
Attachment, and the character of discrimination. [V.30]

They are further proclaimed with regard to
The formation of entities, the three yānas,
The impurity of offerings,
And disordered conduct. [V.31]

Having imputed sentient beings and the cause of these
As their objects, the other nine kinds [of conceptions]
That are associated with the path of familiarization
Are its antagonistic factors by virtue of being overcome through it. [V.32]

In terms of ignorance about the three obscurations
Of the three omnisciences, respectively,
The path of peace, being conjoined with
Or disjoined from suchness and so on, [V.33]

Being unequal, suffering and so on,
The nature of the afflictions,
And nonduality, these conceptions
Are asserted as the last ones. [V.34]

When these pestilences have become extinguished,
It is like breathing freely again after a long time.
All the consummate qualities that accomplish
The happiness of beings in all aspects, [V.35]

Just like rivers [feeding] into the great ocean,
Sustain these mahāsattvas,
Who are embellished with the desired fruition,
From all sides. [V.36]

It is compared to the virtues of having established
The people in a trichiliocosm
In the consummate realizations of disciples and rhinos
And on the flawless [bhūmi] of bodhisattvas. [V.37]

Through such an abundance of merit
This uninterrupted samādhi
Immediately before attaining buddhahood
Is the knowledge of all aspects. [V.38]

The lack of entity is asserted as the focal object of this,
Mindfulness as its dominant factor,
And peacefulness as its aspect. In this regard,
Those who talk a lot dispute [V.39]

About the justification of the focal object,
The identification of the nature of this,
The wisdom of the knowledge of all aspects,
The ultimate and the seeming, [V.40]

The training, the three jewels,
The means, the realization of the sage,

Mistakenness, the path,
Remedies and antagonistic factors, [V.41]

Defining characteristic, and familiarization.
Those people's utterances about these sixteen
Are asserted as the wrong ideas
About the knowledge of all aspects. [V.42]

This is the fifth chapter, on the culminating training, in *The Treatise on the Pith Instructions on Prajñāpāramitā, Called The Ornament of Clear Realization*.

The serial training

By way of generosity up through prajñā,
The recollections of the Buddha and so forth,
And the nature of the lack of entity,
The serial activity is asserted. [VI.1]

This is the sixth chapter, on the serial training, in *The Treatise on the Pith Instructions on Prajñāpāramitā, Called The Ornament of Clear Realization*.

The instantaneous training

By virtue of each one, such as generosity,
Including all that is uncontaminated,
The sage's realization in a single instant
Is to be understood. [VII.1]

Just as a waterwheel driven by a person
Through just a single spot to step on
Turns simultaneously in its entirety,
So does wisdom in a single instant. [VII.2]

When abiding in the state of the true nature
Of all matured spotless phenomena,
At that point, prajñāpāramitā is born—
The wisdom in one single instant. [VII.3]

Through abiding in phenomena being dreamlike
By way of having engaged in generosity and such,
The lack of characteristics of phenomena
Is discovered in one single instant. [VII.4]

With not even a dream and the seeing of it
Being perceived in a dualistic fashion,

The true reality that is the nonduality of phenomena
Is seen in one single instant. [VII.5]

This is the seventh chapter, on the instantaneous training, in *The Treatise on the Pith Instructions on Prajñāpāramitā, Called The Ornament of Clear Realization*.

The dharmakāya

Those who have attained purity in every respect
And the uncontaminated dharmas,
Theirs is the svābhāvikaṃkāya of the sage,
Which bears the characteristic of the nature of these. [VIII.1]

The factors concordant with enlightenment, the immeasurables,
The liberations, the ninefold
Progressive meditative absorptions,
The ten totalities, [VIII.2]

The āyatanas of overpowering,
Divided into eight kinds,
Dispassion, knowledge through aspiration,
The supernatural knowledges, the discriminating awarenesses, [VIII.3]

The four purities in all respects,
The ten masteries, the ten powers,
The four fearlessnesses,
The three ways of nothing to hide, [VIII.4]

The threefold foundation of mindfulness,
The true nature of being without forgetfulness,
The latent tendencies being overcome,
Great compassion for beings, [VIII.5]

The eighteen qualities that are said
To be unique to a sage,
And the knowledge of all aspects—
The dharmakāya is described as these. [VIII.6]

The dispassion of śrāvakas means avoiding
The afflictions of people upon being seen [by them].
The dispassion of the victor refers to extinguishing
The stream of their afflictions in villages and so on. [VIII.7]

The Buddha's knowledge through aspiration
Is held to be effortless, free from attachment,

Unobstructed, remaining forever,
And solving all questions. [VIII.8]

Once the cause has come to maturity,
For whomever and whenever,
It will unfold as beneficial
Activity to them. [VIII.9]

Though the god of rain may send rainfalls,
An unsuitable seed will not grow.
Likewise, though buddhas come forth,
The unsuitable will not come to enjoy any good. [VIII.10]

By virtue of the vastness of activity like that,
Buddhahood is described as “all-pervading.”
By virtue of being inexhaustible,
It is also declared to be “permanent.” [VIII.11]

Since this [kāya] of the sage, whose character lies in
The thirty-two major marks and the eighty minor marks,
Enjoys the mahāyāna,
It is held to be the sām̐bhogikakāya. [VIII.12]

It is marked with wheels on hands and feet, and has tortoiselike feet.
Fingers and toes are joined by webs,
Hands and feet are soft and supple,
The body has seven convex surfaces, [VIII.13]

Long fingers, broad heels, and is tall and straight.
It has nonprotruding ankles, body hairs that point upward,
Antelopelike calves, long and beautiful arms,
And is the supreme of those whose sexual organ is covered by a sheath.
[VIII.14]

The skin has a golden hue and is delicate.
It has well-grown body hairs, each one single by itself and curling to the
right,
The face is adorned with the ūrṇā hair, and the upper body is lionlike.
It has evenly rounded shoulders, with compact flesh in between, [VIII.15]

And even unpleasant tastes appear as the most delicious tastes for it.
Its figure has symmetrical proportions like a nyagrodha [tree],
It has an uṣṇīṣa on the head, a large and beautiful tongue,
A melodious voice like Brahmā, jaws like a lion, [VIII.16]

Very white teeth of equal size, well arranged,
And in a complete set of forty,

Dark-blue eyes, and eyelashes like those of a magnificent heifer.
These are the thirty-two marks. [VIII.17]

As for the causes that accomplish
These respective marks,
Through completing them
These marks will be possessed in full. [VIII.18]

Escorting the gurus and so on,
Firmness with regard to vows,
Relying on the means of attraction,
Providing magnificent things, [VIII.19]

Liberating those to be killed,
Undertaking and increasing virtue,
And so on—these are the causes that accomplish
These marks according to the sūtras. [VIII.20]

The sage's nails are copper-colored,
Glossy, and prominent. His fingers and toes are
Rounded, compact, and tapering.
His veins do not protrude and are free from knots. [VIII.21]

His ankles do not protrude and his feet are equal [in size].
He walks with the stride of a lion, an elephant,
A goose, and a lordly bull, and walks by keeping to the right [side],
Elegantly, and upright. The limbs of his body are well rounded, [VIII.22]

Smooth, slender,
Clean, soft, and pure.
His genitals are fully developed
And his figure is beautiful and stately. [VIII.23]

His steps are even and his eyes
Are pure. His body is beautifully youthful,
Not sunken, with full [flesh],
And very firm. [VIII.24]

His limbs are well proportioned
And his vision is unobscured and pure.
His belly is round, smooth, unmarred,
And slender. His navel is deep [VIII.25]

And winds to the right.
He is beautiful to behold from all sides,
His conduct is clean,
And his body is free from black moles. [VIII.26]

His hands are as soft as cotton wool
 And the lines on his palms are glossy, deep, and extensive.
 His face is not too long
 And his lips are red like a bimba berry. [VIII.27]

His tongue is supple, slender,
 And red. His voice is like thunder,
 Sweet, and gentle. His eyeteeth are round,
 Sharp, white, equal [in size], [VIII.28]

And tapering. His nose is prominent
 And supremely pure.
 His eyes are wide, with well-developed eyelashes,
 And like the petals of a lotus. [VIII.29]

His eyebrows are elongated, smooth,
 And shiny, and their hairs are of equal length.
 His arms are long and muscular, and his ears
 Are equal and completely unimpaired. [VIII.30]

His forehead is well shaped
 And broad, and his head is large.
 His hair is as black as a black bee,
 Thick, smooth, not shaggy, [VIII.31]

Not unruly, and has a fragrant smell
 That captivates the minds of people.
 [His hands and feet show] endless knots and swastikas.
 These are held to be the minor marks of a buddha. [VIII.32]

The perpetual nairmāṇikāya of the sage
 Is the one through which various benefits
 For the world are performed equally
 Until the end of existence. [VIII.33]

Likewise, it is held that its activity
 Is perpetual until the end of saṃsāra.
 The activity of pacifying beings,
 Establishing them in the fourfold means of attraction, [VIII.34]

Realizing afflicted phenomena
 And purified phenomena,
 The true nature of the welfare of sentient beings,
 The six pāramitās, [VIII.35]

The buddha path, emptiness
 Of a nature, the termination of duality,

Symbols, nonobservation,
Maturing living beings, [VIII.36]

The bodhisattva path,
Putting an end to clinging,
Attaining enlightenment, pure
Buddha realms, definitiveness, [VIII.37]

The immeasurable welfare of sentient beings,
The qualities of attending to buddhas and so on,
The branches of enlightenment, actions
Being never lost, seeing reality, [VIII.38]

Relinquishing mistakenness,
The manner of its nonsubstantiality,
Purification, the accumulations,
Conditioned and unconditioned phenomena [VIII.39]

Being understood as nondifferent,
And establishing in nirvāṇa—
The enlightened activity of the dharmakāya
Is held to be twenty-sevenfold. [VIII.40]

This is the eighth chapter, on the dharmakāya, in *The Treatise on the Pith Instructions on Prajñāpāramitā, Called The Ornament of Clear Realization*.

The characteristic, the training in it,
Its highest degrees, its progression,
Its final conclusion, and its maturation—
This is another summary in six points. [IX.1]

The threefold object (the cause),
The fourfold training,
And the fruition (the dharmakāya and enlightened activity)—
This is another summary in three points. [IX.2]

This completes *The Treatise on the Pith Instructions on Prajñāpāramitā, Called The Ornament of Clear Realization*, composed by Lord Maitreyanātha.

Commentary on
**THE PERFECTION OF
SUPREME KNOWLEDGE**

Compiled from Karmapa Mikyö Dorje's commentary on
The Ornament of Clear Realization,
The Noble One's Resting at Ease
by Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

Chapters Two & Three

The Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche

Oral Translation by Karl Brunnnhölzl
Root Text Translation by Karl Brunnnhölzl

TALK TWO

Historical Perspective: The Second Turning of the Wheel of Dharma

The Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche: The historic Buddha Shakyamuni turned the three wheels of dharma twenty-five hundred years ago. The cycle of teachings we are studying belongs to the second turning of the wheel of dharma, which the Buddha Shakyamuni taught at the Vulture Peak Mountain in Rajagriha. That cycle of teachings, the second turning, is known as "the turning of the wheel of dharma called non-characteristics" because the direct teachings of the second turning involve the Mahayana view of shunyata, or emptiness. This topic of discussion shows how all phenomena lack any true existence, or inherent existence, of characteristics. Therefore, it is called "non-characteristics." It is named after the subject matter and cycle of teaching of the *Prajnaparamita*. The longest version that exists has one hundred thousand verses and the shortest version is the *Heart Sutra* that we chant all the time. Shortest of all is the syllable AH. That's my favorite *Prajnaparamita*.

The person who turned the wheel of dharma was the Buddha Shakyamuni, the fourth historic Buddha among one thousand buddhas to come in this fortunate aeon. The place where he turned the wheel of dharma was at Vulture Peak Mountain at Rajagriha, not too far from Nalanda University. The retinue for whom he turned this wheel of dharma was the Mahayana disciples, the great bodhisattvas who possessed two great qualities. One of the qualities was their prajna, their intellect, which was a very sharp faculty, the sharp prajna-like expanse of space. The second quality they possessed was great compassion, which is like the great ocean. For those fortunate disciples of the Mahayana, the Buddha turned this wheel of dharma.

The dharma taught here is the middle, or second, turning of the wheel of dharma, which are the *Prajnaparamita Sutras*.

That is the basis of this treatise that we are trying to study here. It comes from that cycle of teachings. As I said earlier, the longest *Prajnaparamita Sutra* is the *Hundred Thousand Verses*, the middling sutra is the *Twenty-five Thousand Verses*, a shorter version is the *Eight Thousand Verses*, and the shortest version is the *Heart Sutra*. The absolute shortest version is the AH syllable.

Commentaries on the *Prajnaparamita Sutras*

When studying the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*, we rely upon two great commentators, the two great Acharyas, as they are known in the Mahayana tradition. The first commentator is the great master Acharya Nagarjuna, whose commentaries involve interpreting the direct message of the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*, the shunyata teachings. These are the teachings on the lack of characteristics. They are also known as "teachings on selflessness." The teachings on selflessness show the lack of the two-fold self, the lack of the self of the individual and lack of the self of phenomena, thus showing the two types of egolessness. Acharya Nagarjuna's tradition is known as the "Chariot of the Profound View." It is directly connected to the idea of interpreting the profound teachings on shunyata. That interpretation begins with Nagarjuna's writing on the *Madhyamaka* treatises.

As you know, Nagarjuna wrote five or six main *Madhyamaka* texts beginning with the *Mulaprajnamadhyamaka*, or the *Root Verses of the Middle Way*, or the *Prajnanamulamadhyamakakarika*, which is the main text of the five treatises on the Middle Way. It is the root text and the primary commentary on the *Prajnaparamita Sutra* in terms of establishing the view of shunyata through logic and precise reasoning.

Therefore, this tradition is known as the "Profound View tradition." All the masters who followed Nagarjuna's tradition of Madhyamika philosophy are commenting on the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*'s direct word teachings. For example, if you read the *Heart Sutra*, you can see that the direct message is emptiness, or shunyata. "No form, no feeling...form is emptiness, emptiness is form, form is no other than emptiness, emptiness is no other than form...." It is a four-fold shunyata. The direct message is shunyata, and that message, Nagarjuna's view, has been clearly taught in Madhyamika philosophy.

The second commentators we rely upon are the great bodhisattva Maitreya and the great master Asanga. These two great masters founded the second chariot known as the "Chariot of Vast Conduct" or the "Chariot of Extensive Conduct." The tradition of Asanga and Maitreya does not comment on the *Prajnaparamita Sutra's* direct meaning or direct message of shunyata. Their main approach is to reveal the hidden meaning, or hidden topics, of the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*. The hidden meaning or topics of the *Prajnaparamita Sutra* are the paths and bhumis of the bodhisattva's journey, the Mahayana journey.

The details of the bodhisattva path, the bodhisattva bhumis, are taught in the text known as the *Ornament of Clear Realization* by Maitreya-Asanga. That is the main topic we will discuss here, the hidden teachings of the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*. The hidden meaning of the progressive stages of the paths and bhumis. The stages of the paths and bhumis are explained very clearly in this text.

Explanation of the Title

In Sanskrit, the text is titled the *Abhisamayalankara Prajnaparamita Upadeshashshastra*. *Abhisamaya* means "clear realization" or "clearly realizing," and *alankara* means "ornament." The ornament spoken of here is one that clarifies both the words and the meaning. So, it is an ornament that clarifies. This ornament is not only a clarifying ornament; it is also a beautifying ornament. When we put ornaments on our bodies, they beautify our bodies. In the same way, the clear realizations that are taught here beautify the bodies of bodhisattvas.

Prajnaparamita means the "perfection of supreme knowledge" or the "transcendence of supreme knowledge." *Pra* in general means "supreme" or "highest," and the *ja* (or in English-Sanskrit *jna*) syllable means "consciousness." Thus, *prajna* refers to the "supreme mind" or "supreme consciousness" or "supreme awareness." When we explain it in this way, *prajna* is very similar in meaning to *jnana*, or "primordial wisdom." *Paramita* is translated as "perfection" here. In Tibetan, *pharöltu chinpa* (Tib. pha rol tu phyin pa) literally means "to go to the other side." So, we are going to the other side of samsara or going to the other side of dualistic clinging.

To explain this more extensively, the Sanskrit syllable *para* comes from the Sanskrit *param*, which means “other side.” It can also mean “genuine” and “supreme.” *Mita* means “to go” or “to have gone.” There are many meanings of *param* in Sanskrit, but, in the context of the word *paramita*, it was translated into Tibetan as *pharöltu chinpa*, which means “gone to the other side.” That is the chief interpretation. But, we can also say that *paramita* means “to go to a genuine state” or “to proceed to a genuine state” or “to go in a genuine way. *Mita* means “to go” or “to become.” So, we become genuine. “Genuine” refers to genuine reality. Genuine reality is the true nature of things, the great mother Prajnaparamita.

Upadesha in Tibetan means “quintessential instructions” or “oral instructions.” *Shastra* or *tenchö* (Tib. bstan bcos) in Tibetan means “treatise.” “Quintessential instructions” means teaching vast meanings by way of few words. We are not talking about explaining a vast meaning by way of using excessive words. We are keeping the words few, so that they are essential and convey the critical points. Another meaning of the term “quintessential instructions” or *men-ngak* (Tib. man ngag) is that these instructions chiefly teach practice as opposed to explanations. In the context of the stages of the paths and the bhumis, you do need some amount of explanation. But, in this series of teachings, what is emphasized is practice. The teachings here emphasize practice more than they emphasize explanation; therefore, they are called “quintessential instructions.”

So, this is the meaning of the words in the title. From these meanings, we can see how these particular texts relate to the paths and bhumis. They teach how, once on the Mahayana journey of practicing and going through different stages of experiences, one deals with the obscurations of each aspect of path on the bodhisattva bhumis and how one achieves realization.

Overview of Text

The text has eight topics, or chapters. The first topic is called “knowledge of all aspects,” and the second topic is called “knowledge of the path.” The third topic is “all knowledge” or “knowledge of the ground” or “knowledge of the bases.” The fourth topic is “the training of completely perfect realization of all aspects.” The fifth one is called “final culmination,” and the sixth one is “gradualism” or “the application of gradualism.” The

seventh topic is the "application of momentariness" or "actual complete enlightenment in a single moment." The eighth is "dharmakaya." The eighth one is the easy part.

The Eight Topics as the Object, the Method, and the Result

The eight topics are categorized further into three groups: the objects that are the three knowledges, the method that is the four applications, and the result which is dharmakaya. These three categories subsume the eight chapters.

The Object

First, we have the three knowledges, which are the object. There are three knowledges because they represent that which is to be known. The first of these knowledges is the "knowledge of all aspects." This refers to the result, or fruition, of the state of buddhahood. Here, the name of the result is given to the cause.

Chapter One: The Knowledge of all Aspects

The knowledge of all aspects has ten main subheadings, which are the ten qualities that symbolize omniscience. These are the ten qualities that accomplish the state of the knowledge of all aspects, or the state of omniscience. Since these ten qualities are necessary to attain the state of omniscience, they are thus named "knowledge of all aspects." The name of the result is applied to the ten causes.

It is important to know that the fruition of buddhahood, the omniscient wisdom of the Buddha, is to be attained, or accomplished. It is important for one to have the knowledge, or understanding, of the qualities of buddhahood. Knowing the excellent qualities of buddhahood will help one to develop more enthusiasm and aspiration to achieve such a state as buddhahood. It is said to be like a businessperson finding out what kind of business is more profitable. First, you have to find all the qualities needed, then you would like to achieve those qualities, and finally you rely upon the means to achieve such fruition.

Therefore, the first topic discussed here is the knowledge of all aspects, which is the wisdom of the Buddha. It is not discussed as the fruition first. But, in this first chapter, it

is taught as the ten topics that are the main causes to achieve the state of buddhahood. These causes symbolize their effect, or fruition. That is the first topic of discussion here.

Chapter Two: The Knowledge of the Path

The path that actualizes, or realizes, such fruition is taught in the second chapter. The second topic is the knowledge of the path. "Knowledge of the path" refers to the bodhisattva's knowledge and realization on the paths and bhumis. This shows clearly that knowledge of the path is the actual means and path that realizes the fruition of enlightenment.

Chapter Three: The Knowledge of the Bases

In order to travel the path of a bodhisattva, one needs to know the antidotes and the things to be abandoned, or the things to be avoided on the path. This is in the third chapter called the "knowledge of the bases." Sometimes, it is also called "all knowing" or "all knowledge." This mainly refers to that which is to be relinquished.

These three topics or knowledges are necessary for a bodhisattva to know at the beginning in order enter the path of Mahayana. To really accomplish the fruition, these three topics are important to know.

The Method: The Four Applications

The next four chapters are the actual means of realization of the bodhisattva bhumis, the realization of complete enlightenment. Therefore, these four topics are known as the "method of the four applications."

Chapter Four: The Application of Completely Perfect Realization of all Aspects

The first of these stages makes manifest the realization in one's mind of all that was not realized before on the path. The reason we have this first method, which is called "the training of completely perfect realization of all aspects," is because when we study the three knowledges, we first determine their nature by way of reasoning. But, in determining their nature by way of reasoning, we develop an understanding that is not

sufficient in and of itself. We need to completely realize this understanding and manifest it. Therefore, we need to realize what has not been realized yet, and this happens at the stage of completely perfect realization of all aspects. This is the first of the four applications, or, alternatively, the fourth topic of the eight chapters.

What is realized here that was not realized before, the object of realization, is that which is experienced during meditative equipoise: the profound freedom from elaborations that is emptiness. One realizes this meaning that had not been realized before, and one gives birth to this realization. At this stage, one engenders in one's mind-stream non-conceptual wisdom, or non-conceptual jnana.

Chapter Five: The Application of Final Culmination

When this realization actually arises in one's mind, it is the stage of final culmination. How does this realization arise? It arises as the basic entity of that which arises from worldly meditation and meditation that is beyond the world, or, in other words, mundane meditation and super-mundane meditation. What are mundane meditation and super-mundane meditation? Mundane meditation is taught to be that which is endowed with conceptualization towards characteristics, and super-mundane meditation is taught to be that which is free of that type of conceptualization. This is explained in an extensive manner in this section of the text.

Chapter Six: The Application of Gradualism

Then we have gradualism. At the stage of gradualism, the realization that has already arisen in one's mind-stream is special. So it is "made to be special," and what that means, in this case, is "to be made stable." The realization that has dawned in one's mind-stream is stabilized and becomes firm, so it can increase and finally come to perfection.

How does it become special? How does it become stable? The realization that has arisen during meditative equipoise is mixed with the post-meditation phase. During this stage of gradualism, the post-meditation phase is emphasized. Post-meditation is referred to as "subsequent attainment" in the text. The way we bring stability to our realization is through bringing it to the post-meditation phase. In general, during the meditative equipoise phase, we can all have a stable quality, but when the post-meditation phase

comes along, that stability is lost. By bringing stability to the post-meditation phase, realization becomes stable, and, on that basis, the path comes to culmination or perfection.

No matter how long we maintain our samadhi, or meditative equipoise, there is a quality of stability while we remain in it. It is not a question of stability or instability as long as you remain in that state of meditative equipoise. It is stable. That is not in question. The question is: Is it stable when distractions come from post-meditation or from subsequent attainment? When distractions come, such as thoughts or emotions, your realization becomes shaky. That is why you sometimes feel when you are in a long retreat, that you are doing very well because you are very calm. But when you come out in the world, you feel shaky. Thus, in the meditative state, one tries to mix it with the post-meditation state and work with it. This is what is discussed in the application of gradualism.

Chapter Seven: The Application of Complete Enlightenment in a Single Moment

The next topic is complete enlightenment in a single moment. This stage is the perfection of stability, or the perfection of familiarity. At the stage of gradualism, we were training to effect stability, but here, in the stage of enlightenment, in a single moment we actually attain this stability. This is taught to be the perfection of the causes for the attainment of buddhahood, or, in other words, the perfection of the path.

Chapter Eight: The Result Which is Dharmakaya

The last of the ten chapters is the result which is dharmakaya. After having perfected the path, or having perfected the causes for buddhahood, one then manifests the result of dharmakaya buddhahood.

The Eight Topics Have Seventy Points

This has been a brief explanation of the eight main chapters of the *Abhisamayalankara*. It is a general overview of the text by way of describing the eight topics. But, if you present it in a more extensive manner, we have what are called the "seventy points." The seventy points are distributed amongst the eight topics as described below. Here, we are only giving the numbers.

Abhisamayalankara

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abhisamayalankara>

The **Abhisamaya-alāṅkāra** ("Ornament of/for Realization[s]"), abbreviated **AA**, is one of five Sanskrit-language **Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures** which **Maitreya**—a **Buddha** or **bodhisattva** (the point is somewhat controversial)—is said to have revealed to **Asaṅga** (northwest India, 4th century AD). Some scholars (**Erich Frauwallner**, **Giuseppe Tucci**, **Hakiju Ui**) refer to the text's author as **Maitreyanātha** ("Lord Maitreya") in order to avoid either affirming the claim of supernatural revelation, or identifying the author as Asaṅga himself. (Perhaps "Maitreya" was the name of Asaṅga's human teacher.)

The AA is never mentioned by the translator **Xuanzang**, who spent several years at **Nalanda** in India during the early 7th century, and became a savant in the Maitreya-Asaṅga tradition. One possible explanation is that the text is in fact later, and was attributed to Maitreya-Asaṅga for purposes of legitimacy. The question then hinges on the dating of the earliest extant AA commentaries, those of **Arya Vimuktisena** (usually given as 6th century, following possibly unreliable information from **Taranatha**)^[1] and **Haribhadra** (late 8th century).

The AA contains eight chapters and 273 verses. Its pithy contents summarize—in the form of eight categories and seventy topics—the **Prajñāpāramitā** ("Perfection of Wisdom," abbreviated PP) Sūtras which the **Mādhyamika** school of Buddhism regards as presenting the ultimate truth. **Gareth Sparham** and **John Makransky** believe the text to be commenting on the version in 25,000 lines, although it does not explicitly say so. Haribhadra, whose commentary is based on the 8,000-line PP Sūtra, held that the AA is commenting on all PP versions at once (i.e. the 100,000-line, 25,000-line, and 8,000-line versions),^[2] and this interpretation has generally prevailed within the commentarial tradition.

Several scholars liken the AA to a "table of contents" for the PP.^[3] **Edward Conze** admits that the correspondence between these numbered topics, and the contents of the PP is "not always easy to see...";^[4] and that the fit is accomplished "not without some violence" to the text.^[5] The AA is widely held to reflect the hidden meaning (sbed don) of the PP, with the implication being that its details are not found there explicitly. (Sparham traces this tradition to Haribhadra's student Dharmamitra.)^[6] One noteworthy effect is to recast PP texts as path literature. Philosophical differences may also be identified. Conze and Makransky see the AA as an attempt to reinterpret the PP, associated with Mādhyamika tenets, in the direction of **Yogācāra**.^[7]

The AA is studied by all lineages of Tibetan Buddhism, and is one of five principal works studied in the **geshe** curriculum of the major **Gelugpa** monasteries. **Alexander Berzin** has suggested that the text's prominence in the Tibetan tradition, but not elsewhere, may be due to the existence of the

aforementioned commentary by Haribhadra, who was the disciple of [Shantarakshita](#) (an influential early Indian Buddhist missionary to Tibet).^[8] [Tsongkhapa](#)'s writings name the AA as the root text of the [lamrim](#) tradition founded by [Atisha](#). Geshe [Georges Dreyfus](#) reports that

"Ge-luk monastic universities... take the *Ornament* as the central text for the study of the path; they treat it as a kind of Buddhist encyclopedia, read in the light of commentaries by Dzong-ka-ba, [Gyel-tsap](#), and the authors of manuals [monastic textbooks]. Sometimes these commentaries spin out elaborate digressions from a single word of the *Ornament*."^[9]

Dreyfus adds that non-Gelug schools give less emphasis to the AA, but study a somewhat larger number of works (including the other texts of the Maitreya-Asaṅga corpus) in correspondingly less detail.

Note on spelling variations: The compound title *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* may be separated as *Abhisamaya-alaṅkāra*. Stripped of diacriticals, the second element may either be spelled -*alankara* or -*alamkara*, with the "n" or "m" representing the transliterated letter *ṅ* (an *n* with a superscribed dot) and sound *ng*.

Title of the work

The text's full title is:

- Sanskrit: *Abhisamayālaṅkāranāmaprajñāpāramitopadeśaśāstra*
- Tibetan: Shes rap kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i man ngag gi bstan bcos mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan ces bya ba

Which means:

- *abhisamaya* (mngon par rtogs pa) - "Realization(s)"
- *alaṅkāra* (rgyan) -- "Ornament" (Berzin prefers "[Filigree](#)")
- *nāma* (zhes bya ba) -- "called"
- *prajñāpāramitā* (shes rap kyi pha rol tu phyin ba) - "Perfection of Wisdom"
- *upadeśa* (man ngag) -- "Instructions" (literally, "an up-close look")
- *śāstra* (bstan bcos)-- "Treatise"

Thus, a "Treatise [of] Instructions [on the] Perfection of Wisdom, called [the] Ornament [of / for] Realization[s]."

Sparham explains:

"The word *abhisamaya* is made up of the prefix *abhi* ("toward, over"), the prefix *sam* ("together with"), and the root *i*, a verb of motion with the secondary meaning "to understand." Generally speaking, *abhisamaya* means a coming together, a "re-union," particularly of a knower with something to be known, hence a "clear realization." In a title *abhisamaya* may just mean "chapter," hence the title *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* means *Ornament for the Clear Realizations* or *Ornament for the Chapters*.^[10]

Conze adds some details about the term's origins:

In the [Pali](#) scriptures the term is used to designate the stage when we comprehend the [four holy truths](#). In the [Abhidharmakośa](#) (VI 122) it is interpreted as the correct (*sam* = *samyak*) knowledge (*aya*) which is turned toward (*abhi*) [Nirvāṇa](#). In the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* itself it is invariably

coupled with *prāpti*, "attainment," and in one place...it is a synonym for *sāksātkriya* (realization).^[11]

As to whether we are speaking of one realization, or of eight, Sparham offers the following explanation by [rGyal tshab rJe](#), a 14th-15th century Tibetan commentator:

An admirer views a naturally beautiful woman adorned with golden ornaments reflected in a mirror. The *Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras* are the naturally beautiful woman. The systematization of the contents of the *Sūtras* into eight subjects and seventy topics are the golden ornaments, and the *Ornament* the mirror through which they view her.^[12]

Elaborating on the metaphor, Geshe Jampa Gyatso distinguishes between a "natural ornament" (the beautiful woman, the Perfection of Wisdom), "beautifying ornament" (her jewelry, the eight categories and seventy topics), "clarifying ornament" (the mirror, the AA), and "joyful ornament" (the joy of the beholder or AA devotee).^[13]

Philosophical perspective

The PP Sūtras form the basis for the [Mādhyamika](#) ("Middle Way") school of Indian [Buddhist philosophy](#), which Tibetan consensus acknowledges as the "highest" (truest, best) tenet system. Other writings by Maitreya and Asaṅga, however, form the basis for the rival [Yogācāra](#) ("Yoga Adepts") or [Cittamātra](#) ("Mind Only" or "Consciousness Only") school. It is therefore perhaps understandable that the AA, as Sparham writes, "straddles the ground between Indian Middle Way and Mind Only..."^[2] Conze concurs, ascribing to the AA "an intermediate position between Mādhyamikas and Yogācārins..."^[14]

Conze discovers in the AA "some affinities with other Yogācārin works" and suggests a number of precise correspondences. At the same time, he notes, "Two of the specific *doctrines* of the Yogācārins, i.e. the 'storeconsciousness' and the three kinds of own-being (*svabhāva*) are quite ignored."^[15] [Eugène Obermiller](#) on the other hand writes that "The main philosophical view expressed in the Abhisamayalaṅkāra is that of strictest Monism and of the Non-substantiality and Relativity (*śūnyatā*) of all separate elements of existence, i.e. the standpoint of the Mādhyamikas." Obermiller sees the AA as the product of interaction between Mahāyāna Buddhism and the Hindu [Vedānta](#) philosophy.^[16]

[Gelugpa](#) writers, following [Bu ston](#), affirm Maitreya's text to represent the [Prāsaṅgika](#) viewpoint, but consider Haribhadra and later commentators to have taught something called "Yogācāra [Svātantrika](#) Madhyamaka."^[17] The category is often criticized as artificial, even by the standards of Tibetan [doxography](#). [Nyingma](#) and [Sakya](#) writers agree that the AA contains [Madhyamaka](#) teachings, without necessarily endorsing the subdivisions proposed by Gelugpas.

In an aside, Ian Charles Harris finds it "curious" that

"...Maitreya is generally considered to be the mythical instructor of Asaṅga, and therefore for those who see *Māhāyāna* Buddhism in terms of schools [as Harris does not], to be the founder of the *Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda*. One wonders why someone seeking to establish a rival school

to Nāgārjuna should wish to write a treatise on the *Prajñāpāramitā* if, as many authors believe, it is amenable only to an interpretation from the standpoint of the *Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka*.^[18]

Harris goes on to note the "strange fact" that Tsongkhapa would be a self-avowed Prasangika, despite his system's assignment of "all the great *Madhyamaka* authorities on the *Prajñāpāramitā*" to Yogācāra Svātantrika Madhyamaka.^[19]

According to Makransky, the AA was designed to impose a Yogācāra framework and vocabulary onto the PP. AA commentator Arya Vimuktisena preserves this Yogācāra reading; however, Makransky sees Haribhadra's reading as an attempt to "Mādhyamika-ize" the AA. Later Tibetan commentators broadly follow Haribhadra.^[20]

The Eight Categories and Seventy Topics

The AA is divided into eight categories, which correspond to the eight chapters of the work, and (with one technical exception in chapter eight)^[21] to the eight "realizations" said to be necessary for full enlightenment. (Conze remarks that these eight are "not attested elsewhere.")^[22]

This division into eight appears thus at the beginning of the AA itself:

[The Buddhas] proclaim the *Perfection of Wisdom [Sūtra]* by way of eight subjects. These eight are the knowledge of all aspects, knowledge of paths, and all knowledge. Then there is the awakening to all aspects, when culmination is attained, serial, awakening in an instant, and the Truth Body. [AA verses 1.4 and 1.5, Sparham translation]^[23]

These eight categories naturally fall into three groups, as shown below. The seventy topics (here enumerated but not shown) are their subdivisions. Obermiller traces this list to a manual attributed to 'Jam dbyangs Bzhad pa, who also created the various definitions and category-boundaries familiar to Tibetan debaters.^[24] The text may be subdivided further still, into 1,200 items.

Unless otherwise indicated, the English terms below follow Sparham's translation (which revises Conze's).

The Three Knowledges

The first three categories represent the objects or goals of practice, whose attainment leads to peace for the four classes of Buddhist practitioner. Obermiller calls them "the 3 Kinds of Omniscience," while Toh prefers "the Three Exalted Knowers" and Berzin, "the Three Sets of Realized Awareness."

1. Knowledge of all aspects

(*Sarvākārajñatā*, mnam pa tham cad mkhen pa).....**10 topics**
(Wisdom attained by Buddhas; inclusive of categories two and three below)

2. Knowledge of paths

(*Mārgākārajñatā*, lam shes pa).....**11 topics**
(Wisdom attained by [bodhisattvas](#); inclusive of category three below)

3. All-knowledge

(*Sarvajñatā*, gzhi shes pa).....**9 topics**
 (Wisdom attained by [śravakas](#) and [pratyekabuddhas](#), i.e., [Hinayana](#) practitioners)

Berzin explains these categories as

"...groupings of realizations gained by the three sets of *aryas* ('*phags-pa*, highly realized beings), those who have gained nonconceptual cognition of the sixteen aspects of the [four noble truths](#). The three are organized into basis, pathway, and resultant stages and thus, in a complex manner, are cumulative. They are studied, however, in reverse order to their attainment, in order to inspire interest in developing them."^[25]

Śravakas and *Pratyekabuddhas*, in order to discern the truths of [anitya](#) (impermanence), [anatman](#) (selflessness), and [duḥkha](#) (suffering), must acquire knowledge of the fundamental constituents of reality (*vastu*)--namely the [skandhas](#), [āyatanas](#), and [dhātus](#) which are the subjects of [Abhidharma](#). This is the "all-knowledge" of chapter three. A bodhisattva, in order to benefit all sentient beings, must additionally cognize the various possible paths by which others may progress, so that he may, for example, teach in different ways in accordance with their various situations and capacities. This is the "knowledge of paths" of chapter two. According to the Mahayana understanding, only a fully enlightened Buddha has eliminated obstacles to omniscience (*jñeyavaranaheya*) as well as obstacles to liberation (*kleshavaranaheya*). "Knowledge of all aspects" in the first chapter refers to this ultimate state. The AA begins with this as the most impressive of the three, and the ultimate goal of the Mahayana practitioner.

The Four Practices

Categories four through seven (in this order) represent progressive stages of spiritual practice en route to enlightenment. Conze calls them four "understandings"; Obermiller, "practical methods"; Toh, "applications"; and Berzin (who notes the close connection to "yoga," *ngal sbyor*), "applied realizations."

4. Full awakening to all aspects
 (*Sarvākārābhisambodha*, *nam rzdogs sbyor ba*).....**11 topics**
5. Culmination clear realization
 (*Murdhābhisamaya*, *rtse mor phyin pa'i sbyor ba*).....**8 topics**
6. Serial clear realization
 (*Anupurvābhisamaya*, *mthar gyis pa'i sbyor ba*).....**13 topics**
7. Clear realization in a single instant
 (*Ekaksanābhisamaya*, *skad cig ma'i sbyor ba*).....**4 topics**

Referring to the above, Dreyfus explains that

"...the *Ornament* presents the four practices or realizations [chapters 4-7], emphasizing particularly 'the practice of all the aspects' (*nam rzdogs sbyor ba*), which is treated in the fourth chapter. In fact, that practice is the central topic of the text and may have been an actual practice in which all the aspects of the three wisdoms [chapters 1-3] are brought together... But--and this point is crucial--no teacher I have ever met seems to have practiced this meditation, or even to have been clear on how to do so... Clearly the work's central themes are not practiced in the Tibetan scholastic traditions."^[26]

Tibetan tradition lays special emphasis on chapter four, perhaps because it is the longest and most complex, and therefore best suited to commentary and debate. This fourth chapter enumerates, and extensively describes, (in Obermiller's words) "173 forms of the Bodhisattva's *yoga* as realizing respectively the 173 aspects (of the 3 forms of Omniscience)."^[27]

The Resultant Truth Body

The last Category concerns the result of spiritual practice:

8. The Resultant Truth Body

(*Dharmakāyābhisambodha*, chos sku).....4 topics

70 topics

By this is meant the [Dharmakāya](#), one of several glorified spiritual bodies (Makransky prefers "embodiments") which a Buddha is said to possess. A commentarial tradition beginning with Arya Vimuktisena interprets the AA as teaching the existence of three such bodies (the [trikaya](#) doctrine); a rival tradition follows Haribhadra in identifying four such bodies, with the fourth, disputed *kāya* being the *Svabhāvikakāya* (Tib. ngo bo nyid kyi sku) or "Nature / Essence Body". (Other writers interpret this last term as a synonym for Dharmakaya, or else as symbolizing the unity of the three.)

Makransky, whose *Buddhism Embodied* focuses on this eighth chapter of the AA, writes that

"Haribhadra had read AA 8 as a systematic treatise whose purpose was to present a logically coherent model of Buddhahood. His perspective owed much to Buddhist logic and Abhidharma traditions that had sought such systematic coherence. Ratnākoraśānti, basing himself instead on the perspective on nondual yogic traditions, specifically understood the terms *svābhāvikakāya* and *dharmakāya* in AA 8 (and throughout Mahāyana literature) to refer to a Buddha's *own* perspective on the nature of his attainment, *not* to a human perspective on it. [...] Tsong kha pa, influenced by the logico-epistemological approach expressed in Haribhadra's work, supported his interpretation of AA 8. [Go ram pa](#), drawing from a perspective framed by nondual yogic praxis, supported Ratnākoraśānti's call to return to Arya Vimuktisena's previous interpretation. Tsong kha pa and Go ram pa's interpretations are closely related to their differing perspectives on a Buddha's awareness, which was an explicit topic of discussion in [Candrakīrti's](#) *Mādhyamikāvatāra*, upon which they both commented."^[28]

For Makransky, the controversy reflects a fundamental tension between immanent and transcendent aspects of Buddhism, which is also reflected in debate over the [Three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma](#), or gradual vs. sudden enlightenment (as at [Samye](#)). In his view, all these controversies stem from a fundamental difficulty in reconciling the transcendent nature of Buddhahood with the immanent nature of [bodhicitta](#).

Ancillary Topics

Obermiller, describing the curriculum of [Drepung's](#) ('Bras spungs) [Go mang](#) college, reports that the monks studied the AA in a four-year sequence (after certain preliminary subjects); and that each class also studied a prescribed "secondary subject" (zur-bkol) for that year:

- First class: Introduction to the AA as well as the special topic, the "Twenty Sangha."
- Second class: Finished through the seventh topic of the first AA chapter; the supplementary topic was dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*)
- Third class: Finished the first AA chapter and continued; also studied the Yogacara theory of the storehouse consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), and the difference between definitive and interpretable scripture as taught by Mādhyamaka and Yogācāra.
- Fourth class: Focused on the fourth chapter of the AA ("which is regarded as the most difficult"), supplemented with "the teaching about the four degrees of trance in the sphere of Etherial Bodies...and the four degrees of mystic absorption in the Immaterial Sphere." The fourth-year students would conclude with a celebratory feast.

Obermiller adds that "All these studies are conducted in the form of lectures which are accompanied by controversies between the different groups of students according to the method of 'sequence and reason' (*thal-phyir*)."^[29]

Twenty Sangha

The subject of "Twenty Sangha" (*vimsatiprabhedasamgha*, dge 'dun nyi shu) aims at schematizing the various spiritual levels through which one might pass on the way to enlightenment. Here "Sangha" refers not so much to actual monks and nuns (the term's most common meaning), but to an idealized, gradated schema of all the types of accomplished Buddhist. The AA explains that it is the latter sense of "Sangha" which constitutes the object of Buddhist [Refuge](#), and in an especially cryptic verse, offers the following subdivision into twenty types:

There are Twenty [categories]: those with dull and sharp faculties, those who have attained faith and vision, those who are born from family to family, those born with one interval, those who are born in the intermediate state, those who are born, with effort and effortlessly, those who go to Akanistha, three who leap, those who go to the upper limit of the world, those who destroy attachment to the form [realm], those who pacify visual phenomena, the bodily witness, and the rhinoceros. [AA verses 1.23-24, James Apple translation]^[30]

What does this mean? "Akanistha" is the name of the highest Buddha-field in the Form Realm, inhabited by pious gods and tenth-ground bodhisattvas. The solitary nature of the rhinoceros made that animal a traditional symbol for *pratyekabuddhas* ("solitary Buddhas"). Beyond that, the list is quite difficult to decipher.

The basic project seems to have been inspired by an [earlier typology of four](#) ([Stream-Enterer](#), [Once-Returner](#), [Non-Returner](#), [Arhat](#)), which may be expanded to eight by distinguishing between approachers to (zhugs pa), or abiders at ('bras gnas), each level. Unfortunately the list of twenty does not correspond very well with this earlier one. Furthermore, Tibetan exegetical tradition estimates the actual number of types of Sangha (including combinations and subdivisions) to approach the tens of thousands.^[31] Such difficulties seem to account for much of the subject's popularity in debate. (See Apple's monograph on the subject.)

Definitive and Interpretable Scriptures

Tibetan tradition accepts the common Mahayana view that Sakyamuni Buddha (the historical Buddha) taught various kinds of teachings that do not seem to agree—hence the various discrepancies between [nikaya](#) Buddhism and the Mahayana scriptures—and following the [Sandhinirmocana Sutra](#), hold that the Buddha taught three grand cycles called "[Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma](#)." According to the sutra, the first of these consists of Hinayana teachings; the second, of Mahdyamaka teachings; and the third, of Yogacara teachings. The sutra seems to assume the third cycle to consist of the "highest" teachings. However, Tibetan tradition generally sides with Madhyamaka, and therefore must read the sutra in this light.

The issue becomes more pressing in view of the fact that Tibetan Buddhist doctrine in fact combines elements from all three cycles, and is therefore faced with the task of defending its authorities while simultaneously minimizing contradictions between them.

Form and Formless Realm Absorptions (Trances)

Commentarial Literature

In India

The oldest extant commentary is that of [Ārya Vimuktisena](#) (Grol sde), called *Illuminating the Twenty Thousand: A Commentary on the Ornament* (*Pañcavimsatisāhasrikā-prajñāparamitopadesa-sāstrabhisamāyalaṅkāravṛtti*, nyi khri snang ba). Written in a different style from its successors, it makes frequent reference to [Vasubandhu](#)'s [Abhidharmakośaśāstra](#).

Even more influential have been the commentaries of [Haribhadra](#) (Seng ge Bzang Po), especially his *Blossomed Meaning* (*Sphuṭārthā*, 'grel pa don gsal) and *Light for the Ornament*. (*Abhisamāyalaṅkāralokāprajñāpāramitāvyākhyā*, rgyan snang). Haribhadra also edited an abridgment of this work, called the "Short Commentary" (*Sphuṭārtha*, 'grel pa don gsal/'grel chung).

Altogether, 21 ancient Indian AA commentaries are said to have been translated into Tibetan, although it is possible to doubt the existence of some of the titles listed. For example, an ambiguous reference at the beginning of Haribhadra's prefatory homage is sometimes interpreted to mean that Asanga wrote an AA commentary. If so, the work is no longer extant. Haribhadra also mentions an AA commentary by [Vasubandhu](#) entitled *Padhati* ("The Well-Trodden Path"), and one by [Bhadanta Vimuktisena](#) ("the Intelligent" Vimuktisena—not to be confused with Ārya, "the Noble" Vimuktisena) called *Excellent Explanation of the Twenty Thousand* (*Abhisamayālaṅkāra-vārttika*, tshig le'ur byas pa'i nam par 'drel pa). However, the commentaries by Ārya Vimuktisena and Haribhadra are most fundamental to the subsequent commentarial tradition. Sparham writes that

...practically speaking, the *Light* [Haribhadra's commentary] is the more readable explanation. It has fewer words to explain [since it is based on the 8,000-line PP rather than the 25,000-line version]. Ārya may well be the more profound thinker, but Hari's is the better book. This perhaps explains why Hari, not Ārya, became the most influential Indian figure in the study of the

Perfection of Wisdom in Tibet, even though Ārya is more admired. It also perhaps explains why Hari's own abridgement of his *Light* is the basis of nearly every Tibetan Perfection of Wisdom commentary.^[32]

Makransky, on the other hand, feels that Arya Vimuktasena's commentary better captures the AA's Yogācāra assumptions.

In Tibet

The AA was extremely influential in Tibet, resulting in the production of numerous commentaries. The first were those of "Ngok Lotsawa" or "Ngok the Translator" (Rngog Lo tsa ba Bal Idan Shes rab, 1059–1109): *Mngon rtogs rgyan gyi don bsdus pa* (a summary), *Shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i man ngag mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan gi tik chung* (a "small" commentary), and an 8000-line Prajnaparamita summary called *Yum brgyad stong pa'i 'grel pa'i don bsdus* (possibly a sub-commentary to Haribhadra's *Short Commentary*).

Well known [Nyingma](#) commentaries on the AA include the *sher phyin mngon rtogs rgyan gyi spyi don* by [Dza Patrul Rinpoche](#), [Orgyen Jikmé Chökyi Wangpo](#) which forms the whole of the sixth volume of his *Collected Works*; and *The Words of the Invincible Maitreya*, (*ma pham zhal lung*) by Pöpa Tulku Dongak Tenpé Nyima.

[Sakya](#) commentators on the AA include '[Go rams pa bsod nams seng ge](#) (four commentaries), Shakya Chogden, [Shes ba Kun rig](#) (seven commentaries and treatises),^[33] and G.Yag ston (Sangs gyas dpal, g.yag phrug pa, 1350–1414). The latter's work is *King of Wish-Fulfilling Jewels* (*Mngon rtogs rgyan 'grel pa rin chen bsam 'phel dbang rgyal*), in eight volumes.

[Kagyu](#) commentaries on the AA include Padma Karpo's "The Words of Jetsun Maitreya"; the "Short and Clear" commentary *mngon rtogs rgyan gyi 'grel pa nyung ngu rnam gsa'*^[34] by Shamar Konchok Yenlag; "Introducing the Lamp of the Three Worlds: A commentary on the Ornament of Realization" (*mngon rtogs rgyan rtsa 'grel gyi sbyor tika 'jig rten gsum sgron la 'jugs pa*)^[35] by Karma Thinleypa

[Tsongkhapa](#)'s teacher Don grub Rin chen encouraged him to study the five texts of Maitreya, especially the AA.^[36] One of Tsongkhapa's major works, *Golden Garland* (gSer-phreng), is an AA commentary. His disciple [Gyaltsab](#) (rGyal tshab Dar ma Rin chen) also wrote an AA subcommentary, called *Ornament of the Essence* (*mngon rtongs rgyan gyi 'grel pa dor gsal rnam bshad snying po'i rgyan*).

In East Asia

The AA seems not to have been translated into Chinese until the 1930s. At this time the Chinese monk [Fazun](#) (法尊), an associate of [Taixu](#) (太虛), produced a translation entitled 現觀莊嚴論, for use by the Sino-Tibetan Buddhist Institute (漢藏教理院) in [Sichuan](#). The institute's leaders sought to harmonize the Buddhisms of China and Tibet, and improve relations between the [Khampas](#) and Han Chinese immigrants to Eastern Tibet. Fazun had studied in the *geshe* program of the [Drepung](#) ('Bras

spungs) college (grwa tshang) of Loseling (Blo gsal gling), near [Lhasa](#), and possibly even obtained the degree.^[37] The institute failed to survive the [Chinese Civil War](#).

In the West

The AA seems not to have attracted the attention of Western scholars until the 1930s, when [Eugène Obermiller](#) and [Theodore Stcherbatsky](#) produced an edition of the Sanskrit / Tibetan text. Obermiller, a specialist in Yogacara and [Tathagatagarbha](#) literature, also wrote a lengthy article on the AA ("The Doctrine of PP...") and was in the process of composing *Analysis of the AA* when he died. While Obermiller approached the AA from the perspective of "Monism," which he associated with Vedanta, his studies in the [Buryat](#) Mongolian monastery of Dgah Idan dar rgyas gling (Chilutai) exposed him to a more traditional hermeneutic framework. Along with a translation of the AA (or the three-fifths of it which he finished), he also provided a summary of Haribhadra's commentary for each section.

[Edward Conze](#), who was active from the 1950s to the 1970s, devoted his career to PP translations and commentaries, his AA translation being an early example. An especially significant work was his translation of the PP Sutra in 25,000-lines, which he organized according to the AA topics. This required a certain amount of creative editing on his part—for example, his translation does not strictly follow the 25,000-line AA, but incorporates text from other PP Sutras. Like Obermiller, Conze's writings betray a certain German idealistic influence, hence his references to "Union with the Absolute."

During the 2000s, several Western scholars with experience as Buddhist monks living among the Tibetan exile community in Dharamsala, who had participated in traditional [geshe](#) studies, published articles and books related to the AA. Their ranks included [Gareth Sparham](#) (who translated the AA anew, along with the commentaries of Arya Vimuktisena, Haribhadra, and Tsongkhapa) and Geshe [Georges Dreyfus](#) (whose writings describe the contemporary social context of AA study). In addition, studies and translations by [Karl Brunnhölzl](#) and the [Padmakara Translation Group](#) have focused on non-Gelug readings of this text, which the earlier literature had neglected. The AA has also received attention from several Western [dharma centers](#) (notably those associated with the [Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition](#), whose "[Masters Program](#)" devotes several years to its study), with the result that the AA has now been transmitted to the West not only as a text, but as a living spiritual tradition.

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2. Sparham, AA vol. 1, p. xiv; Makransky, p. 129.
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4. From his Preface to the *Large Sūtrap*. x
5. From his AA translation, p. 10.
6. Sparham, AA vol. 1, p. xx.
7. Conze, *The PP Literature*, p. 104; Makransky, p. 10.
8. In his "Overview..." (cited below), second sentence.
9. ...*Two Hands Clapping*, pp. 175–176.
10. Sparham, AA vol 1, pp. xiii–xiv
11. Conze, *The PP Literature*, pp. 104–105.
12. Sparham, AA vol 1. p. xiii.
13. From pp. 3–4 of an oral commentary given in Pomaia, Italy, 1998. Transcript reprinted by the Istituto Lama Tsong Khapa, Pomaia, 2008.
14. Conze, *The PP Literature*, p. 101.
15. Conze, *The PP Literature*, pp. 102–103.

16. p.Obermiller, *Analysis of the AA*, ii-iii. (This is also a main point of his article "The Doctrine of PP...")
17. See Alexander Berzin's "The Five Pathway Minds (The Five Paths): Advanced Presentation," par. 3.
18. *The Continuity of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), p. 72.
19. Op. cit., p. 73
20. Makransky, p. 10.
21. According to Geshe Jampa Gyatso, the eighth *category* is the "resultant truth body" whereas the eighth *clear realization* is the "resultant exalted wisdom truth body." This reflects a Gelug understanding. From p. 1 of a 1998 oral commentary printed in 2008 and privately circulated by the Istituto Lama Tsong Khapa in Pomaia, Italy.
22. *The Prajnaparamita Literature*, p. 105.
23. Sparham, AA. vol. 1, p. xviii.
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26. ...*Two Hands Clapping*, p. 176.
27. Obermiller, *Analysis of the AA*, p. 6.
28. Makransky, pp. 15, 18.
29. Obermiller, *Analysis of the AA*, p. v-vii.
30. Apple, "Twenty Varieties of the Sangha" pt. 1, p. 514.
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Stairway to
Nirvāṇa

A STUDY OF THE TWENTY SAṂGHAS
BASED ON THE WORKS OF TSONG KHA PA

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3

CONTEXTUAL AND DOCTRINAL PRESUMPTIONS

The Twenty *Samghas* is a topic that has been extracted from two verses of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*'s first chapter and developed by Tibetan scholars into an encyclopedia of ideal figures. Yet at the same time, the Twenty *Samghas* is a subject that is understood through its embedded context within the *Mahāyāna* Buddhist soteriology presented in the AA. An exegesis of the Twenty *Samghas* by an Indian or Tibetan author presumes that the reader has background knowledge of *Abhidharma* path structures, categories of mental defilements, meditational attainments, analytical procedures, and cosmology, among other factors. This chapter will present the background material that is needed to properly understand the overall context in which the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* presents the Twenty *Samghas* and the soteriological and cosmological doctrines that Tibetan authors presuppose in studying the topic.

Most of this material can be drawn from the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* itself following the interpretation given by the Indian commentaries of Vimuktisena and Haribhadra, supplementing these with remarks from Tsong kha pa in his *Golden Garland*. The remarks from these commentaries present a general outline of the material that conforms to the expectations of most Indian and Tibetan commentators. Locating the Twenty *Samghas* within the overall schema of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, specifications regarding the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*'s path and yoga systems, and a brief overview of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist cosmological factors are discussed in this chapter.

LOCATING THE TWENTY SAMGHAS IN THE ABHISAMAYĀLAṅKĀRA

The *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* is a *Mahāyāna* Buddhist work that presents the path (*mārga*) to complete unsurpassable awakening (*anuttarasamṣyaksambodhi*) based on the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*. Its full title in Sanskrit is

Abhisamayālaṅkāranāmaprajñāpāramitopadeśaśāstra. The *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* is regarded as an *upadeśaśāstra* ("instructional treatise") because it is viewed as bringing out the hidden or concealed meaning (*sbaḥ don, garbhyārtha*)¹ of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*. *Śāstra* here means that which protects (*trāṇa*) the mental continuum of the trainee (*śaikṣa*) and also causes the trainee who has generated the three trainings of morality, concentration, and wisdom to turn away from unsuitable accumulations of body, speech, and mind and engage in that which is suitable for them.² *Upadeśa*, translated in Tibetan as *man ngag*, means "specific instruction, teaching, or essential skill-in-means."³ This rendering implies that the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* provides the essential advice to easily understand the meaning of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*. "*Prajñāpāramitā*" refers to, among its many different meanings, three senses of the term. In its (1) direct or primary (*mukhya*) sense, PP refers to the *Buddha Bhagavat* as represented in his *dharmakāya* aspect, the highest nondual wisdom that is like an illusion. In its indirect or metaphorical (*gauṇa*) sense, PP means (2) the path leading to this highest wisdom, and (3) the texts containing the teaching on attaining this path and that nondual wisdom (*advayaajñāna*).⁴ A fourth meaning is added to this list of three, as the nature (*svabhāva, rang bzhin*) of *Prajñāpāramitā*.⁵ In this case, the "essential" *Prajñāpāramitā* is emptiness, the essence, or final nature of all phenomena. The main subject matter of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* then is "the path that leads to the attainment of the Perfect Wisdom of a Buddha."

The main title of the text is *Abhisamayālaṅkāra, Ornament for Clear Realization*. In using the word *ornament*, Tsong kha pa utilizes a metaphor from the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* in his explanation from the *Golden Garland*:

The connection with ornament is an illustrative name, for example: just as the lovely body of a natural ornament, adorned with beautifying ornaments like bracelets and so forth, when appearing in a luminous mirror generates happiness for people, likewise, here, when the lovely body of the Mother (PP *sūtras*), the natural ornament, appears [in the sphere of] this *śāstra* that clarifies vividly with the beautifying ornament, the seventy topics [of the AA], wise people generate happiness.⁶

"Ornament" therefore signifies that this instructional treatise adorns the root texts of the PP *sūtras* like jewelry adorns the natural beauty of a woman. Specifically, it is the seventy topics (*don bdun cu*) presented in the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* that reflect like a mirror the soteriological hidden meaning contained within the natural beauty of the expansive PP *sūtras*.

The term at the beginning of the title, *abhisamaya*, is the most fundamental to the text and is found throughout the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* and its commentaries with a variety of specific usages. Etymologically *abhisamaya* is comprised of the prefix *abhi* "toward, facing," the prefix *sam* "together" + the verbal root *i* "to go or to understand." The indeclinable prefix *abhi*, drawn from *abhiṭas* "on all sides" and combined with the indeclinable prefix *sam* "completeness," implies "comprehensiveness."⁸ In combination with the verbal root *i* "to go," which in this case means "to understand," the term *abhisamaya* may be taken to mean "comprehensive understanding" or "clear realization." This is the meaning implied in the sixth chapter of the *Abhidharmakośa*.⁹ Therefore, the full title may be translated as *An Instructional Treatise on Prajñāpāramitā Called "Ornament for Clear Realization."*

As a technical treatise, the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* consists of an encyclopedic table of contents, communicating in an abridged form the subject matter of the entire Large *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* corpus.¹⁰ It presents a condensed summary of all the instructions, practices, paths, and stages of realization to Buddhahood that are implicitly found in the PP *sūtras*. Each portion of the PP *sūtras* was interpreted as a specific teaching in regard to the stages on the path to enlightenment. The *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* presents that interpretation on each specific section of the PP *sūtra* in a verse, following the order and succession of topics as they are presented in the *sūtra*. This pattern is designed to allow for an easier understanding of the vast amount of material that is demonstrated in the PP *sūtras*.¹¹ By providing an easier understanding of the PP *sūtras*, it is thought that all adherents can apply the practices and progress easily toward the goal of Buddhahood. The first two verses of the AA after the homage state this very purpose:

May the wise behold that path to Total Omniscience, shown by the Teacher here, unperceived by others. And having placed in memory the aim of the [*Prajñāpāramitā*] *Sūtra*, may they easily progress in the tenfold practice of the Dharma! This is the purpose of my undertaking.¹²

sarvākārajñātā mārgaḥ śāsinā yo 'tra deśitaḥ /
dhīmantō vīkṣiṣṭraṇis tam anālīdhaṃ parair iti // (AA 1.1)

smṛtau cādhāya sūtrārthaṃ dharmacaryāṃ daśātmikāṃ /
sukhena pratipatsīraṇi ity ārambhaprayojanam // (AA 1.2)

This versified presentation of the topics based on the PP *sūtras* explains what at first seems to be the strange order of the AA. This text does not give a sequential presentation of the path and its stages

occurring in a linear fashion from beginning to end. Rather, the path and its stages are presented with a deliberate degree of repetition. The *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* lays out the same subject matter numerous times, yet with each repetition of the presentation, the subject matter is covered in successively greater detail. The main subject matter of the text is presented five separate times. The (1) homage encapsulates the main principles that flow throughout the whole text. The homage is followed by a reinstatement of these main principles in (2) a condensed presentation (AA I.3–4). These main principles or topics are then slightly expanded and contained in (3) an elucidation of the “body of the text” (AA I.5–17, *śarīra vyavasthānam*, AAV (Pensa, 1967: 14; Pk 5185 fols. 9.2.2–9.4.3); AASPh [Amano, 2000: 8.3]). The fourth repetition is the most expansive and consists of (4) a detailed articulation (AA, I.18-penultimate) of the paths and stages. Finally, (5) summation verses (AA IX.1–2) are given that condense the subject matter of the text into three categories.

The first repetition of the material occurs in the homage, which embodies in a condensed manner the main doctrines that are found in the AA. It is the source by which the presentation is inspired and contains the overall principles that underline the whole *upadeśa śāstra*:

Homage to the Mother of the Buddha together with *śrāvakas* and *bodhisattvas*: she who, in the guise of All-knowledge, leads *śrāvakas* who seek peace to pacification; she who, in the guise of Knowledge of the Paths, causes those who benefit the world to accomplish the welfare of people; [and] possessed of which, Sages teach this all-pervading [dharma] in every aspect.¹³

*yā sarvajñatayā nayaty upaśamaṃ śāntaiṣiṇaḥ śrāvakān yā mārgajñatayā
jagaddhitakṛtāṃ lokārthasampādikā /*

*sarvākāram idaṃ vadanti munayo viśvaṃ yayā saṃgatās tasyai
śrāvakabodhisattvagaṇino buddhasya mātṛe namaḥ //*

In this homage, *Prajñāpāramitā* manifests herself in three forms of omniscience: All-knowledge (*sarvajñatā*, *thams cad shes pa nyid*, or *vastujñāna*, *gzhi shes*), Knowledge of the Paths (*mārgajñatā*; *lam shes*), and Total Omniscience (*sarvākārajñatā*; *rnam pa thams cad mkhyen pa nyid*). She is glorified as the “Mother” (*mātṛ*; *yum*) of the *śrāvakas* (which implicitly include *pratyekabuddhas*), *bodhisattvas*, and *buddhas*). The name “Mother” (*mātṛ*) may imply a relationship to *mātṛkāś*, early *Abhidharma* terminological lists that clarified the distinguishing points of the Buddha’s doctrine that should be known (*jñeya*) or correctly analyzed. Such lists were comprised of topics like the four applications of mind-

fulness, the four right efforts, the seven limbs of enlightenment, and so forth. This term *mātrkā*, a secondary formation derived from the ordinary word for "mother" (*mātr*), *mātrkā* (cognate with English "matrix"), is also used figuratively to mean "source" or "origin." The *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* itself may be an early *mātrkā* of the *Prajñāpāramitā*, serving as a source for the various lists describing paths and stages to full enlightenment.¹⁴

Traditionally, the name of "Mother" is given to the three kinds of knowledge because each manifestation of knowledge is like a mother who aids her child (the *śrāvaka*, *bodhisattva*, etc.) in the realization of the desired aim and a mother who fosters the virtuous elements in the spiritual streams of the practitioners.¹⁵ *Prajñāpāramitā* is also considered the mother of the different spiritual types because she is their cause. Just as the mother is one of the two principal causes of a child, so too is wisdom (*prajñā*) one of the two chief causes of enlightenment. The other, of course, is skillful means (*upāya*). Just as a mother must bear the child in her womb for ten (lunar) months, the traditional gestation period, so too does wisdom nurture the adept along the way through the ten *bhūmis*, the stages of the *bodhisattva* path. Here, in this case, it is the gestation in the mother wisdom's womb that brings about the birth of enlightened beings (Cabezón, 1992: 185). Therefore, whether viewed as a scripture, the spiritual state of mind, the goal of enlightenment, or emptiness, *Prajñāpāramitā* in this Indo-Tibetan tradition is identified as both a feminine force and a maternal one. Manifest in relation to the needs of the aspirant, she incorporates all facets of the path and is synonymous with Total Omniscience.

Because of her relation with the three individuals, this maternal force is explained as *Bhagavatī*. She is one who causes the completion of the desired qualities "leading to peace" and so forth, the final aim for each individual path. The homage illustrates that within the manifestation of the three types of omniscience, she is the Mother of four types of Noble Beings (*ārya*): the Buddha, along with the assemblies of *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and *bodhisattvas*.

What are these three manifestations? All-knowledge (*sarvajñatā*) is the Mother of *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*, as *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* are exemplified by the words "śrāvakas, those seeking the peace of *nirvāṇa*, she who is able to lead through pacification of defilement and suffering through the guise of All-knowledge." Knowledge of the Paths (*mārgajñatā*) is the Mother of the *bodhisattvas* and *buddhas*, those who cause benefit to beings, she who causes to achieve the aims of those to be trained in the world. Total Omniscience (*sarvākārajñatā*) is the Mother of the Buddhas, by being well affiliated with knowledge in all its aspects, which understands exactly the

manner of reality (*ji lta ba bzhin yod pa, yathāvadbhāvika*) to its fullest possible extent (*ji snyed yod pa, yāvadbhāvikatā*).¹⁶

The Mother, as *Prajñāpāramitā*, manifests in accord with the disciple's degree of understanding into these three knowledges. However, her nature is not classified into three different natures. She is a mother of the three sons in terms of the disciple's level of training (*gdul bya'i bsam pa'i dbang gyi sras gsum gyi yum yin*), her final nature being only the Mother of Omniscient Buddhahood (PSPH 16a.8–16b.1). The level of training that is engaged in by *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* is the mere realization of selflessness and that engaged in by the *buddhas* and *bodhisattvas* is the realization of the essencelessness of the person (*pudgalanairātmya*) and the essencelessness of things (*dharmanairātmya*).

The AA contains eight chapters of subject matter with a summary of them as the ninth chapter. The three knowledges themselves comprise the subject matter of the first three chapters of the AA and encompass the remaining five realizations (*abhisamaya*) that constitute the text. In this way the praise exalts the Mother, the means of achieving the uncommon goals of *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, *bodhisattvas*, and *buddhas*, along with the subject matter of the *Sāstra*. These eight subjects are illustrated in the third verse of the AA as follows:

The perfection of wisdom is proclaimed through eight subjects: total omniscience, knowledge of the paths, all-knowledge, the full realization of all aspects, the [realization] that has attained the summit, the progressive [realization], the instantaneous realization, and the *Dharmakāya*; these are the eightfold [perfection of wisdom].

prajñāpāramitāṣṭābhiḥ padārthaiḥ samudīritā /
sarvākārajñatā mārgajñatā sarvajñatā tataḥ // (AA 1.3)

sarvākārābhisambodho mūrdhaprāpto 'nupūrvikaḥ /
ekakṣaṇābhisambodho dharmakāyaś ca teṣṭadhā // (AA 1.4)

The eight subjects (*padārtha*) that comprise the eight chapters (*adhikāra*) of the AA correspond to eight clear realizations (*abhisamaya*) that represent the three meanings of *Prajñāpāramitā* (see Figure 3.1). Each subject is explained by reference to a number of topics (*artha*; *don*) articulated through the verses of each chapter. The first chapter comprises ten topics within seventy-three verses that mention the necessary practices that lead to the special omniscience of the Buddha, that is, Total Omniscience or the wisdom of all aspects (*sarvākārajñatā*; *rnam pa thams cad mkhyen pa nyid*). These practices should be performed in order to completely cognize all knowable objects in existence. Total Omni-

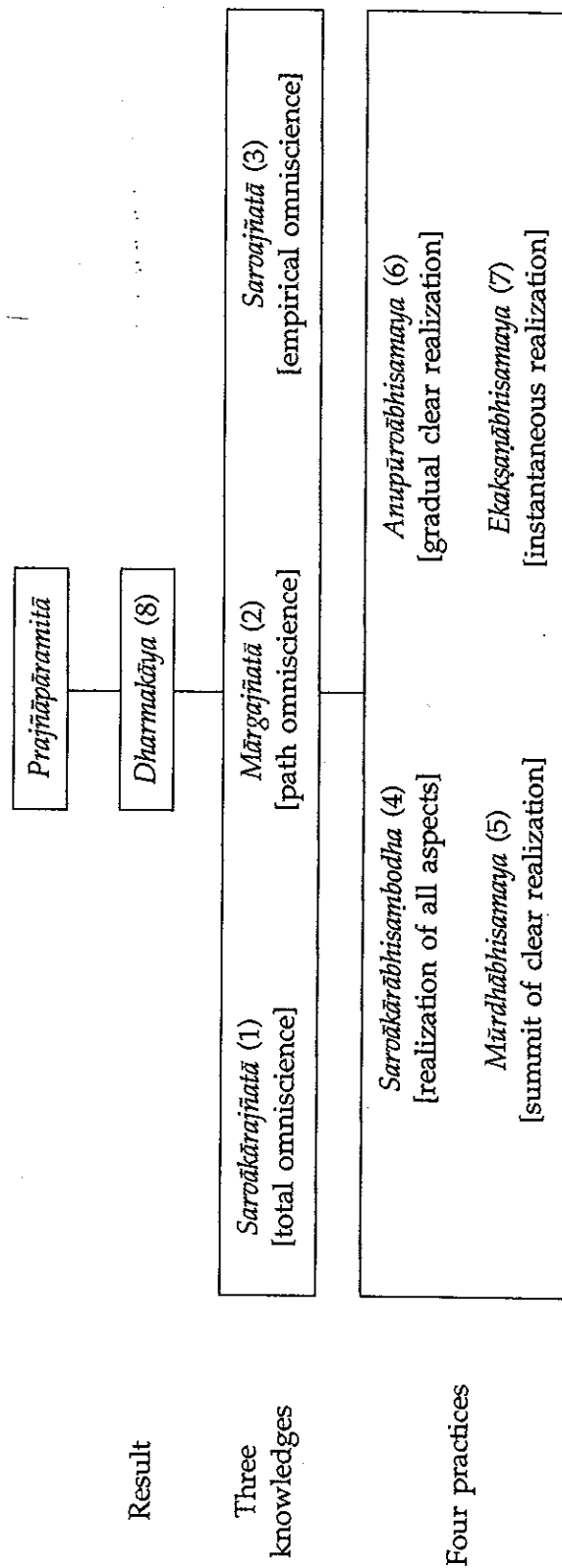
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science is regarded as the fundamental wisdom and the central concept of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*. This knowledge is attained only by fully enlightened Buddhas. The second chapter of the AA discusses eleven topics in thirty-one verses on the knowledges of all paths (*mārgajñatā; lam shes nyid*), which consists of coming to understand the paths of *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and *bodhisattvas*, the *bodhisattvas* realizing the knowledge of all the paths. The third chapter makes reference to nine topics through sixteen stanzas that teach the omniscience of objects or knowledge of all things (*sarvajñatā; thams cad shes pa nyid*). This *abhisamaya* is comprehended by *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*. Practicing these nine topics leads *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* to comprehend the entirety of dharma in which the five aggregates (*skandha*), the twelve sense spheres (*āyatana*), and the eighteen sense objects (*dhātu*) are included. These first three *abhisamayas*, better known as the three kinds of omniscience (*mkhyen gsum*), are the method that one applies to the path.

The path to Buddhahood itself and the detailed means of its application are covered by *abhisamayas* four through seven. The fourth chapter of the AA, the realization of wisdom of all aspects (*sarvākārābhisambodha; rnam rdzogs sbyor ba*), elucidates eleven topics in sixty-three stanzas. This begins the discussion of the one hundred seventy-three aspects of the three forms of omniscience that correspond with the Path of Accumulation (*saṃbhāramārga*). The AA's chapter 5 details in forty-two verses the eight topics pertaining to the summit of full understanding (*mūrdhābhisamaya; rtse sbyor*), or "culminating insight." This *abhisamaya* concurs with the Path of Training (*prayogamārga; sbyor lam*) and the Path of Cultivation (*bhāvanāmārga; sgom lam*) and extends until the instant before the attainment of Buddhahood. The sixth chapter defines, by reference to thirteen topics in one verse, the gradual, full understanding (*anupūrvābhisamaya; mthar gyis sbyor ba*). This *abhisamaya* of "gradual insight" is present, beginning in the path of accumulation, and slowly increases until the final moment before Buddhahood. The seventh *abhisamaya* clarifies the "instantaneous realization" (*ekakṣaṇābhisamaya; skad cig gcig pa'i mngon par rdzogs par byang chub pa*) through five stanzas that discuss four topics. "Instantaneous realization" occurs at the final moment right before Buddhahood. *Abhisamayas* four through seven are known as "the four methods of realization" of the three types of knowledge. The last subject, the fruit of the Path, is the realization of the Dharma-body (*dharmakāyābhisamaya; chos sku mngon rtogs pa*) in its four aspects. This idea is presented in forty verses that make reference to four topics. The realization of the *Dharmakāya* is brought about as a natural cause of the preceding practices. In this way, the eight subjects of the AA are articulated in two hundred and seventy-one verses comprising seventy topics (*don bdun*

Figure 3.1 Relationship of the Eight Subjects (*padārtha*) of the AA



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cii). The summation of these subjects occurs at the very end of the *śāstra*, forming a ninth chapter, which has two verses. The AA then contains two hundred and seventy-three stanzas that present the hidden meaning of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*.

For our purposes here, the contextualization of the Twenty *Samūhas* within the AA, we need only present a schematic introduction to the material that is discussed in the first chapter.¹⁷

Mind generation, special instructions, the four-fold limbs of insight, basis of attaining whose nature is of the *Dharmadhātu*, supports, purpose, the activity of putting on armor and setting out, equipment, along with emergence [comprise] the Total Omniscience of the Sage.

cittotpādo'vavādaś ca nirvedhāṅgaṃ caturvidhaṃ /
ādharmaṃ pratipatteś ca dharmadhātusvabhāvakaḥ // (AA 1.5)

ālambanaṃ samuddeśaḥ saṃnāhaprasthīkriyā /
sambhārāś ca saniryaṇāḥ sarvākārajñatā muneh // (AA 1.6)

These verses present a list of the subject matter contained within the first chapter on Total Omniscience (*sarvākārajñatā*). The verses outline a table of contents that includes ten main topics or factors that a *bodhisattva* applies to the path in order to attain the state of total omniscience equal to Buddhahood.

The first factor¹⁸ is (1) the production of the thought for enlightenment (*bodhicittotpāda*; *byang chub tu sems bskyed*). The *bodhisattva* produces the altruistic mind set on achieving perfect awakening (*saṃyaksambodhi*), a mind having for its essence (*garbha*) emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) and consisting in the twofold stage of resolution (*praṇidhi*) and engagement (*prasthāna*). One who desires to sustain the qualities that are produced from this mind generation must hear and place firmly into his mind (2) special instructions (*avavāda*), such as the practices and applications (*pratipatti*) that develop his advancement in the *Mahāyāna* path. Then, having received the special instructions, a *bodhisattva* cultivates the roots of virtue (*kuśalamūla*), which are characterized by the qualities of faith (*śraddhā*), and so on, conducive to emancipation (*mokṣabhāgīya*) and are obtained by excellence in learning (*śruta*). The *bodhisattva* will then establish (3) the fourfold factors conducive to insight (*nirvedhabhāgīya*).¹⁹ These *nirvedhabhāgīya*, which we shall refer to as "preparatory analytical factors," comprise the path of preparation (*prayogamārga*) and constitute a mundane meditative realization (*laukikabhāvanāmaya*). In addition, they are conducive to a penetrative understanding of the four

Chapter Summaries of the *Ornament for Clear Realization*

The *Ornament for Clear Realization* is divided into eight chapters:

- Chapter One: Introduction and Exalted Knower of All Aspects
- Chapter Two: Knower of Paths
- Chapter Three: Knower of Bases
- Chapter Four: Application in Complete Aspects
- Chapter Five: Peak Application
- Chapter Six: Serial Application
- Chapter Seven: Instantaneous application
- Chapter Eight: Resultant Truth Body/Conclusion

Chapter One – Introduction and Exalted Knower of All Aspects

The first of the eight categories presented in the *Ornament* is the exalted knower of all aspects. It is the exalted knower in the continuum of a buddha superior that knows all the aspects of all objects of knowledge without exception. As described in the verse of homage, it is the means which enable a buddha to turn the wheel of Dharma to lead all sentient beings to enlightenment. It is set forth as the first category in order to inspire trainees to engage in the practices through understanding the excellent qualities of the result – the omniscient mind of a buddha. The manner in which the exalted knower of all aspects is presented is by way of the ten topics that illustrate it. These ten topics are not divisions of the exalted knower of all aspects but they enable us to develop an understanding of it.

The first topic is the conventional mahayana mind generation. This is a mind aspiring for complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. The initial uncontrived generation of this mind marks a person's entry into the mahayana path. It is for this reason that it is described as the door of entry into the mahayana and is presented first. The second topic is precepts. These are precepts or oral instructions on the two truths, four noble truths, the Three Jewels, effort, and so forth. In general, one first listens to precepts and then on this basis one meditates and develops the mind generation. However, they are presented in the reverse order in this explanation in order to indicate that only after the mind generation has been developed is one free from the obstacles to receiving precepts directly from a buddha in his supreme emanation body aspect.

Having listened to precepts and meditated on them, one then generates the third topic, the four branches of definite discrimination. This presents the mahayana path of preparation, the second of the five paths of a bodhisattva. The next topic is the naturally abiding lineage, the basis of mahayana achievings. In general, naturally abiding lineage is also called buddha nature. It is possessed by all sentient beings and shows that all beings have the potential to achieve buddhahood. It is presented after the path of preparation because only after having attained the path of preparation does one possess a wisdom arisen from meditation on emptiness, whereby one becomes free from most of the four obstacles to activating the lineage. These four obstacles are: (i) much familiarity with the afflictions, (ii) being accompanied by misleading friends, (iii) being destitute, that is, lacking the conditions for Dharma practice, and (iv) being under the control of others.

The fifth topic is the observed object of the achievings because one has to meditate on their observed objects in order to attain the goal of the achievings. Although there are eleven observed objects, virtue and so forth, it can also be said that the observed objects of the achievings are all phenomena. In observing these objects what is the intent? This is discussed in the sixth topic, the objects of intent. These are the three greatneses, the final results for which a bodhisattva exerts effort to achieve.

Then, the seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth achievings are in order to attain the object of intent: achieving through armor, achieving through engagement, achieving through collections, and definitely issuing achieving respectively. A bodhisattva meditates on the observed objects of the

achievements by means of the four types of achievements, whereby he attains the object of intent, the three greatneses. The achieving through armor is the bodhisattva's practice of the six perfections within each of the six perfections. With the achieving through engagement, the bodhisattva engages with joyous effort in practices such as developing meditative absorptions, six perfections, four immeasurables and so forth. The achieving through collections is accomplished mainly through the two vast collections of merits and wisdom. This leads to the definitely issuing achieving, which is a practice that definitely issues forth without doubt the exalted knower of all aspects.

Chapter Two – Knower of Paths

The knower of paths is the exalted knower that completely realizes the paths of the three vehicles. As there are trainees of different levels: those following the hearer vehicle, those following the solitary realizer vehicle, and those following the bodhisattva vehicle, a bodhisattva must develop respectively a knower of paths that knows the paths of hearers, a knower of paths that knows the paths of solitary realizers, and a knower of paths that knows the paths of bodhisattvas in order to guide them. In other words, a bodhisattva must gain the exalted wisdom realizing the selflessness of persons, the exalted wisdom realizing non-duality (the emptiness of apprehenders and apprehendeds being different substances), and the exalted wisdom realizing the emptiness of true existence of all phenomena in order to guide different trainees on their paths to enlightenment.

There are many misconceptions in regard to the path that leads to enlightenment. Someone thinks that, since the omniscient mind directly realizes all phenomena, it is only necessary to meditate on one reality as an object without meditating on the paths of all three vehicles in order to attain it. Someone else thinks that by merely taking refuge in the Three Jewels one can attain enlightenment, and also that while cultivating despair regarding cyclic existence is a correct practice for hearers and solitary realizers it is not correct as a practice of the bodhisattvas who enter cyclic existence for the welfare of others. In order to negate these wrong conceptions regarding the knower of paths it is explained apart in this second chapter, so that the trainees are aware that in order to directly realize and attain the very exalted knower of all aspects one has to meditate thoroughly on and completely know the knower of paths that leads to that, since without this there is no attainment of enlightenment.

The definition of a knower of paths is: a mahayana superior's clear realizer conjoined with the wisdom directly realizing emptiness in the continuum of the person who possesses it. It is mutually inclusive with the exalted knower of a mahayana superior. This means that all the exalted knowers of a mahayana superior (either a bodhisattva superior or a buddha superior) are conjoined with or influenced by his direct realization of emptiness and are knowers of paths. When divided, there are three: a knower of paths that knows hearers' paths, a knower of paths that knows solitary realizers' paths and a knower of paths that knows mahayana paths.

In this chapter the knower of paths is illustrated by eleven topics. The first topic, the limbs of a knower of paths, explains the cause, entity, and result of a knower of paths. The second topic, the knower of paths that knows hearers' paths, explains the realizations that are cultivated by a bodhisattva in order to lead trainees of the hearer's lineage. These realizations are shared with the hearers in the sense that hearers exerted effort to develop these realizations in order to achieve their goals of liberation from cyclic existence. The principal realization is the exalted wisdom directly realizing the selflessness of persons, i.e., the lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self of person.

The third topic, the knower of paths that knows solitary realizers' paths, refers to the realizations that are cultivated by a bodhisattva for leading trainees of the solitary realizer's lineage. Here, the principal realization is the exalted wisdom directly realizing non-duality, i.e., the emptiness of apprehenders and apprehendeds being different substances. These two topics highlight that a bodhisattva has to actually generate such realizations in his continuum.

The knower of paths of the mahayana paths is divided into two: the mahayana path of seeing (the fourth topic) and the mahayana path of meditation. During the meditative equipoise of the

mahayana path of seeing, the bodhisattva directly realizes the emptiness of true existence for the first time. This meditative equipoise is divided into 16 moments: dharma forbearance, dharma knowledge, subsequent forbearance, and subsequent knowledge with respect to each of the four noble truths. According to the Svatantrika Madhyamika, all eight forbearances occur simultaneously on the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing while all eight knowledges occur simultaneously on the path of release of the path of seeing.

Subsequent to the path of seeing, there is the path of meditation when the bodhisattva familiarizes herself with the direct realization of emptiness repeatedly in order to abandon the innate obstructions. The beneficial results of cultivating the path of meditation are presented first in the fifth topic, the function of the mahayana path of meditation. Then the mahayana path of meditation itself is presented in two divisions: the contaminated and uncontaminated paths of meditation. In this context, contaminated means conceptual, while uncontaminated means non-conceptual.

The contaminated paths of meditation are: mahayana path of meditation of belief, dedication and rejoicing. The path of meditation of belief, the sixth topic, refers to the belief or conviction that each of the three – the scriptural, path and resultant perfections of wisdom – is a source of the three aims, that of oneself, others and both. This is followed by a presentation of its beneficial qualities in the seventh topic. The path of meditation of dedication describes the practice of dedication when one's or others' roots of virtue are transformed into a cause for complete enlightenment. The path of meditation of rejoicing, the ninth topic, cultivates joy in one's own or others' roots of virtue.

The uncontaminated paths of meditation are: the path of meditation of achieving (tenth topic) and the completely pure path of meditation (eleventh topic). They are mutually inclusive. Both occur during the meditative equipoise of the path of meditation. The difference between them is that the path of meditation of achieving establishes the imprint of the final realization, which is either the exalted wisdom of an exalted knower of all aspects or the wisdom truth body, while the completely pure path of meditation establishes the imprint of the final abandonment, the true cessations of all obstructions, both afflictive and knowledge.

Chapter Three – Knower of Bases

In the first chapter the exalted knower of all aspects, the omniscient mind, was explained in order to make disciples delight in hearing about the result and to generate interest in achieving it. In order to attain that omniscient mind one needs a path, therefore in the second chapter the knower of paths is explained. In order to complete the knower of paths one needs to initially engage in the practices that are related to the knower of bases. This is because without thoroughly knowing the bases, the four noble truths and their sixteen attributes such as impermanence and so forth, there will not be a thorough understanding of the paths of the three vehicles. Therefore the knower of bases is now explained.

When the *Ornament* is related to the *lam-rim* teachings it can be said that the third chapter mainly presents the practice of a person of middling capacity, the second chapter mainly presents the practice of a person of great capacity, and the first chapter mainly presents the result of practicing the bodhisattva path. By first showing the result one is inspired to practice and comes to understand that to achieve this result one must first engage in the practices shared with persons of small and middling capacities, followed by the practices of the person of great capacity; therefore, the second and third chapters are presented.

The knower of bases, also called the knower of all, is defined in the *70 Topics* as: an exalted wisdom abiding within a lesser vehicle class of realizations conjoined with the wisdom directly realizing selflessness in the continuum of the person who possesses it.

The measure of abiding in a lesser vehicle class of realizations is that that exalted wisdom is taken by a hinayana learner as his *main* object of cultivation with a similar observed object and aspect of it, for example, an exalted wisdom directly realizing impermanence. Moreover, it is conjoined with the wisdom directly realizing the selflessness of persons, i.e., the lack of a self-sufficient substantially existent self of persons. Such knowers of bases exist in the continua of all superiors, since all superiors necessarily have directly realized the selflessness of persons.

The knower of bases is illustrated by nine topics in this chapter. The first six topics explain the entity of the knower of bases in the continuum of a bodhisattva and how this is distinguished from a knower of bases in the continuum of either a hearer or solitary realizer.

The first two topics, the knower of paths not abiding in cyclic existence through knowledge and the knower of paths not abiding in peace through compassion, illustrate that mahayana superiors possess the antidotes to abiding in the two extremes of cyclic existence and solitary peace. They have attained the knowledge, i.e., the wisdom directly realizing the selflessness of persons, which cuts the root of cyclic existence, and the great compassion that stops the abidance in solitary peace.

The next two topics, the knower of bases distant from the resultant mother and that close to the resultant mother, show that mahayana superiors have cultivated great compassion (method) and the wisdom directly realizing emptiness of true existence (wisdom), due to which they are close to the attainment of buddhahood, the resultant mother. Whereas the hinayana practitioners are distant from buddhahood because they are devoid of great compassion and bound by the conception of true existence. Therefore, the knower of bases in the continua of hinayana superiors are called “knower of bases of the discordant class” (the fifth topic) because they are the discordant class to the path of bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas are to abandon them and instead engage in generating the “knower of bases of the antidote class,” (the sixth topic). The knower of bases distant from the resultant mother and the knower of bases of the discordant class are mutually inclusive and similarly, the knower of bases close to the resultant mother and the knower of bases of the antidote class are mutually inclusive.

Having explained the entity of the knower of bases of the bodhisattva, the next two topics explain the bodhisattvas’ applications. In the seventh topic, the bodhisattva’s applications that realize the emptiness of true existence and stop the mistaken settling on true existence of all phenomena are presented. The eighth topic presents the nature of these applications. They are bodhisattva’s yogas conjoined with the wisdom that realizes the object and object-possessor (subject) are equal in not existing truly.

As a result of cultivating these applications on the mahayana path of preparation, the mahayana path of seeing arises. Hence, the mahayana path of seeing is explained as the ninth topic. It is presented in terms of the 16 moments of knowledges and forbearances, there being the four: (1) dharma forbearance, (2) dharma knowledge, (3) subsequent forbearance, and (4) subsequent knowledge, for each of the four truths. These sixteen are explained to have individual aspects that are related to the sixteen attributes of the four noble truths. However, in terms of entity, they are all direct realization of emptiness of true existence, with the eight forbearances arising simultaneously as the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing and the eight knowledges arising simultaneously as the path of release of the path of seeing.

Chapter Four – Application in Complete Aspects

The application in complete aspects, the fourth of the eight clear realizations explained in the *Ornament*, is the subject of chapter four. The application in complete aspects is a means by which

one cultivates the three exalted knowers – the knower of bases, the knower of paths, and the exalted knower of all aspects – in order to attain buddhahood. He does so by meditating on all the aspects of these three exalted knowers, which are the twenty-seven aspects of the knower of bases, the thirty-six aspects of the knower of paths, and the 110 aspects of the exalted knower of all aspects. There are 173 aspects in all.

In general, these 173 aspects are cultivated by means of the four applications – the application in complete aspects, peak application, serial application, and instantaneous application. What is an application? Its Tibetan name, *sbyor ba*, has a multitude of meanings such as ‘connect,’ ‘join,’ or ‘prepare.’ In this case, an application is a method for joining to buddhahood or preparing for buddhahood. The application in complete aspects is the means by which one joins to buddhahood through familiarizing oneself with the 173 aspects in order to gain mastery over them. This is done by meditating on a compendium of the aspects with a union of calm abiding and special insight. The other three applications further develop and refine this wisdom until the bodhisattva is able to correctly meditate on all 173 aspects serially in the shortest moment of a complete action at the last moment of the bodhisattva’s continuum as a sentient being, just prior to reaching buddhahood.

Although the three exalted knowers have been presented in the first three chapters, there is no redundancy in presenting their 173 aspects again in the fourth chapter. This is because they are presented for different purposes. In the first three chapters the uncommon individual entities and characteristics of the three exalted knowers are presented for the sake of developing a thorough knowledge of them. Whereas here in the fourth chapter all the aspects of these knowers are presented without exception in order to familiarize with them by means of an application that is a union of calm abiding and special insight, as well as to gain mastery over the aspects.

The definition of an application in complete aspects is: a bodhisattva’s yoga conjoined with the wisdom cultivating a compendium of the aspects of the three exalted knowers. A “bodhisattva’s yoga” is a clear realizer of a bodhisattva that is a union of calm abiding and special insight. The application in complete aspects initially arises on the Mahayana path of accumulation and continues through the end of the continuum as a sentient being. All bodhisattva’s paths, clear realizations, and exalted wisdoms – these being synonymous – are application in complete aspects.

The application in complete aspects are illustrated by eleven topics. The first is the knower-aspects of the antidote class. These are the 173 aspects of the three exalted knowers, such as the exalted wisdom realizing impermanence and so forth, that are the antidotes to the different discordant classes, such as the misconception grasping at permanence. Here, the knower-aspects are referring to the exalted wisdoms that realize, while object-aspects are the objects that are being realized. The second topic presents the principal applications that bodhisattvas engaged in. They are conjoined with the wisdom realizing emptiness and act to overcome the conceptions of true existence.

In order to inspire trainees, the excellent qualities of the applications are presented in the third topic. These are the benefits that are attained by cultivating the mahayana applications. While in the fourth topic the pitfalls that can interfere with the production, abidance or completion of these applications are presented as faults of the applications. This is to help trainees to avoid these potential pitfalls in practice. The next topic is the characteristics of the applications. These characteristics assist one in understanding the principal applications. They are presented in order to help the trainees understand the applications’ individual characteristics, enabling them to practice them appropriately.

As for the stages of generation of these different realizations, the sixth topic presents the initial path in the mahayana vehicle where the application in complete aspects is generated – the mahayana partial concordance with liberation. This is also known as the mahayana path of accumulation.

Subsequent to this is the mahayana path of preparation, or the mahayana partial concordance with definite discrimination, which is the seventh topic. In this topic the subsequent attainment period of the mahayana path of preparation, that is, subsequent to the meditative equipoise meditating on emptiness is addressed. Also on this path are found a special group of bodhisattvas, the bodhisattva sangha who has attained a sign of irreversibility (the eighth topic). This topic presents the signs that indicate to trainees that a bodhisattva is irreversible from complete enlightenment. Since these signs first arise for sharp-facultied bodhisattvas on the Mahayana partial concordance with definite discrimination, this topic is presented here.

When the bodhisattvas reach the eighth bodhisattva ground, they have definitely attained the signs of irreversibility, regardless of being dull or sharp-facultied. At this time, the bodhisattvas have entered the three pure bodhisattva grounds and are creating the causes for attaining the three bodies of a Buddha through engaging in the next three applications. The application in the equality of cyclic existence and peace (the ninth topic) presents the applications that give rise to the truth body of a Buddha. The application in a pure land (the tenth topic) presents the applications that give rise to the complete enjoyment body of a Buddha and the application in skillful means (the eleventh topic) presents the applications that give rise to the emanation body of a Buddha. In this manner, within the presentation of the topics illustrating the application in complete aspects is also found the presentation of the entire path to enlightenment.

Chapter Five – Peak Application

Having presented the application in complete aspects that cultivates a compendium of the 173 aspects of the three exalted knowers in order to gain mastery over them, the peak application that has gained this mastery is presented. To gain mastery over the 173 aspects means to have gained the ability to meditate on all 173 aspects in a single session without leaving any out and without doing so in the wrong order.

The definition of peak application is: a bodhisattva's yoga conjoined with the wisdom highly transformed from the mahayana path of accumulation that cultivates a compendium of the three exalted knowers. It is mutually inclusive with achieving through engaging presented in the first chapter. "Highly transformed from the mahayana path of accumulation" means that it has become a mahayana path of preparation. Therefore, the boundaries of the peak application are from the mahayana path of preparation through the end of the continuum of the sentient being.

In this chapter the peak application is illustrated by eight topics. The first four occur on the path of preparation: the peak application of heat, peak, tolerance and supreme mundane qualities. The peak application of heat presents the twelve signs of the attainment of peak application, which are related to three periods: the waking state, dream state, and both. Signs in dreams means, for example, a bodhisattva who is very familiar with his own vehicle, even in a dream, will not have any desire to enter the lower vehicle; he will not generate a mind toward the hearer ground. And if one has this awareness during the dream state, one necessarily has it when awake. Of the twelve signs, the first six are related to the dream state, the seventh and eighth exist both in the waking and dream states, and the last four occur during the waking state.

The peak application of peak occurs on the occasion of the peak level of the path of preparation. The root text says that this has more merit than the merit from all sentient beings of the billion world systems making offerings to the buddhas. There are sixteen aspects of this peak application which are explained in accordance with the increase in merits attained by them, with the later ones being more superior than the earlier ones. They are divided into two groups of eight, one group in relation to the internal and one the external.

At the tolerance level of the path of preparation, the bodhisattva achieves the peak application of tolerance. This is called “stability” because the bodhisattva has attained stable method and wisdom in that he will not forsake the welfare of sentient beings and he has attained a wisdom approximate to the three exalted knowers.

Then at the point of the peak application of supreme mundane qualities, one has fully developed the meditative stabilization, the always abiding mind. This implies that this bodhisattva is close to the path of seeing and is about to attain it.

The fifth topic of peak application is the peak application of the path of seeing. In this context, four principal groups of conceptions of true existence making a total of 36 conceptions are abandoned: conceptions of apprehended to be engaged in, conceptions of apprehended to be turned away from, conceptions of apprehenders of substantial existent, and conception of apprehenders of imputed existent. These are acquired conceptions of true existence due to wrong tenets and reasonings. Both the causes and result of the peak application of the path of seeing are explained. Since the result is identified to be the great enlightenment, there is an explanation of great enlightenment. During meditative equipoise a bodhisattva on the path of seeing meditates on the emptiness of true existence of phenomena, while in subsequent attainment, he meditates on the twelve links of dependent and related arising in the forward and reverse orders. Therefore, the twelve links are also discussed.

The sixth topic is the peak application of the path of meditation. Here the path of meditation itself, the objects of abandonment, and the beneficial qualities of the path of meditation are presented. The leaping absorptions are described in the context of the entity of the path of meditation. The objects of abandonment of the path of meditation are also four sets of conceptions of true existence of the apprehended and apprehender. These are, however, the innate conceptions whereas those abandoned on the path of seeing are the acquired conceptions.

Uninterrupted peak application is the seventh topic illustrating the peak application. It is mutually inclusive with the exalted wisdom at the end of the continuum of the sentient being and acts to directly produce its result, the exalted knower of all aspects. It is “uninterrupted” since there is no interruption between itself and its result.

As for the perverse conceptions that are eliminated by the peak application, these are presented as the eighth topic, the perverse achievings to be eliminated. There are sixteen of them and are related to the wrong conception holding the two truths as being unsuitable to be included in a single entity. They are due to not understanding that phenomena exist conventionally but are empty of true existence. Instead, various perverse conceptions arise holding that phenomena, such as the exalted knower of all aspects, that are empty of existing truly or ultimately are inappropriate because if phenomena do not exist truly or ultimately, they do not exist at all.

Chapter Six – Serial Application

While the application in complete aspects is related to the meditation on the 173 aspects of the three exalted knowers in order to attain mastery over them, the serial application is related to the meditation on those aspects serially in order to attain steadiness with respect to them. To meditate serially is to meditate on all 173 aspects of the three exalted knowers following a definite sequence. This is compared to showing a race horse the particular race track that it will be racing on for several days so that it can familiarize with the different parts of the track and easily run the race on the actual day. This application culminates in the instantaneous application, which is the last moment in the continuum of a sentient being, when steadiness has been achieved.

The definition of serial application is: a bodhisattva's yoga conjoined with a wisdom that serially cultivates the aspects of the three exalted knowers for the sake of attaining steadiness with respect to the aspects of the three exalted knowers. It has thirteen divisions.

A serial application is necessarily conjoined with a wisdom cultivating the 173 aspects serially, but it itself is not necessarily cultivating these aspects serially. For example, the serial application of recollection of the buddha is the recollection of the causes for attaining buddhahood and the qualities of the buddha while conjoined with a wisdom that cultivates the 173 aspects serially.

Chapter Seven – Instantaneous Application

The instantaneous application is the last uninterrupted path of the path of meditation that will issue forth the final result, complete enlightenment of a buddha, in the next moment. It is the result of cultivating all the aspects of the three exalted knowers serially, such that at this moment steadiness with respect to these aspects has been attained and all the aspects are realized in the shortest moment of a complete action. In fact, this bodhisattva has completed all the direct causes to have a direct realization of all phenomena simultaneously.

The definition of instantaneous application is a bodhisattva's final yoga that has attained steadiness with respect to the aspects of the three exalted knowers. It is mutually inclusive with the exalted wisdom at the end of the continuum of the sentient being. It has four divisions: fully ripened instantaneous application, non-fully ripened instantaneous application, characterless instantaneous application and non-dual instantaneous application.

What is the meaning of “fully ripened” and “non-fully ripened”? There are different explanations of them. According to Gyeltshap Je's *Ornament of Essential Explanation*, “fully ripened” means attained or completed, whereas “non-fully ripened” means not attained or not completed. Thus, all the uncontaminateds on the seventh ground and below are non-fully ripened, whereas all uncontaminateds from the eighth ground upward are fully ripened. This is because when the bodhisattva on the first through the seventh grounds actualizes a single uncontaminated quality he does so with coarse effort. On the other hand, the uncontaminated qualities of the eighth ground upward are actualized without effort. An example for an uncontaminated non-fully ripened quality is the ten perfections while that for an uncontaminated fully ripened quality is the 112 signs of a buddha.

According to Lama Tsongkhapa's *Golden Rosary*, “fully ripened” and “non-fully ripened” are posited from the point of view of objects and not object-possessors because it cannot be said that a instantaneous application itself is either non-fully ripened or fully ripened. In this way, a fully ripened object is one on the occasion of a fully ripened exalted knower of all aspects, and a non-fully ripened object is one on the occasion of an exalted knower in a bodhisattva's continuum. This is because if it is an exalted knower of a bodhisattva it is not fully ripened, whereas if it is an exalted knower of all aspects it is fully ripened.

These four instantaneous applications indicate that the bodhisattva at the end of the continuum of the sentient being has (1) the ability to actualize all uncontaminated non-fully ripened qualities that are similar in type when actualizing one uncontaminated non-fully ripened quality; (2) the ability to actualize all uncontaminated fully ripened qualities that are similar in type when actualizing one uncontaminated fully ripened quality; (3) the wisdom directly realizing emptiness; and (4) the wisdom directly realizing non-duality (the emptiness of apprehended and apprehender being different substances).

Chapter Eight – Resultant Truth Body

In the next instant following the instantaneous application, there arises the manifest complete enlightenment, the resultant truth body. According to the *70 Topics*, the definition of resultant truth body is the final result attained by the power of cultivating the aspects of the three exalted knowers, the method for its attainment. Therefore, the purpose of cultivating the aspects of the three exalted knowers by means of the four applications is the resultant truth body.

In this chapter, the resultant truth body is presented in terms of four divisions: (1) the nature body, (2) the wisdom truth body, (3) the enjoyment body, and (4) the emanation body. The nature body and the wisdom truth body are also referred to as the truth bodies while the enjoyment body and the emanation body are the form bodies. These bodies are the result of completing the two collections of merit and wisdom.

The nature body is defined as a final sphere possessing the two purities. The two purities are purity of natural stains and purity of adventitious stains. A natural stain is not an actual stain, it is merely given the name “stain.” It is the object of negation, true existence. Therefore, the nature body that is the factor of natural purity is the emptiness of true existence of the buddha. The adventitious stains are actual stains; they are the afflictive obstructions and the knowledge obstructions. Hence, the nature body that is the factor of adventitious purity is the true cessations of these two obstructions in the continuum of the buddha superior. For the Svatantrika Madhyamika, a nature body is posited in two ways: one that is an ultimate truth, an emptiness of true existence and one that is a conventional truth, a true cessation. A true cessation is not an emptiness according to them, whereas for Prasangika Madhyamika, a true cessation is also an emptiness and an ultimate truth.

The wisdom truth body is defined as an exalted knower that is the final insight regarding modes and varieties. This is referring to the enlightened mind of the buddha. Here, modes are emptinesses of true existence while varieties are all phenomena excluding emptinesses. According to Jedzun Chogyi Gyeltsen if it is a consciousness in the continuum of a buddha superior, it is necessarily a wisdom truth body and an exalted knower of all aspects that realizes all phenomena. Other scholars, however, assert that the sense consciousnesses of a buddha superior are not exalted knowers of all aspects.

Since the two truth bodies of the buddha are not accessible to sentient beings, in order to benefit them, there arise the form bodies of the buddha. The complete enjoyment body is only perceived by bodhisattva superiors, not ordinary beings. It possesses the five certainties, such as only teaching the Mahayana dharma and so forth. The emanation bodies appear according to the fortune of the sentient beings in order to lead them on the path to enlightenment. These are of different types, such as artisan emanation body, incarnate emanation body and supreme emanation body. Although these bodies appear to have flesh, body hair, veins and so forth, they are composed neither of gross matter nor subtle particles. They are rather of the nature of the exalted wisdom of the buddha.

There is also a presentation of the 27 types of enlightened activities of the wisdom truth body. The enlightened activity is divided into two, that existing in the object of the action, i.e., in the trainee, and that existing in the agent, the buddha superior. It is said that every virtue we ordinary beings possess arises due to the enlightened activity of the wisdom truth body. In other words, only due to the blessing of the buddhas do we create roots of virtue.

This concludes the presentation of the *Ornament* in terms of eight summarized categories. In order to benefit other trainees who delight in a less extensive explanation compared to this, there are also the presentation in six categories and three categories.

GONE BEYOND

The Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras,
The Ornament of Clear Realization,
and Its Commentaries in the Tibetan Kagyü Tradition

VOLUME TWO

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The Abhisamayālaṃkāra and Its Commentaries

The *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* and its contents

The traditional origin of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* is first described in Haribhadra's *Ālokā*:

I have heard that, though noble Asaṅga understood all the meanings of the words [of the Buddha in general] and had gained realization, he was still not [able to] determine the meaning of the *prajñāpāramitā* [sūtras] because of their profundity, their numerous repetitions, and his not recognizing the precise significance of individual phrases in the nonrepetitious parts [of these sūtras]. He became depressed about this, upon which the Bhagavān Maitreya expounded the *prajñāpāramitā* sūtras and composed the verses of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* for his sake. After noble master Asaṅga had heard these [texts], he as well as Vasubandhu and further [masters] explained them [to others].¹⁵¹

As for the meaning of the text's title, the Sanskrit term *abhisamaya* is made up of the prefixes *abhi* (toward) and *sam* (together, fully), and the verbal root *i* (going, understanding), thus generally meaning "coming together," "reunion," "agreement," and "full understanding." In particular, as a Buddhist technical term, it refers to the clear realization of or perfect insight into the supreme spiritual reality, indicating the moments on the path when the meditating mind as the subject fully merges with its object and thus "everything falls into place." In fact, in the Indian and Tibetan commentaries, *abhisamaya* is often glossed as "path" (*mārga*). In Buddhism, this is meant to signify the mind as it progresses in its spiritual insights toward liberation from saṃsāra and buddhahood, with the main factor in this process being *prajñā*. The *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* explains the term as follows:

“What is the meaning of ‘clear realization’ (*abhisamaya*)?” It is clear and true perception (*abhisambodha*).¹⁵² “Why is it solely uncontaminated, but not contaminated?” It is the true (*saṃ/saṃyak*) realization (*aya*) that is directed toward (*abhi*) nirvāṇa, with “true” [referring] to true reality (*tattva*).¹⁵³

The *Yogācārabhūmi*¹⁵⁴ speaks of six clear realizations, which are explained in the *Viniścayasamgrahaṇī*¹⁵⁵ as follows. (1) The clear realization in terms of reflection has the nature of the great prajñā that arises from reflection and of the dharmas concordant with enlightenment that are endowed with such prajñā. (2) The clear realization in terms of confidence has the nature of the great mundane and supramundane confidence that focuses on the three jewels and of the dharmas concordant with enlightenment that are endowed with such confidence. (3) The clear realization in terms of ethics has the nature of the physical and verbal actions that delight the noble ones and of the dharmas concordant with enlightenment that are endowed with such actions. (4) The clear realization of reality that is the knowledge of clear realization has the nature of the prajñā that focuses on presentable reality¹⁵⁶ and of the dharmas concordant with enlightenment that are endowed with such prajñā. (5) The clear realization of reality that is the knowledge which arises from the culmination of clear realization has the nature of the prajñā that focuses on the unrepresentable reality and of the dharmas concordant with enlightenment that are endowed with such prajñā. (6) The final clear realization has the nature of the knowledge of termination and nonarising¹⁵⁷ and of the dharmas concordant with enlightenment that are endowed with such knowledge.

The *Abhidharmasamuccaya*¹⁵⁸ presents clear realization as tenfold in terms of (1) dharma, (2) meaning, (3) true reality, (4) being subsequent, (5) the three jewels, (6) nonbirth, (7) being final, (8) śrāvakas, (9) pratyekabuddhas, and (10) bodhisattvas. (1)–(4) and (7) respectively refer to the clear realizations on the five paths in general, with “the clear realization of true reality” consisting of the attainment of the sixteen mental moments of the path of seeing. The clear realizations of bodhisattvas are superior to those of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas by virtue of ten differences (explained in more detail in the *Mahāyānasamgraha*)¹⁵⁹ in terms of focal object (the dharmas of the mahāyāna versus those of the hīnayāna), support (the two accumulations of merit and wisdom as the six pāramitās), realization (both types of identitylessness), nonabiding nirvāṇa, the ten bhūmis, purity (relinquishing the latent tendencies of all afflictions and purifying buddha realms), an equal mind toward themselves and others (thus maturing others uninterruptedly), taking birth in the *tathāgatagoṭra*, the outcome of this (always being born into the retinues of buddhas and being mentored by them), and fruition

(infinite buddha qualities, such as the ten powers, the four fearlessnesses, and the eighteen unique qualities; the fundamental change of state of the ālaya-consciousness, attainment of the three kāyas, relinquishment of both afflictive and cognitive obscurations, and so on).

In brief, in general, “clear realization” is understood as either the Buddhist path as a whole, its progressive stages, the methods on the path, or the progressive levels of prajñā or superior insight. In particular, in the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, the term also refers to the eight topics of this text, which include the final fruition of the dharmakāya. Thus, according to some commentaries, it is used as a synonym for the text’s eight chapters.

Alaṃkāra means “ornament” and refers to a common genre of brief Indian commentary, which does not provide a detailed and comprehensive exegesis of a given subject matter, but just summarizes the most salient points, usually in verses. Metaphorically, here, the prajñāpāramitā sūtras are like a naturally beautiful woman whose looks are only further enhanced by the fine ornament of Maitreya’s synopsis. As the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* says:

Just as a physical form that is an ornament and endowed with
natural qualities,
Through being seen in a mirror, produces supreme delight in
people,
So this dharma, which is endowed with the natural qualities of
excellent words,
Always produces distinct satisfaction in the wise when its
meaning is discriminated.¹⁶⁰

As such an ornamental digest of the prajñāpāramitā sūtras, the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* is generally related to the three largest sūtras,¹⁶¹ but most clearly to the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra in Twenty-five Thousand Lines*, as the order of its topics corresponds the closest to the form in which they appear in this sūtra. Essentially, the AA is a giant table of contents for this large sūtra, while fitting each of its sections into its proper place within the progressive stages of the path to buddhahood. This is reflected in the structure of the AA, which consists of eight chapters or topics—“the eight clear realizations”—branching out into seventy points,¹⁶² which are further divided into about 1,200 subpoints. The eight topics are:

- (1) the knowledge of all aspects (*sarvākārajñatā*)
- (2) the knowledge of the path¹⁶³ (*mārgajñatā*)
- (3) the all-knowledge (*sarvajñatā*)
- (4) the full realization of all aspects (*sarvākārābhisambhoda*)
- (5) the culminating clear realization (*mūrdhābhisamaya*)

- (6) the serial clear realization (*ānupūrvikābhisamaya*)
- (7) the clear realization in a single instant (*ekakṣaṇābhisamaya*)
- (8) the dharmakāya¹⁶⁴

Among these eight topics, (1)–(3) represent what is to be known and realized on the path to buddhahood; (4)–(7) are the four kinds of trainings or yogic practices¹⁶⁵ as the means to realize (1)–(3); and (8) discusses the fruition of these trainings. The eight topics can also be summarized into six by taking (1)–(3) as the object of realization in general or three by additionally taking (4)–(7) as the training in general. The following is an outline of the contents of these eight topics and their seventy subpoints.

1) The knowledge of all aspects

The knowledge of all aspects refers to a buddha's realization of all aspects, signs, and characteristics of all phenomena being unborn. This means being omniscient about all aspects of the true nature of phenomena and the entire variety of seeming appearances. In itself, the knowledge of all aspects encompasses all the remaining seven topics of the AA. However, though the knowledge of all aspects is in essence nothing but the fruition of the bodhisattva path, the text presents it in retrospect, that is, through the ten sets of causes on the bodhisattva path that, when practically engaged in, eventually lead to the attainment of this knowledge and then also make up its intrinsic constituents.

The ten points that define the knowledge of all aspects

The AA's opening stanza pays homage to prajñāpāramitā as the mother of all four noble ones (śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha arhats, bodhisattvas, and buddhas). Verses I.1–2 identify the purpose of the text as realizing the meaning of prajñāpāramitā as taught in the sūtras in an easy way in order to attain buddhahood. There follows a brief synopsis of the entire text through outlining its eight topics and their seventy points (I.3–17).

The actual first chapter on the knowledge of all aspects starts with verses I.18–20 on (1) generating bodhicitta as the foundational motivation for the entire mahāyāna path. The progressive stages of cultivating bodhicitta are illustrated through twenty-two examples that show how it flourishes on the various levels of the path up through buddhahood.

(2) This is followed by the tenfold instructions (I.21–24) on how to practically apply this motivation of bodhicitta. These instructions consist of the nature of such practice (engaging in the union of profound and vast means and prajñā in a nonreferential manner by way of not going beyond the two realities); the focal object of practice (the four realities of the noble ones);¹⁶⁶

the foundation of practice (the three jewels); and the causes of consummate practice (three kinds of vigor, cultivating extrasensory powers to benefit beings, and the paths of seeing and familiarization). The subpoint of the three jewels includes a supplementary discussion of the twenty types of bodhisattva saṃgha as modeled on the different types of stream-enterers, once-returners, nonreturners, and arhats that are presented in the śrāvaka system.

(3) The path of preparation, called “the branches conducive to penetration” (I.25–36), represents both the first major fruition of having practiced the instructions under (2) and the cause of the path of seeing. It consists of the four levels of heat, peak, poised readiness, and supreme dharma, each one of which has three degrees. All twelve have their own specific focal objects and cognitive aspects under which the former are viewed, with the four realities and their sixteen aspects being the common basis for all of them. During these levels, four sets of nine conceptions¹⁶⁷ about the apprehended (in terms of afflicted and purified phenomena) and the apprehender (in terms of substantially and imputedly existent persons) are progressively relinquished. This section includes the supplementary topic of bodhisattvas being mentored by genuine spiritual friends of the mahāyāna, who are not afraid of profound emptiness and thus skillfully teach others the lack of nature of all phenomena and encourage them to abandon the obstacles in their minds to profound means and prajñā.

(4) The foundation of practice (I.37–39)—the “disposition” for buddhahood—refers to the single indivisible dharmadhātu as the basic ground within which all activities on the path, particularly those of the mahāyāna, take place.¹⁶⁸

(5) The focal object (I.40–41) or vast scope of mahāyāna practice consists of all phenomena, be they virtuous, nonvirtuous, neutral, mundane, supramundane, conditioned, or unconditioned.

(6) The aim of this practice (I.42) is represented by the three greatnesses—the great wisdom mind of a buddha that establishes all sentient beings in the highest state possible (buddhahood); the great relinquishment of all adventitious stains from this wisdom mind (all views in terms of personal and phenomenal identities); and the great realization of this wisdom’s fundamental nature. At the same time, these three greatnesses are taken as the means on the bodhisattva path to accomplish their ultimate consummation.

Finally, the actual nature of mahāyāna practice consists of the last four points of the knowledge of all aspects—armorlike practice, the practice of engagement, the practice of the equipments, and the practice of final deliverance. (7) In general, armorlike practice (I.43) refers to the cause of donning the great armor that primarily consists of the mental vigor to strive for the welfare of others through the basic motivation of the mahāyāna—bodhicitta.

In particular, this practice consists of engaging in the six pāramitās in such a way that the practice of each one of them includes the practice of all.

(8) Generally speaking, the ninefold practice of engagement (I.44–45) is primarily the application of the above mental vigor that is preceded by (7) as its cause. In particular, it includes the trainings in the dhyānas and formless absorptions; the four immeasurables;¹⁶⁹ the pāramitās; the path of the ten bhūmis; nonreferential prajñā; the above three greatneses; the supernatural knowledges; and the knowledge of all aspects.

(9) In general, the practice of the seventeen equipments (I.46–71) means to unrelentingly embrace the activities that make one attain the fruition of great enlightenment, that is, rendering the two accumulations powerful. In particular, one gathers the equipments of loving-kindness; the pāramitās; calm abiding with superior insight; the path of the union of the vast and the profound; skill in means; wisdom; merit; the twenty-one sets of the path (such as the thirty-seven dharma concordant with enlightenment); the four kinds of dhāraṇī; the ten bhūmis as the foundations of qualities; and the remedies to dispel flaws. The bulk of this discussion (I.48–70) consists of the factors that are necessary to achieve each one of the ten bhūmis.¹⁷⁰

(10) In general, the eightfold practice of final deliverance (I.72–73) delivers one from bhūmi to bhūmi and has the nature of the union of means and prajñā. In particular, it consists of the three greatneses by virtue of realizing that all phenomena are unobservable; realizing all phenomena as equality; accomplishing the infinite welfare of beings; effortlessness with regard to these; deliverance in terms of the extremes of permanence and extinction; the lasting attainment of all qualities of the three yānas; and deliverance in terms of the final paths of nonlearning (the knowledge of all aspects) and learning (the special path of the tenth bhūmi).

2) The knowledge of the path

The knowledge of the path means that, while bodhisattvas travel through the five paths of the mahāyāna and in particular through the ten bhūmis, they realize that all three types of paths—those of śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas—are primordially unborn and without any nature of their own. This knowledge also refers to all the activities performed on the bodhisattva path and primarily serves as the remedy for the cognitive obscurations, eventually resulting in the knowledge of all aspects.

The eleven points of the knowledge of the path

(1) There are five causes for the knowledge of the path to arise in the mind stream of a being (II.1). A mind free from afflictions (the conditions adverse to the arising of this knowledge) becomes a suitable support for this

knowledge (exemplified by the Buddha eclipsing the radiance of the gods through his own radiance in order to overcome their pride). The favorable condition for this knowledge to arise is the generation of bodhicitta. Its substantial cause is the disposition—buddha nature—that dwells in all sentient beings. The enhancing factor is to not relinquish the subtle afflictions that enable bodhisattvas to be willingly reborn in saṃsāra for the sake of accomplishing the welfare of others. The activity of the knowledge of such bodhisattvas consists of liberating sentient beings continuously without manifesting their own buddhahood.

As for the paths to be known through the knowledge that arises from these causes, they include (2) the paths of śrāvakas (II.2–5), (3) the path of pratyekabuddhas (II.6–10), and the mahāyāna path (II.11–31). The former two need to be known by bodhisattvas primarily in order to guide disciples with the dispositions of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas. However, unlike śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas cultivate the knowledge of these two paths not as their own actual path for their own welfare, but in a nonreferential manner by seeing the lack of nature of all the aspects of these paths.

The mahāyāna path as discussed in this context starts with (4) the path of seeing (II.11–16) with its sixteen moments of realizing the four realities in the mahāyāna way of primarily focusing on the emptiness of all their aspects. The actual nature of the meditative equipoise that is the path of seeing is just a single moment of clear realization of the dharmadhātu, but its sixteen moments are presented from the point of view of how this realization provides the power to eliminate certain kinds of superimpositions during the phase of subsequent attainment. This point includes the great benefits of this path in this and all following lifetimes.

The presentation of the mahāyāna path of familiarization begins with explaining (5) its function (II.17), which is its sixfold benefit, so that bodhisattvas become enthusiastic about this path.

The actual path of familiarization consists of its contaminated phase of subsequent attainment and its uncontaminated phase of meditative equipoise. The first one is represented by the following four activities outside of meditative equipoise from the second up through the tenth bhūmis, which still entail illusionlike conceptions and appearances. (6) Bodhisattvas aspire for prajñāpāramitā (II.18–19) in three ways, as her being endowed with the supreme qualities that consist of the welfare of themselves, others, and both. (7) The fruitions of such aspirations are that buddhas and bodhisattvas shower down praise, eulogy, and laudation (II.20) upon these bodhisattvas. The two supreme kinds of mental engagement during subsequent attainment consist of (8) the nonreferential dedication (II.21–23) for perfect buddhahood that renders all virtue inexhaustible and (9) rejoicing (II.24), which further increases virtue.

The uncontaminated path of familiarization represents the nonconceptual wisdom of the meditative equipoises from the second up through the tenth bhūmis. This path is discussed under two points. (10) The path of familiarization in terms of accomplishment (II.25) refers to the respective uninterrupted paths of these bhūmis and thus represents consummate realization. (11) The pure path of familiarization (II.26–31) refers to the respective paths of liberation of these bhūmis and thus represents consummate relinquishment.¹⁷¹

3) The knowledge of entities¹⁷²

Simply put, the knowledge of all entities refers to the full realizations of śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha arhats that serve as the remedy for the afflictive obscurations, being the knowledge that all entities—skandhas, dhātus, and āyatanas—are empty of a personal self. In the AA, however, the full scope of the knowledge of entities refers to the perspective of bodhisattvas (and buddhas), which includes their being fully aware of both the antagonistic factors and the remedies in the context of the knowledge of the path. This means that, from the perspective of the bodhisattva path, the above realizations of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas (their knowledge of the path) make up the antagonistic factors discussed here because these realizations still entail apprehending characteristics, while their remedies (the knowledge of the path of bodhisattvas) essentially consist of being free from apprehending any characteristics. Though the ways in which śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas gain their realizations are not to be cultivated by bodhisattvas and buddhas as something that leads to their own specific realizations on the path of the mahāyāna (and in fact are to be relinquished by them), they nevertheless need to know these ways in order to help and teach those on the paths of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas.

The nine points of the knowledge of entities

Unlike the knowledge of entities of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, the one pertaining to bodhisattvas dwells neither in (1) saṃsāra (by virtue of the prajñā of knowing the three times to be equality) nor in (2) inferior forms of nirvāṇa (by virtue of compassion for all sentient beings) (III.1).

Consequently (III.2), (3) the knowledge of entities of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas is distant from fruitional prajñāpāramitā due to their lack of skill in means in terms of relinquishing the cognitive obscurations, promoting the welfare of sentient beings, and relying on mahāyāna spiritual friends.

(4) On the other hand, the knowledge of entities of bodhisattvas is close to fruitional prajñāpāramitā due to being skilled in means in the above three respects.

As for the antagonistic factors and the remedies in terms of the knowledge of entities of bodhisattvas (III.3–7), (5) the former consist of the knowledge of entities of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas in that these cling to the real existence of the factors to be relinquished, their remedies on the path, and the fruition.

(6) The remedy for such clinging is the knowledge of entities of bodhisattvas, primarily because it realizes all phenomena in terms of ground, path, and fruition to be empty and without any nature.

(7) The actual training in engaging in the remedial knowledge of entities of bodhisattvas (III.8–10ab) consists of the trainings in nonreferential meditative equipoise that stop clinging to any characteristics in terms of view, meditation, conduct, fruition, subject, and object—which includes the clinging to one's not being attached to any of these.

(8) All these trainings need to be cultivated through realizing all their subjects and objects as being fourfold equality (III.10cd), which serves to eliminate obstacles. This fourfold equality refers to being free from any conceits in terms of clinging to phenomena as having a nature; the characteristics of phenomena; the reference points of “me” and “mine”; and realizing the ways things appear and how they actually are.

(9) The fruition of (7) and (8) is the path of seeing of bodhisattvas (III.11–15), whose sixteen wisdom moments relinquish the two sets of sixteen superimpositions by tīrthikas and śrāvakas, respectively, onto the four realities of the noble ones.

The third chapter concludes with a verse that summarizes the three knowledges (III.16).

4) The complete training in all aspects

The complete training in, or full realization of, all aspects refers to actually engaging in the practice of all the points of the three knowledges (1)–(3). It is the combined familiarization with all entities, all paths, and all aspects, including their respective knowledges, as being without nature in order to realize the three knowledges. The AA discusses the 173 aspects of all three knowledges in terms of practicing, realizing, and mastering them in their entirety.

The eleven points of the complete training in all aspects

(1) “All aspects” refer to that with which bodhisattvas must familiarize themselves—the 173 aspects of all three above knowledges (IV.1–5). Here, “aspects” refer to the particular instances of cognition or wisdom that focus on particular focal objects, which in this case means all the facets of the four realities of noble ones from the perspective of the mahāyāna, the various

stages of the bodhisattva path, and the qualities of the final fruition. In particular, the focusing on the four realities differs from the manner of doing so in the other *yānas* because it eliminates all extremes and reference points with regard to these four realities as entertained by non-Buddhists as well as by *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*. Thus, all these “aspects” are not aspects in terms of seeming reality (such as outer objects or impermanence), but represent aspects in terms of ultimate reality—they are nothing but the distinctive forms in which the mind that familiarizes with and realizes emptiness, the two kinds of identitylessness, the lack of arising of the three knowledges, and so on appears. In more detail, among these 173 aspects, the twenty-seven aspects in terms of the knowledge of entities and the thirty-six aspects in terms of the knowledge of the path represent the specific ways in which bodhisattvas focus on the four realities as the path. Among the 110 aspects of the knowledge of all aspects, the first set of thirty-seven consists of the *dharma*s concordant with enlightenment. The second set of thirty-four consists of various sets of *saṃādhis* (the three doors to liberation, the eight liberations, the nine meditative absorptions of progressive abiding, the four readinesses of the path of seeing) and the ten *pāramitās*. The final set of thirty-nine describes the nature and the qualities of buddhahood, such as the ten powers and the four fearlessnesses. The description of all these aspects is followed by two verses about the general characteristics of the persons who are suitable recipients for the teachings on *prajñāpāramitā* (IV.6–7).

(2) The nature of this training or the manner in which bodhisattvas familiarize with these aspects consists of the five natural and the fifteen situational trainings (IV.8–11). The former are practiced on an ongoing basis from the path of accumulation up through the end of the tenth *bhūmi*, while the latter are only engaged in during certain phases of the path.

The next four points refer to the preliminary factors of the actual trainings. (3) First, there are the fourteen distinct qualities (IV.12ab) that result from cultivating the above twenty trainings. These include vanquishing the power of *māras*, never being born in the unpleasant realms, firm *bodhicitta*, the ability to establish many beings in perfect enlightenment, and the promotion of their vast welfare.

(4) On the other hand, while being engaged in these trainings, bodhisattvas need to know and eliminate forty-six flaws (IV.12cd). These obstacles to properly familiarizing with and realizing *prajñāpāramitā* consist of three main groups—twenty flaws that depend on oneself (such as being distracted in various ways, misconceptions about *prajñāpāramitā*, and causes for abandoning the *maḥāyāna*), twenty-three flaws in terms of various ways in which teacher and student can be incompatible, and three flaws that depend on others (various activities of *māras*).

(5) The defining characteristics of the mahāyāna training in all aspects (IV.13–31) consist of (a) the characteristic of supreme knowledge in terms of each one of the three knowledges of bodhisattvas, which demonstrates the capacity of the mahāyāna training to produce the final realization of buddhahood. (b) The characteristic of supreme activity indicates the capacity of this training to accomplish the vast welfare of others. (c) The characteristic of distinctiveness shows that śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas do not possess such consummate capacities. (d) The characteristic of the nature of the training that possesses these distinctive features (a)–(c) is instantiated by sixteen aspects in terms of the three knowledges.

(6) The first temporary result of such training is the mahāyāna path of accumulation, which is called “the factors conducive to liberation” (IV.32–34). In general, it consists of gathering the accumulations and, in particular, of five faculties—the skill in the means to abide in signlessness through eliminating signs and characteristics by way of confidence in the three jewels; vigor with regard to the pāramitās; mindfulness of bodhicitta; nonconceptual samādhi; and the prajñā of knowing all aspects of phenomena. Classified in another way, the lesser, medium, and great levels of the path of accumulation are the four foundations of mindfulness, the four correct efforts, and the four limbs of miraculous powers.

(7) The next path is the path of preparation, which represents the factors conducive to penetration (IV.35–37). In this chapter, its four levels of heat up through the supreme dharma are taught from the perspective of the activities of bodhisattvas during subsequent attainment (in the chapter of the knowledge of all aspects, they were taught from the perspective of their realizations in meditative equipoise). Throughout these levels, the focal objects are all sentient beings, on whom one focuses through seeing oneself and all others as equal, refraining from evil, abiding in the pāramitās, maturing sentient beings, and so on. One also establishes others in such activities and rejoices in their doing so.

(8) The persons who cultivate the complete training in all aspects are the irreversible learning bodhisattvas (IV.38–59). Bodhisattvas of sharp faculties achieve twenty signs of being irreversible from eventually attaining buddhahood already on the path of preparation. Those of medium faculties attain sixteen signs of such irreversibility on the path of seeing, which consist of special expressions of physical and verbal conduct as the natural outflow of the realizations during the sixteen moments of this path. Those of duller faculties show eight signs of said irreversibility on the path of familiarization, which are this path’s profundity in terms of arising, ceasing, suchness, and so on.

(9) The training in realizing saṃsāra and nirvāṇa as equality (IV.60) consists of not conceptualizing these two in any way because all phenomena are equally empty and dreamlike. This training is the cause of the dharmakāya.

(10) The training in pure realms means to manifest one's own pure buddha realm, which consists of pure beings and a pure environment with unsurpassable qualities (IV.61). This training is the cause of the sambhogakāya.

(11) The tenfold training in skill in means (IV.62–63) matures others and is the cause of one's enlightened activity in this pure realm.

5) The culminating training

The culminating training, or culminating clear realization, represents the highest forms of familiarization with all entities, all paths, and all aspects as being without nature, which take place on the paths of preparation, seeing, and familiarization, respectively. In other words, it consists of the various levels of “breakthrough experiences” and their signs that manifest on the progressive paths of bodhisattvas as the results of their cultivating the complete training in all aspects.

The eight points of the culminating training

(1) The culminating training of the level of heat of the path of preparation (V.1) arises from the cause of having cultivated the complete training in all aspects on the path of accumulation. It is taught through the twelve signs during both the waking state and in dreams that signal its attainment.

(2) The culminating training of the level of peak (V.2) is taught by way of sixteen examples that demonstrate the increase in merit on this level in comparison with the level of heat. These examples show that bodhisattvas on the level of peak, through not being separated from the mental engagement of all phenomena as being dreamlike, engage in prajñāpāramitā and teach it to others, which is far more meritorious than the merits in any of these examples.

(3) The culminating training of poised readiness (V.3) is taught by way of the stability of not regressing into the paths of śrāvakas or pratyekabuddhas through never abandoning the three knowledges (by virtue of dedicating them to buddhahood) or the welfare of sentient beings.

(4) The culminating training of the supreme dharma (V.4) is taught by way of the immeasurable extent of the two accumulations of merit and wisdom that characterize the samādhi of continuously settling on the threefold lack of nature of the three knowledges.

(5) The culminating training of the path of seeing is discussed by starting with the four sets of the nine imputational conceptions about apprehender and apprehended that are the factors to be relinquished through seeing (V.5–16). The two sets of conceptions about the apprehended are in terms of the

objects that bodhisattvas regard as something to be engaged in (the paths and fruitions of the mahāyāna) versus the objects from which they need to withdraw (the paths and fruitions of the hīnayāna). Respectively, the two sets of the conceptions about the apprehender are in terms of ordinary beings taking persons to be substantially existent and noble beings taking them to be imputedly existent. This is followed by discussions of the causes of enlightenment (enlightenment being understood as the actual nature of the culminating training of the path of seeing), its nature, and the manner of familiarizing with it (V.17–21). Unlike the explicit explanations in the sūtras on the individual remedies for the implied four sets of conceptions, the AA explicitly discusses the latter, while their remedies are implied. Thus, the AA gives no details of the remedies, but only summarily refers to the uninterrupted path and the special path (called “the lion’s sport”) of the path of seeing (V.22–23).

(6) The culminating training of the path of familiarization is explained by starting with its special way of training in samādhi through alternating and skipping various meditative states, called “crossing in one leap” (V.24–25). Among the four sets of the nine innate conceptions about the apprehender and the apprehended to be relinquished through familiarization (V.26–34), the two sets of the conceptions about the apprehended are about what is to be engaged by bodhisattvas (the prajñāpāramitā teachings, their qualities, and the paths related to them) and what is to be rejected by them (not mentally engaging in and familiarizing with prajñāpāramitā or doing so in wrong ways). The two sets of the conceptions about the apprehender refer to imputations (mere persons) and the mere causes for such imputations (mere appearances). This section concludes with the limitless qualities that arise from the culminating training of the path of familiarization (V.35–36) and support the bodhisattvas on this level, enabling them to swiftly become buddhas.

(7) The culminating training of the final uninterrupted path of the path of familiarization (V.37–38) is the “vajralike samādhi” during the very last moment of the tenth bhūmi, which overcomes the most subtle obscurations (the last remainder of the ālaya-consciousness). Here, this training is equated with the knowledge of all aspects (which manifests immediately after it) and is described through its abundance of merit.

(8) Finally, this chapter speaks about sixteen mistaken notions in terms of the two realities seeming to be contradictory (V.39–42). These subtle qualms represent the specific factors to be relinquished during the vajralike samādhi and pertain to its focal object (the lack of entities), its dominant factor (the prajñā of mindfulness), and its aspect (all reference points and characteristics being at peace).

6) The serial training

As for the serial training in a general sense, it is a brief overview of the sequential nature of the entire path, emphasizing the progressive stabilization of momentary and culminating insights in terms of all the different aspects of the three knowledges. More specifically, it refers to being able to train in all these aspects together in a very swift sequential manner due to one's great familiarity with them.

The thirteen points of the serial training

This training is taught through (1)–(6) practicing the six pāramitās (VI.1a) in the manner of not observing the three spheres. This represents conduct (or the consummate training) in which merit is primary.

The six recollections (VI.1b) represent the path of the union of view and conduct (or the consummate way of thinking) and consist of recollecting the three jewels—(7) the Buddha (the aspects of the knowledge of all aspects), (8) virtuous, nonvirtuous, and neutral dharmas, and (9) the saṃgha of irreversible bodhisattvas; (10) ethics and (11) giving as the bases of the six pāramitās; and (12) taking the noble ones who appear as deities as one's witnesses on the path. The specific manner of familiarizing with all these recollections is to lack recollection and mental engagement.

(13) The training in realizing the nature of the lack of entity (VI.1c) represents the training in equality and the general view for all thirteen aspects of the serial training, which means to primarily familiarize with nonconceptual wisdom.

7) The instantaneous training

The instantaneous training, or the clear realization in a single instant, refers to a bodhisattva's simultaneous realization of all aspects of the three knowledges in the vajralike samādhi during the last moment of the tenth bhūmi, which is immediately followed by the attainment of buddhahood. This training is the natural culminating outflow of training (6), in particular due to having cultivated all the pāramitās in a sequential manner. In terms of its nature, the instantaneous training cannot be divided, but by way of its general characteristics, isolates, or distinct capacities, it is fourfold.

The four points of the instantaneous training

(1) The instantaneous training in terms of nonmaturation (VII.1–2) refers to being in the process of becoming free from the most subtle stains that are the impregnations of negative tendencies. This means that each uncontaminated phenomenon includes all other infinite uncontaminated phenomena.

Therefore, if a single one of them becomes free from these subtle stains, all uncontaminated phenomena will be free from them.

(2) The instantaneous training in terms of maturation (VII.3) refers to this very training being about to become buddha wisdom after being freed from the above impregnations. This means that, in a single instant, personally experienced wisdom dawns as the matured true nature of *prajñāpāramitā*, which overcomes even the most subtle stains. The inseparability of subject and object at this point represents the knowledge of all aspects.

(3) The instantaneous training in terms of the lack of characteristics (VII.4) means that, through dwelling in the insight that all phenomena arise in a dreamlike fashion, the knowledge of all aspects is manifested in one single instant of discovering the lack of characteristics of these dependently originating phenomena.

(4) The instantaneous training in terms of nonduality (VII.5) means that, upon awakening from sleeplike ignorance, phenomena are no longer seen as the duality of apprehender and apprehended. Thus, the true reality of the purity of nondual mind is seen in one single instant.

8) The dharmakāya

The last topic discusses the final fruition of the four trainings—buddhahood—as the three (or four) kāyas and their enlightened activity. The primary buddhakāya is the dharmakāya. In terms of its nature and purity, it is referred to as the *svābhāvikakāya*; in terms of its enjoyment of the dharma of the mahāyāna, as the *sāmbhogikakāya*; and in terms of its manifesting in all kinds of pure and impure forms in various realms, as the *nairmāṇikakāya*.

The four points of the dharmakāya

(1) The *svābhāvikakāya* (VIII.1–11) refers to twofold purity—the dharmadhātu being primordially pure and also having become free from all adventitious stains. This includes the attainment of the twenty-one sets of uncontaminated qualities, which account for a buddha's all-pervading and permanent activity for the vast and inexhaustible welfare of all sentient beings.

(2) The *sāmbhogikakāya* (VIII.12–32) is always endowed with the five certainties in terms of body, realm, retinue, teaching the mahāyāna, and time. In the AA, it is described through the thirty-two major and the eighty minor marks, including their causes on the path.

(3) The *nairmāṇikakāya* (VIII.33) is of three types—(a) artistic *nairmāṇikakāyas* (great artists, scientists, healers, and so on); (b) incarnate *nairmāṇikakāyas* (any animate or inanimate manifestations by buddhas for the welfare of beings); and (c) supreme *nairmāṇikakāyas* who display the twelve deeds of a buddha (such as Buddha Śākyamuni). Though all these

manifestations of the nairmānikakāya arise and cease in great variety, the continuum of their common activity represents an uninterrupted stream for as long as saṃsāra lasts.

(4) The effortless and nonconceptual enlightened activity of buddhahood (VIII.34–40) depends on the dominant condition of the wisdom dharmakāya. In brief, it consists of the twenty-seven aspects of establishing beings in the support of the path, the path itself, and the fruition of this path.¹⁷³

The last two verses of the AA respectively summarize the eight topics into six (taking the three knowledges as one point) and three (taking the three knowledges and the four trainings as one point, respectively).

In sum, the teachings on the three knowledges serve to cut through doubts about what is to be known and practiced, with the respectively higher ones among the three knowledges including the lower. They are taught in order to know what is to be made a living experience—that all entities (skandhas, dhātus, and āyanatas), paths, and aspects are unborn. The four trainings are the means to make the three knowledges a living experience, and the dharmakāya is taught as the outcome of these trainings.

In particular, the ten causes of the knowledge of all aspects in Chapter One are followed by the knowledge of the path since what bodhisattvas strive for through these ten causes depends on this second knowledge. The third knowledge, the knowledge of entities, is taught in order to recognize the concordant and discordant factors of the knowledge of the path. The complete training in all aspects represents the familiarization with all aspects of the three knowledges in order to clearly perceive them. The culminating training refers to familiarizing with them in such a way that they are clearly realized. The serial training is the familiarization in order to gain stability in this clear realization, and the instantaneous training means familiarization with all these aspects in a simultaneous way after having attained stability in their clear realization. The dharmakāya is the full and incontrovertible realization of all three knowledges. This represents the gradual order of topics (1)–(8), but each one of (1)–(6) also teaches the complete path in more or less great detail. Also, the commentaries usually say that the latter five topics are included in the first three.¹⁷⁴ Among the three knowledges, the knowledge of the path and the knowledge of entities are in turn included in the knowledge of all aspects. In this way, the first topic, which in itself already encompasses the entire teachings of the mahāyāna path, is of paramount importance and usually studied most thoroughly. In their briefest form, the three knowledges are contained in the AA's opening verse of homage to Prajñāpāramitā, which thus contains the subject matter of the entire text.



GONE BEYOND

The Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras,
The Ornament of Clear Realization,
and Its Commentaries in the Tibetan Kagyü Tradition

VOLUME TWO

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Karl Brunnhölzl

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The Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras

The three cycles of the Buddha's teachings

In the mahāyāna, particularly in the Tibetan tradition, the Buddha's teachings are usually divided into three cycles, called "the three turnings of the wheel of dharma." A dharma wheel is defined as "the teachings of the Buddha, consisting of both scriptures and realization, which eliminate the factors in the mind streams of the beings to be guided that obscure liberation from saṃsāra and a buddha's omniscience."³ The Eighth Karmapa's JNS defines the dharma of realization as "the reality of the purified phenomena that are produced by having become familiar with the mind that thoroughly discriminates phenomena." This consists of the two realities⁴ of cessation and the path. The first one means being free from contaminations by virtue of focusing on suchness. The second one refers to the uncontaminated path (the paths of seeing and familiarization)⁵ as the means to attain this cessation. The nature of the dharma wheel of the scriptures is defined as "the cognizance of a disciple that appears either in the form of a buddha's speech, whose main topics are either the causes, the results, or the nature of nirvāṇa, or, the cognizance that appears as the collections of names, words, and letters that serve as the support for such speech."⁶ Thus, it represents the understanding of a meaning through the recollection that is connected to certain designations. In other words, in dependence on the dominant condition that is a buddha's wisdom and the causal condition that consists of the relatively pure mind streams of certain beings to be guided, this wheel of dharma is nothing but the very mind of these beings that appears for them in the form of words and letters.⁷ Since buddhas have neither any latent tendencies that would give rise to some speech of theirs nor any ignorance of clinging to inner mind as being external sounds, ultimately, such a dharma wheel is not a teaching that results from the wish of a buddha to teach. This is why it is said in many sūtras and treatises that the Buddha never taught even a single syllable. For example, the sūtras say:

Śāntamati, between the night that the Tathāgata became a fully perfect buddha in unsurpassable utterly perfect enlightenment and the night that he will pass into complete nirvāṇa, the Tathāgata did not speak so much as a single syllable, nor will he speak any.

Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* states:

At no time did the Buddha teach
Any dharma to anybody.⁸

His *Nirāupamyastava* declares:

Nothing, not even a single syllable,
Has been uttered by you, O lord,
But every person to be guided
Has been satisfied by your rain of dharma.⁹

Thus, from the perspective of various disciples, it seems that the Buddha taught in many different ways according to their individual capacities and needs. Nāgārjuna's *Ratnāvalī* says:

Just as a grammarian
[Initially] teaches the alphabet,
The Buddha teaches the dharma
Just as those to be guided can absorb it.

To some, he teaches the dharma
In order to turn them away from evil;
To some, so that they accomplish merit;
To some, [the dharma] based on duality;
To some, [the dharma] based on nonduality;
To some, [the dharma that is] profound and frightening to the fearful;
And to some, the means for enlightenment
That is emptiness with a heart of compassion.¹⁰

As for the three wheels of dharma, there are various terminologies and classifications in different sūtras and treatises. The most well-known is found in the *Saṃdhinirmocanasūtra*, which says:

Initially, at the site of the antelope grove of Rṣivādāna near Vārāṇasī, the Bhagavān taught the four realities of the noble ones to those who had correctly entered the śrāvakayāna. Thus, he turned the wonderful and marvelous wheel of dharma. . . . This turning of the wheel of dharma by the Bhagavān is unsurpassable, and there is a possibility [for refutation]. It is of expedient meaning and a basis for debate.

Then, starting with the lack of a nature of phenomena, he [taught] that they lack arising and lack ceasing, that they are primordial peace and by nature perfect nirvāṇa. Thus, for those who had correctly entered the mahāyāna, in the form of speaking about emptiness, he turned the very wonderful and marvelous second wheel of dharma. This turning of the wheel of dharma by the Bhagavān is [also] unsurpassable, and there is a possibility [for refutation]. It is of expedient meaning and a basis for debate.

[Finally,] starting with the lack of a nature of phenomena, he [taught] that they lack arising and lack ceasing, that they are primordial peace and by nature perfect nirvāṇa. Thus, for those who had correctly entered all yānas, he turned the exceedingly wonderful and marvelous third wheel of dharma that is endowed with excellent and thorough distinction. This turning of the wheel of dharma by the Bhagavān is unsurpassable, and there is no chance [for refutation]. It is of definitive meaning and not a basis for debate.¹¹

Thus, this sūtra speaks of the first wheel that teaches the four realities of the noble ones; the second wheel that speaks about emptiness; and the third wheel that is endowed with the excellent distinction (between expedient and definitive meaning). Obviously, both the second and the third turnings are said here to teach on the lack of nature, nonarising, and so on. The Seventh Karmapa's JG¹² says that the difference lies in the second turning not further differentiating the lack of nature, while the third turning differentiates between three kinds of lack of nature, between existence and nonexistence, and between expedient and definitive meaning (thus, the last turning is considered as the definitive teaching here). The threefold lack of nature is clarified by the Buddha at the beginning of Chapter Seven of the sūtra:

“ . . . With what intention did the Bhagavān say, ‘All phenomena lack a nature of phenomena, all phenomena lack arising, lack ceasing, are primordial peace, and by nature perfect nirvāṇa? I ask the Bhagavān the meaning of this.’” The Bhagavān replied to bodhisattva Paramārthasamudgata, “ . . . it was with the intention of the

threefold lack of nature of phenomena—the lack of nature in terms of characteristics, the lack of nature in terms of arising, and the ultimate lack of nature—that I taught, ‘All phenomena lack a nature. . . .’¹³

As the sūtra explains further in detail, this threefold lack of nature refers to the imaginary nature, the other-dependent nature, and the perfect nature, respectively.

As for the presentation in the *Dhāraṇīśvararājaparipṛchāsūtra*, though it does not explicitly use the term “wheel of dharma,” it describes the process of cleansing an encrusted jewel in three stages with increasingly refined chemical solutions and cloths. This analogy serves to illustrate the progressively more advanced stages of the teachings of the Buddha:

Likewise, the Tathāgata knows the dispositions of very impure sentient beings and, through his discourses [that cause] revolution (such as on impermanence, suffering, identitylessness, and impurity), he produces weariness in those sentient beings who like saṃsāra. Thus, he introduces them to the noble dharma of the vinaya. [However,] the Tathāgata does not confine himself to this amount of effort. Thereafter, through speaking on emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness, he makes [those to be guided] realize the way of being of the Tathāgata. [However,] the Tathāgata does not confine himself to this amount of effort either. Through speaking on the wheel of irreversibility and the complete purity of the three spheres, he makes sentient beings with their causal [dispositions] of various nature engage in the object of the Tathāgata.¹⁴

Thus, this sūtra speaks of the discourses on renunciation; the discourses on emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness; and the discourses of irreversibility and the purity of the three spheres.¹⁵

Maitreya’s *Uttaratantra* refers to three similar phases of progressively guiding sentient beings—making samsaric beings enter the path to peace of śrāvakas¹⁶ and pratyekabuddhas;¹⁷ bringing śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas to maturation in the mahāyāna;¹⁸ and, on the eighth bhūmi, granting them the prophecy of supreme enlightenment.¹⁹

Āryadeva’s *Catuhśataka* says:

First, what is not meritorious is put to an end.

In the middle, [any kind of] identity is put to an end.

Finally, all views are put to an end.

Those who understand this are skilled.²⁰

As for the prajñāpāramitā sūtras, both the sūtras in eight thousand and twenty-five thousand lines, after having referred to the teaching on the four realities of the noble ones, identify their own teachings on emptiness as the second wheel of dharma:

Then, many thousand of sons of the gods residing in the sky above . . . showered down flowers of divine substances . . . and spoke the following words: “Oh, through the teachings of this prajñāpāramitā, many thousands of sons of the gods have attained poised readiness for the dharma of nonarising. We see the turning of the second wheel of dharma in jambudvīpa.”²¹

Not surprisingly for these sūtras, the Buddha answers that, precisely because of emptiness, there are no two wheels of dharma and such.

Thus, in general, among the three wheels of dharma, the first one teaches mainly the four realities of the noble ones; the second one speaks primarily about emptiness or the lack of characteristics; and the third one mainly distinguishes between the expedient and the definitive meaning in the Buddha’s teachings.²² In this order, the three wheels serve to generate renunciation toward saṃsāra, mature beings in the mahāyāna, and cause them to enter the ultimate sphere of all buddhas.²³

As for the ways of distinguishing in general which sūtras are of expedient and which are of definitive meaning, JG, JNS, and CE agree that the distinction as put forward in the *Akṣayamatīnīrdeśasūtra*, the *Samādhirājasūtra*, and other texts is to be followed. The *Akṣayamatīnīrdeśasūtra* says:

“What are sūtras of expedient meaning?” The sūtras that teach seeming reality are of expedient meaning. “What are sūtras of definitive meaning?” The sūtras that are taught in order to reveal ultimate reality are of definitive meaning. The sūtras in which manifold words and letters are used are of expedient meaning. The sūtras that speak about the profound that is difficult to see and difficult to realize are of definitive meaning. The sūtras that use a variety of terms and phrasings in a manner as if there were an owner where there is no owner, such as self, sentient being, soul, life-sustainer, individual, person, Manu-born,²⁴ son of Manu,²⁵ agent, or experiencer are of expedient meaning. The sūtras that teach emptiness, signlessness, wishlessness, nonapplication, nonorigination, nonarising, nonentity, no self, no sentient beings, no soul, no person, no owner up through the doors to complete liberation are of definitive meaning. Thus, rely on the sūtra collection

of definitive meaning, but do not rely on the sūtra collection of expedient meaning.²⁶

As for the particular distinction that describes which among the three turnings of the wheel of dharma are of expedient and which are of definitive meaning, JG, JNS, and CE present the various models as found in the *Samñhinimocanasūtra* and so on as well as those by Asaṅga and Nāgārjuna. The gist of their presentations is that all followers of the mahāyāna accept the first turning as being of expedient meaning, while the second and third ones are of definitive meaning. However, the difference is that the False Aspectarians deny that the second wheel represents the definitive meaning that is to be taken literally, whereas the Nīlsvabhāvavādins assert this to be the case.

CE concludes its discussion of this topic by making a further distinction in terms of eliminating superimpositions and reference points while establishing the view through study and reflection versus gaining direct experiences and realizations in meditation:

Here, the following needs to be understood. For the sake of persons in whom fear of [certain statements] in the middle wheel (such as, “[Phenomena] do not arise by a nature of their own”) arises, through clearly distinguishing existence and nonexistence in the last wheel, [the Buddha] said that “the perfect [nature]—the other-dependent empty of the imaginary—exists.” In this context, when one cuts through reference points with the view, the middle [wheel] comes to be of definitive meaning, and when one gains one’s experiences through meditation, it is the last one that comes to be of definitive meaning.²⁷

What is *prajñāpāramitā*?

In particular, the second turning of the wheel of dharma, which is said to have taken place on the Vulture Flock Mountain²⁸ near Rājagṛha, is called “the wheel of the lack of characteristics,” since it appears as the teachings on the true reality that is beyond speech, thought, and expression—that is, all phenomena form up through omniscience being utterly devoid of any intrinsic characteristics or nature of their own. In other words, this is known as the teachings on *prajñāpāramitā*. In general, in Buddhism, *prajñā* does not refer to some kind of passive knowledge or to merely knowing some facts. Rather, it stands for the vast range of actively investigating and realizing all the ways in which phenomena appear and the way they truly are. It means

intelligence in its original sense of being able to know or cognize,²⁹ which entails the capacity to clearly discriminate. Thus, the definition of *prajñā* is “that which fully discriminates the general and specific characteristics of phenomena.” This can be performed on the mundane or the supramundane level, the latter referring to the Buddhist path. Specifically, lesser supramundane *prajñā* refers to the *prajñā* on the paths of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, such as realizing the four realities of the noble ones and personal identitylessness. Great supramundane *prajñā* results from study, reflection, and meditation on the path of bodhisattvas, such as realizing that all phenomena are unarisen and empty of an inherent nature of their own. As the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* in *Seven Hundred Lines* says:

A son of good family or a daughter of good family who wishes to realize [everything] up through all phenomena being unarisen should train in this *prajñāpāramitā* in the manner of nonobserving.³⁰

Atīśa’s *Bodhipathapradīpa* states:

Prajñā is comprehensively explained
As that which realizes that skandhas,
Dhātus, and āyatanas are unborn
And empty of a nature of their own.³¹

Thus, *prajñāpāramitā* means the perfection of such *prajñā* since it is the most supreme among all *prajñās*, focuses on ultimate reality, and causes one to proceed to the nonabiding nirvāṇa. Thus, it refers to the great supramundane *prajñā*, which is the primary mental factor that actively engages in and engages the progressive path of insight into the nature of all phenomena, thus leading to and finally manifesting as the wisdom of a buddha that is beyond both saṃsāra and the limited personal nirvāṇa of arhats.³² In this sense, it is used both in a fruitional sense (the highest wisdom of a buddha) and as referring to the main element of the path that leads there. The “transcendent” quality of *prajñāpāramitā* is especially highlighted in the more creative, but widely used, hermeneutical etymology of *pāramitā* as “having gone beyond or to the other shore” (reflected in the Tibetan *pha rol tu phyin pa*).³³ During this process of going beyond both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, on the first two of the five paths of the mahāyāna (the path of accumulation and the path of preparation),³⁴ the *prajñā* that arises from meditation is still somewhat conceptual, though its conceptuality becomes increasingly refined and subtle (according to JNS, on the path of preparation it is nonconceptual self-awareness).

During the meditative equipoises of the paths of seeing and familiarization, this *prajñā* consists exclusively of nonconceptual yogic cognition since it directly realizes the nature of all phenomena without any mental reference points. During the phases of subsequent attainment³⁵ on these paths, however, there are still subtle traces of conceptuality in *bodhisattvas*, whereas there is no such difference in the omniscience of a *buddha* on the path of no more learning. Such omniscient wisdom is always nonconceptual and free from reference points since it is the constant and panoramic awareness of the nature of all phenomena and does not involve any shift between meditative equipoise and subsequent attainment. This *prajñā* of a *buddha* and the *prajñā* of *bodhisattvas* during their meditative equipoises on the *bhūmis* are called wisdom or *prajñāpāramitā* in the strict sense.³⁶

In a general way, *prajñā* can be said to be the basic inquisitiveness and curiosity of our mind, which is very precise and playful at the same time. Iconographically it is often depicted as a double-bladed, flaming sword, which is extremely sharp. Such a sword obviously should be handled with great care, and may even seem somewhat threatening. *Prajñā* is indeed threatening to our ego and to our cherished belief systems since it undermines our very notion of reality and the reference points upon which we build our world. Thus, it is what questions who we are and what we perceive. Since this sword cuts both ways, it not only serves to slice up our very solid-looking objective reality, but it also cuts through the subjective experienter of such a reality. In this way, it is also that which makes us see through our own ego trips and self-inflation. It takes some effort to continuously fool ourselves about ourselves. *Prajñā* means being found out by ourselves, which first of all requires taking an honest look at the games we play. If we keep inflating ourselves, *prajñā* is what punctures the balloon of ego and brings us back to where we are.

Thus, *prajñā* cuts not only through delusion but also through any tricky attempt by our ego to take credit for being on the path of a *bodhisattva* or the like. As the *prajñāpāramitā* sūtras never tire to emphasize, any colorful fancies of personalized spiritual attainments must be seen through and recognized to be as groundless as everything else. As the *prajñāpāramitā* sūtras say not only about form and emptiness:

The path is emptiness. Emptiness is the path. Emptiness is no other than the path. The path is no other than emptiness.

This spotlight quality of *prajñā* is symbolized by the flames on the sword illuminating our blind spots. There is a sense of no escape. We cannot hide from ourselves or pretend to be unaware of what is going on in our mind. In this way, *prajñā* also functions as the direct antidote to the more active tendencies

of our ignorance, which does not want to look too closely at ourselves and what we do. Often, we think that knowledge means to come up with all the right answers, but *prajñā* is more like asking all the right questions. Often the question is the answer, or much better than any answer. Trying to get all the right answers down may just create more reference points in our mind and thus more rigidity and problems. Also, often one answer produces ten new questions. To let *prajñā* unfold in a natural way means to give our basic inquisitiveness more space for its natural acute freshness. The teachings on *prajñāpāramitā* are a clear message to not restrict *prajñā* to merely rearranging or expanding our web of dualistic categories. Thus, the *prajñāpāramitā* sūtras say:

If you think, “I cultivate *prajñā*,” “*Prajñā* is this,” or “It is for the sake of such and such,” this may well be *prajñā*, but it is not *prajñāpāramitā*.

Iconographically, *prajñāpāramitā* is represented as a female deity. She is yellow in color, sits in a cross-legged position, and has four arms, with her first left hand holding a text, her first right hand raising a flaming sword, and the remaining two being in the gesture of meditation. Together, these represent the three types of *prajñā*: knowledge through study, cutting through and illuminating delusion, and direct realization of the true nature of all phenomena. These are also called the *prajñās* resulting from study, reflection, and meditation.³⁷

Since *prajñāpāramitā* stands for directly encountering ultimate reality, it is the main highway to liberation and omniscience. Therefore, to be immersed in it is explained to be the supreme of all practices and realizations. This is why its qualities as well as its profound and far-reaching impact on our minds cannot be overestimated and are repeatedly praised in the scriptures. They declare that to rest for a single moment within *prajñāpāramitā* is of far greater merit than—and in fact includes—all other *pāramitās*, such as generosity. As the *Vajrasamādhiharmasūtra*³⁸ says:

If one does not move away from emptiness,
The six *pāramitās* are assembled.

The *Brahmāviśeṣacintipariprcchāsūtra*³⁹ declares:

Not reflecting is generosity.
Not abiding in any difference is ethics.
Not making any distinctions is patience.

Not adopting or rejecting anything is vigor.

Not being attached is samādhi.

Not conceptualizing is prajñā.

Likewise, it is stated that dwelling in prajñāpāramitā is far superior to any studies, reflections, or other meditations on the dharma, even if these are performed for many eons. It is also the supreme way of making offerings, taking refuge in the three jewels, generating bodhicitta, and purifying all negativities. Both the sūtras and treatises such as the AA describe many signs that indicate increasing familiarity and ease with prajñāpāramitā. In brief, one is able to see much more clearly in any given situation and to deal more carefully and compassionately with both oneself and others. One mindfully engages in virtuous actions, afflictions become weaker, the dharma is practiced wholeheartedly, and distractions are relinquished. Clinging in general is reduced, particularly the attachment to this life.

In more technical terms, prajñāpāramitā is glossed in the *Prajñāpāramitā-nāmaśāstakā*⁴⁰ (an enumeration of 108 synonyms of prajñāpāramitā) as omniscient wisdom, suchness, true reality, nonduality, emptiness, mother⁴¹ of all buddhas, the single taste of all dharma, and so forth. The opening verse of Dignāga's *Prajñāpāramitārthasamgraha* describes prajñāpāramitā as follows:

Prajñāpāramitā is nondual wisdom,

Which is the Tathāgata.

By virtue of being connected to this actuality to be accomplished,

It is [also] the term for both the [related] scriptures and the path.⁴²

Accordingly, the commentaries on the prajñāpāramitā sūtras and the AA usually classify prajñāpāramitā as

- (1) natural prajñāpāramitā
- (2) scriptural prajñāpāramitā
- (3) the prajñāpāramitā of the path
- (4) fruitional prajñāpāramitā.

The Eighth Karmapa, Milky Dorje's (1507–1554) commentary on the AA (JNS)⁴³ defines (1) *natural* or *actual prajñāpāramitā* as “suchness, which is never something other and bears the name ‘wisdom that lacks the duality of apprehender and apprehended.’” When this suchness is obscured by various conditioned formational elements, it is given the name “the basic element that is the sugata heart.” Once this very Heart has become free from all its fetters (the imprecipitations of negative tendencies), it represents (4) the *fruitional prajñāpāramitā*—the wisdom of a tathāgata, which is inseparable from the

svābhāvikakāya. This fruition to be accomplished is also taught as being the dharmakāya.⁴⁴

(2) The *scriptural prajñāpāramitā*, which teaches this meaning, is “the cognizance that appears as assemblies of names, words, and letters, and is suitable to be observed in the disciples’ consciousnesses that entail dualistic appearances.” This primarily consists of the sūtras called “the six mothers and the eleven children” (see below) as well as the treatises that comment on their intention.

(3) The *prajñāpāramitā of the path* is “the prajñāpāramitā that arises as the nature of nonconceptual wisdom when resting in meditative equipoise.”⁴⁵

As for the issue regarding which of these aspects of prajñāpāramitā are the actual prajñāpāramitā and which ones are just nominal, Haribhadra's *Abhisamayālaṃkārālokā* says:

The illusionlike nondual wisdom of a buddha bhagavān is the actual [prajñāpāramitā]. By virtue of being concordant with attaining this, the scriptures (collections of words and sentences) and the paths that have the characteristics of seeing and so forth are also called “prajñāpāramitā,” [but] this is nominal. As master Dignāga says:

Prajñāpāramitā is nondual wisdom, . . .⁴⁶

Quoting the above verse from Dignāga's *Prajñāpāramitārthasamgraha*, Ngog Lotsāwa's *Summary* agrees:

The actual reality [of prajñāpāramitā] is the nonconceptual wisdom of a buddha. The nominal ones are all the paths [that lead] to that and the words of the victor—the scriptures that express both this fruition and the paths.⁴⁷

Based on JG, JNS makes the following distinction between actual and nominal kinds of prajñāpāramitā:

As far as the position of the mighty victor, [Karmapa] Chötra Gyatso,⁴⁸ and his disciples is concerned, on the buddhabhūmi, the natural, the scriptural, and the path [prajñāpāramitās] are all three the actual prajñāpāramitā. On this level, the scriptural and path prajñāpāramitās are undifferentiable from the natural prajñāpāramitā. [The Karmapa] teaches that the scriptural and the path prajñāpāramitās during the time of the path are fully qualified [as prajñāpāramitā], but are not the completely perfect scriptural

and path prajñāpāramitās [of the buddhabhūmi]. As for the natural prajñāpāramitā that fulfills this function, there is no difference in its [always and unchangingly] being the actual prajñāpāramitā during any phase of learning and nonlearning whatsoever. [However,] in terms of the definitive meaning, the scriptural prajñāpāramitā that appears as other-dependent cognition is presented as only a nominal prajñāpāramitā.⁴⁹

Sometimes, the texts also speak of a mere “reflection of prajñāpāramitā,” which refers to the wisdoms of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas. It is called a reflection because, through training in it, one does not attain the nonabiding great nirvāṇa of the mahāyāna, which is entirely beyond both saṃsāra and the limited form of nirvāṇa that is just one’s own personal state of mental peace.

The prajñāpāramitā sūtras and their contents

As for the scriptural prajñāpāramitā, the Buddhist mahāyāna tradition holds that the prajñāpāramitā sūtras were directly taught by Buddha Śākyamuni.⁵⁰ However, due to not being valued enough among the early Buddhists after the Buddha’s parinirvāṇa, they disappeared from the earth for about four centuries. They are said to have been hidden away by nāgas in the depth of the ocean until Nāgārjuna retrieved these texts from them. The early Tibetan tradition has it that there exist several extensive versions of the prajñāpāramitā sūtras, such as the sūtra in one billion lines⁵¹ in the realm of the gandharvas,⁵² the sūtra in ten million lines in the god realms, and the sūtra in one hundred thousand lines in the realm of the nāgas (the one retrieved by Nāgārjuna).⁵³ However, the most commonly known prajñāpāramitā sūtras in the human realm are called “the six mothers” and “the eleven children” (with the former being said to contain all eight topics as presented in the AA, while the latter do not).⁵⁴ “The six mothers” are the prajñāpāramitā sūtras in:

- one hundred thousand lines⁵⁵
- twenty-five thousand lines⁵⁶
- eighteen thousand lines⁵⁷
- ten thousand lines⁵⁸
- eight thousand lines⁵⁹
- and the *Prajñāpāramitāsaṃcayagāthā*.⁶⁰

“The eleven children” are the following:

- Suvikīrṇatavakīrṇapariṣcchāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*⁶¹
- Prajñāpāramitāsūtra in Seven Hundred Lines*⁶²
- Prajñāpāramitāsūtra in Five Hundred Lines*⁶³

- Prajñāpāramitāsūtra in Three Hundred Lines*⁶⁴
- Prajñāpāramitāsūtra in One Hundred and Fifty Modes*⁶⁵
- Prajñāpāramitāsūtra in Fifty Lines*⁶⁶
- Kauśikaprajñāpāramitāsūtra*⁶⁷
- Prajñāpāramitāsūtra of the Twenty-five Gates*⁶⁸
- The Sūtra of the Heart of Prajñāpāramitā*⁶⁹
- Prajñāpāramitāsūtra in a Few Words*⁷⁰
- Prajñāpāramitāsūtra in One Syllable*.⁷¹

The twenty-one volumes of the prajñāpāramitā section in the Tibetan *Kangyur* (Derge and Narthang)—making up about a fifth of the entire collection—contain a total of twenty-three prajñāpāramitā sūtras. These consist of the above seventeen, the *Prajñāpāramitānāmāśāstakā*, and the five sūtras taught for Śūryagarbha, Candragarbha, Samantabhadra, Vajrapāṇi, and Vajraketu, respectively.⁷²

Traditionally, the prajñāpāramitā sūtras are said to be taught by way of “the three approaches” and “the eleven instructional specifications.” The three approaches are (1) the approach of the concise teaching for those who understand through concise statements; (2) the approach of the intermediate teaching for those who understand through slight elaboration; and (3) the approach of the detailed explanation for those who are very fond of words. According to the *Āloka*⁷³ and other commentaries, in terms of the actual scriptures these three approaches refer to the three prajñāpāramitā sūtras in eight thousand lines, twenty-five thousand lines, and one hundred thousand lines, respectively.⁷⁴ The eleven instructional specifications refer to the different teachings in the form of dialogues between the Buddha and several of his close disciples in the various chapters of the prajñāpāramitā sūtras. In these dialogues, the Buddha’s interlocutors are Śāriputra (dialogue 1); Subhūti (dialogues 2, 4, 6, 8, 10); Śakra⁷⁵ (3, 7); Maitreya (5, 9); and Ānanda (11).⁷⁶

As for the primary subject matter of the prajñāpāramitā sūtras, what they teach explicitly is the actual nature of emptiness, which is explained through various formats such as the three doors to liberation.⁷⁷ Through teaching emptiness, implicitly the Buddha also explained the hidden meaning⁷⁸ of these sūtras—the eight topics of clear realization—as the means to fully realize this emptiness in meditation.⁷⁹ Thus, the hidden meaning refers to the way in which the clear realization of emptiness arises successively in the mind streams of disciples during the process of cultivating the increasingly subtler stages of conceptual and direct insight into the true nature of all phenomena. In other words, the teachings on emptiness—as also explained in detail in the Madhyamaka texts—address the object to be realized. The hidden meaning—as commented on in the AA and its subcommentaries—refers to what

happens on the subjective side, that is, the mind of a bodhisattva who meditates on emptiness, attempting to make it a living experience from the stage of a beginner up through buddhahood. Ultimately, there is no difference between these two aspects of subject and object. However, in terms of cultivating the realization of this unity of the ultimate subject and object on the path, the sūtras also lay out the gradual subjective process of realizing emptiness, that is, how *prajñā* is perfected in the mind. This is why the texts always refer to “the perfection (pāramitā) of *prajñā*”—they never say “the perfection of emptiness” or “the perfection of the nature of phenomena.” Of course, by definition, there is nothing to be perfected in emptiness or the true nature of phenomena anyway, but there is a lot to be perfected in our awareness of this nature. Thus, *prajñāpāramitā* means perfecting not the ultimate object to be realized but the realization of this object.

Besides these explicit and implicit teachings on emptiness and the path, respectively, the *prajñāpāramitā* sūtras also exhibit a very distinct and strongly voiced contrast to the approaches of śrāvakas and *pratyekabuddhas* in general, and abhidharmic scholasticism in particular. Typically, Śāriputra, who is the wisest of the Buddha’s most senior disciples among the śrāvakas, is constantly depicted as someone who cannot grasp *prajñāpāramitā* and is subordinated to more realized bodhisattvas. Thus, the fact that the Sthavira Subhūti (another śrāvaka) is the Buddha’s main interlocutor in these sūtras and even teaches on *prajñāpāramitā* is typically explained by him having been empowered or blessed by the Buddha since *prajñāpāramitā* is outside the sphere of regular śrāvakas and *pratyekabuddhas*. Also, though the sūtras employ many of the (overly reifying and ramifying) default lists of phenomena in the abhidharma tradition, at the same time, they reduce them to dust through declaring them to be without any nature—null and void. This includes such Buddhist hallmarks as the five skandhas, karmic causes and results, the four realities of the noble ones, and nirvāṇa. Conze summarizes the distinction between the mahāyāna approach of these sūtras and the “hīnayāna”⁸⁰ in five main points:

- 1) The ideals, aims and career of a *Bodhisattva* are opposed to those of the *Arhat* and *Pratyekabuddha*.
- 2) The *perfection of wisdom* is contrasted with the *wisdom* of the old schools.
- 3) The Abhidharmists were constantly occupied in “reviewing” dharmas. By contrast it is said often that one “should not review dharmas”. The Abhidharmists were probably too self-conscious of what they were doing, and presumably not without some touch of self-centered pride.
- 4) The Abhidharmists acquired great skill in reviewing the *rise and fall* of dharmas. Here they are taught that there is no such thing because of the *nonproduction* of all dharmas.
- 5) A

multiplicity of separate dharmas was considered to constitute the ultimate reality. Here it is taught that a) there is no such multiplicity because all is one; b) there are no separate dharmas, but what appears to be so are mere words.⁸¹

Paths and bhūmis

In terms of the hidden meaning of the *prajñāpāramitā* sūtras, during what is experienced on the mental path of refining and uncovering *prajñāpāramitā*, in itself, this *prajñā* is completely beyond all reification,⁸² inconceivable and inexpressible, yet its realization is to be cultivated progressively. Traditionally, such experiences and realizations are discussed in the technical framework of “paths and bhūmis.” In Buddhism, “paths” and “bhūmis” primarily refer to the inner spiritual development of the mind (“mind” is sometimes even given as a synonym for “path”). In other words, this refers to the continuum of cultivating, and familiarizing with, certain states of mind and insights in many different ways from the levels of a beginner up through perfect buddhahood, which entails increasingly positive and powerful mental qualities. This is exactly what the AA discusses at length. The Sanskrit word *mārga* for “path” derives from the verbal root *mārg* (to seek for; to strive after; to trace out; to go or move) and has a wide range of meanings, such as (right) way, path, passage, course, channel; range; search, inquiry; manner, method, style; practice; and hinting at or indicating how something is to happen. TOK defines and classifies “path” as follows:

The nature of the path on which one is to progress is that which, once one has entered it, serves as a stepping stone for progressing towards more superior mundane or supramundane states. . . . In general, the extensive classifications of paths are limitless—the three paths of the three yānas; the two paths to higher states and liberation, or, higher realms and definite excellence, or, mundane and supramundane paths; the two paths that are contaminated and uncontaminated. . . . a fourfold [classification of] paths, such as the preparatory [path, the uninterrupted path, the path of liberation, and the special path],⁸³ [another] fourfold classification of paths in terms of being swift, slow, difficult, and easy; the two paths of learning and no more learning; and the two paths of meditative equipoise and subsequent attainment. There are many different contextual categories of classifications such as these, but the most well-known general outline of all supramundane paths is known as the five paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, familiarization, and nonlearning.⁸⁴

As for the bhūmis, texts such as the *Ālokā* say that they “refer to the principle of being foundations for qualities.”⁸⁵ Employing the traditional Sanskrit hermeneutical etymologies as found in the *Mahāvānasūtrāṅkāra*, TOK elaborates on this as follows:

“The bhūmis of a fully perfect buddha” refer to the familiarization with the two identitylessnesses and the samādhi of emptiness—the nature of all phenomena. These are the ten bhūmis of the mahāyāna. . . . The nature of a bhūmi consists of the prajñā in the mind streams of bodhisattvas (from the first generation of bodhicitta up through complete enlightenment) that realizes identitylessness and is accompanied by the congruent factor of samādhi. This serves as the support or basis for the progressive further arising of special qualities. . . . Its instances consist of the knowledge in the mind streams of learning bodhisattvas, that is, their [respective] wisdoms and their congruently associated factors that are embraced by special means and function as the support for special qualities. . . . Why are these called bhūmis? The *Mahāvānasūtrāṅkāra* says:

Because of delighting in various accomplishments of virtue, [Bodhisattvas] dwell [on them] always and everywhere. Therefore, the bodhisattvabhūmis are asserted as abodes.⁸⁶

Accordingly, just like the great earth, they function as the bases, abodes, or supports for all qualities. Therefore, they are called “bhūmis.” Alternatively, the *Mahāvānasūtrāṅkāra* states:

Since [bodhisattvas] apply themselves to ascend higher and higher On these immeasurable [abodes] For the sake of innumerable beings becoming fearless, They are asserted as bhūmis.⁸⁷

The [Sanskrit] equivalent for “ground” is “bhūmi.” Through the certainties [that derive from] eliding or adding [certain] syllables, the general hermeneutical etymologies of “ground” are as follows. *Bhū*, [when interpreted as] *bhūta*, [means] “element”—just as the great element [earth], [the bhūmis] function as supports for the assemblies of qualities. *Mi*, [when interpreted as] *amīta*, [means] “immeasurable”—they are attained through immeasurable hardships. Or *bhū* [can be interpreted as] *abhaya*, [which means]

“fearless”—once the bhūmis are attained, one is free from the five fears and so on.⁸⁸ Furthermore, *bhū* [can be understood as] *bhūya*, [which means] “higher and higher.” Thus, by relying on the [respective] lower ones, [the bhūmis] function as supports for progressing further and increasingly higher. For all these reasons, they are called “bhūmis.” In brief, since they, similar to the ground of the earth, function as supports for qualities, they are designated as “bhūmis.”

When the bhūmis are classified in a merely common way, [there are] four [ways to do so]. . . . The first one [in terms of beings and noble ones] . . . has two parts:

- a) The bhūmis of ordinary mundane beings
- b) The supramundane bhūmis.

a) The definition of the first is “that which functions as the support for the qualities of engaging in the attributes of the noble ones.” Their instances are suitably classified as two—the bhūmi of beginners and the bhūmi of engagement through aspiration.⁸⁹ The first one consists of the phase of the path of accumulation, which starts with the awakening of the disposition for the mahāyāna and the first generation of bodhicitta, since this represents the maturation of one’s immature mind stream. The latter one is the phase of the path of preparation since it represents a mere cultivation of aspiring for the actuality of emptiness.

b) The definition of a supramundane bhūmi is “that which functions as the support for the special qualities of the noble ones.” Its instances consist of the phases from the path of seeing up through the path of completion. Because these [paths] are what make one familiar with and accustomed to the samādhi of the uncontaminated wisdom of true reality that is directly realized on the first bhūmi. . . .

Secondly, the classification in terms of the manner of attainment is fourfold. The engagement through mainly cultivating the aspiration for the dharma is called “the bhūmi that is attained through aspiration.” The engagement in the ten dharma activities as one wishes is “the bhūmi that is attained through conduct.” The direct realization of the nature of phenomena on the first bhūmi and above is “the bhūmi that is attained through realization.” In particular, on the eighth bhūmi and above, there is effortless and spontaneous engagement. Therefore, this is “the bhūmi that is attained [through] accomplishment” since this is stated in *Mahāvānasūtrāṅkāra* [XX.41].⁹⁰

Apart from these more technical aspects, in terms of actually experiencing *prajñāpāramitā*, the whole point of the progressive and profound realizations on paths and grounds is to become friends with the basic groundlessness of one's existence and the notion of no-path. This principle applies not only to *samsāric*, or afflicted, phenomena, but also to *nirvāṇic*, or purified, phenomena, such as any and all experiences, realizations, and conduct on all the paths of *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and *bodhisattvas* as well as the ultimate fruition of omniscient buddhahood.

Both the explicit and the implicit subject matter of the *prajñāpāramitā sūtras*—emptiness and the path of realizing it—are aptly summarized by Edward Conze:

The thousands of lines of the *Prajñāpāramitā* can be summed up in the following two sentences: 1) One should become a *Bodhisattva* (or, *Buddha-to-be*), i.e. one who is content with nothing less than all-knowledge attained through the perfection of wisdom for the sake of all beings. 2) There is no such thing as a *Bodhisattva*, or as all-knowledge, or as a 'being', or as the perfection of wisdom, or as an attainment. To accept both these contradictory facts is to be perfect.⁹¹

Or, as Sparham puts it:

According to Hari, the message of the *Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras* is that the entire path and its result operate on a covering level (*samvṛti*) made up of illusory mind, while below, as it were, at an ultimate level, they are empty of any essential nature.⁹²

Verse 72 of Nāgārjuna's *Bodhisambhāra* simply says:

Bodhisattvas benefit sentient beings,
But do not see any sentient beings.
This is indeed a very difficult point,
Superb and ungraspable.

In terms of the actual practice on the path of a *bodhisattva*, however, it is not simply a matter of "accepting contradictory facts." Rather, this path means to gain an increasingly thorough understanding of each of these two realities—seeming and ultimate—and eventually realize that they are not two separate levels of existence, but the different outlooks of the confused dualistic minds of ordinary beings versus the nonreferential wisdom minds of those who

directly experience how things really are, with the former eventually dissolving within the latter as one progresses on the path. From this perspective, what may seem to be contradictory is seen to be so not at all. This is called realizing the union of the two realities, or the union of *prajñā* and skillful means (*upāya*).⁹³ Buswell and Gimello say:

How is it that deliberate spiritual disciplines can be effective given the inherent emptiness that must mark them all? How can obedience to the precepts, scriptural study, asceticism, calming of the mind and body, exercise of analytical insight, and so on collaborate to sustain a coherent course of spiritual development? How can they lead consistently to a single end? Were one to focus only on the cognitive message of Buddhism, the message of metaphysical indeterminacy, such efficacy would be inexplicable, perhaps even unlikely. But since Buddhists teach *mārga* as insistently as they teach *śūnyatā*, we have good reason to believe that the practical principles of structure, continuity, and efficacy implicit in the one are as important as the theoretical principles of indeterminacy, discontinuity, and structurelessness in the other.⁹⁴

Especially according to the *prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, in actual fact all afflictions and obscurations as well as their remedies are alike in being completely unreal and without any nature of their own—they never even came into being in the first place. Nevertheless, until this is fully realized and made a living experience, the path consists of applying progressively refined antidotes to progressively subtle obscurations in an illusionlike manner, but eventually one has to let go of even the most refined antidote, once its job of seemingly having eliminated its corresponding factor to be relinquished has been accomplished. From the perspective of the true and unchanging nature of phenomena, anything that appears as either something to be relinquished or a remedy is nothing but an adventitious illusory obscuration. However, from the perspective of the path, one needs to work on recognizing precisely this fact. As the famous female Chinese Buddhist ancestor Kongshi Daoren wrote in a poem on the wall of a bathhouse:

If nothing truly exists, what are you bathing? Where could even the slightest bit of dust come from? . . . Even if you see no difference between the water and the dirt, it all must be washed away completely, when you enter here.

gloss over with theoretical descriptions the actual tribulations that spiritual development will demand.²⁹⁴

Also the AA starts with the fruition—the knowledge of all aspects—and it is this topic that pervades and determines all others in the text in a top-to-bottom manner. There are no indications or descriptions of personal experiences or difficulties on the spiritual journey, but only generalized templates and recurring fixed sets of elements of the path (many of which are based on or the same as in the abhidharma). Thus, the AA may be considered as a kind of highly formalized mahāyāna abhidharma presentation of the path and realization (similar to Chapters Five to Eight of the *Abhidharmakośa*, which are frequently quoted in the AA commentaries). On abhidharmic schematization in both Sarvāstivāda and the mahāyāna, Lopez says:

Given the significant quantitative imbalance between the obscurations and their antidote, why was the Sarvāstivādin model of various levels of misapprehension of the four truths in the three realms maintained, while the antidote to ignorance was understood to be the knowledge of selflessness alone . . . ? A traditional positivist response would hold that the mind has been contaminated over countless births, and that the defilements are engrained from the surface to the depths and can be dislodged only through persistent and prolonged purification. As for the single antidote, there may have been a conflation . . . of the purificatory and visionary models of the earlier tradition, with the purification of myriad discrete defilements held to be effected by the vision of a single truth.

For the Mahāyāna, the focus, was not on the three marks of existence but on one, selflessness, and there was an attendant reduction in antidotes from the sixteen aspects of the four noble truths to only one, the third aspect of suffering (albeit reinterpreted), emptiness. It was this vision of emptiness that was said to destroy, in one moment on the path of vision, all seeds for future rebirths in the unfortunate realms . . . Yet this was only the beginning of the first of ten *bhūmis*; . . . two periods of innumerable aeons to complete the path, aeons in which . . . s/he was to enter repeatedly into direct yogic perception (*yogipratyakṣa*) of an emptiness no more profound than that which s/he had first seen. These repeated visions of the same emptiness were to serve as antidotes to a wide variety of afflictions and thus effect the removal of the entire range of obscurations—both those to liberation (the *kleśāvaraṇa*) and those to the omniscience of a buddha (the *jñeyāvaraṇa*). . . . the role of



The Abhisamayālamkāra in Its Traditional Setting

There seems to be a general perception of texts like the AA and its secondary literature on grounds and paths possessing hardly any practical relevance, if any at all. As for the highly scholastic format of the AA as opposed to a more practically oriented meditation guidebook, it compares well with Buswell's description of the Vaibhāṣika versus the Theravāda approach:

One might say that the Vaibhāṣikas have developed a *retrospective* approach to soteriology — a system that begins from the premise of the Buddha's own enlightenment and looks *backwards* as it were from the supramundane point, reinterpreting all other experiences in light of that unique event. Because of this rigorously theoretical orientation in discussion of soteriological questions, their interpretation of the *mārga* inevitably takes a heavily scholastic bent; their effort at *synthèse* has managed to wring out of their description virtually all of the actual struggle undergone by the adept in his quest for enlightenment. Such a tack was perhaps inevitable given the historical exigencies within which Vaibhāṣika doctrine developed, for such a rigorous soteriological system would serve to differentiate their school explicitly from rival schools of Indian and Buddhist philosophy and practice. Unfortunately, however, it allows us to know little of the actual content or practice of Vaibhāṣika methods of *bhāvanā* [meditation].

A comparison of the path as outlined by the Theravādins in the *Visuddhimagga* reveals some startling contrasts . . . The Theravāda system is thus proleptic — beginning from the defiled, unenlightened state and looking *forward* in anticipation of purification (*visuddhi*). . . . the Theravādins have left considerable lore on meditation practice itself . . . There, we find no overriding interpretive tool, such as the four noble truths used by the Vaibhāṣikas . . . Instead, the Theravādins have focused on the process of training itself, an approach that holds more hope for the individual attempting practice because it does not

the Abhidharma was to express the inexpressible content of the Buddha's enlightenment, in doctrinal formulations of the nature of reality, in the categorizations of veridical and deceptive states of consciousness, and in the delineation of a process of purification.

Indeed, the role of the Abhidharma was to domesticate enlightenment. The infinite prolongation of the path removed enlightenment from the hazardous present and placed it in the safety of the unforeseeable future as the sole possession of the exalted, absent Buddha . . .

If we see the development of the mārga schema as representing a transition from autobiographical to universal experience, then it would seem that experience can become universal precisely to the extent that it is the experience of no one. But such an explanation has almost a scent of conspiracy about it . . . whereby the complex of defilements and their antidotes are viewed as a wholly artificial product of the Ābhidarmikas, the elite of the Buddhist order.²⁹⁵

In the traditional higher education in Tibetan monastic colleges, the AA together with its commentaries and the secondary supplementary materials elaborating on various topics are regarded as laying the ground for all the remaining texts to be studied, being a kind of massive encyclopedia of the Buddhist worldview that pervades the entire curriculum. This is illustrated by what, according to the *Blue Annals*, Tsongkhapa's first teacher said to him:

You will first study earnestly the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, which is the ornament of the three "Mothers."

If you become learned in it, you will be able to master all the Scriptures.

Keep this advice in a corner of your mind!²⁹⁶

Traditionally, the AA is often compared to a map or a travel guidebook, providing a precise and detailed orientation for the path to enlightenment. The question of the possibility of there being such a path and a goal is not thematized in the text—it rather presupposes that the readers have at least resolved to embark on this journey or are already on their way. However, on its own, the text resembles more a succinct catalogue of tours and expeditions to all the places that you never even knew existed, or the coded notes of someone who has made an exhaustive study of all the available guidebooks and maps to these places in all their scales and details so as to have a brief mnemonic device for being on the road, with the ability to readily bring to mind all that has been studied before (which, by the way, is one of the general principles

of the often very terse Indo-Tibetan śāstra literature). For others, such cryptic notes on all kinds of major and minor landmarks and routes must remain completely unintelligible or misunderstood without the benefit of any further explanations by experienced travel guides. Though the AA refers to an overwhelming amount of details, at the same time, it highlights again and again that, actually, neither the travelers, nor their vehicles, nor any journeys or goals exist. Thus, it constantly dissolves or reduces the explorers and their quest into emptiness, the central theme of the prajñāpāramitā sūtras.

However, there are many people, even within the Tibetan monastic educational system, who react to the AA and its commentarial literature not as practical guide books, but as being either particularly annoying pieces of lifeless scholasticism, or, on a more gracious reading, more or less just something that is traditionally part of the curriculum. Most everybody agrees that the AA—despite its topic being the various levels of the path—is not related to practice. Nevertheless, people try to come up with various—more or less convincing—reasons why so much time is spent on studying this text. For example, Hopkins says the following on the text and the materials related to it:

In the standard dGe-lugs-pa educational curriculum, six years are spent studying Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realization* . . . a highly elaborate compendium on the paths that is not practiced in its own form. Rather, the long period of study is used to enrich understanding of a complex structure of the spiritual development that provides an all-encompassing worldview daunting in its intricacy. Though the structure of the path, as it is presented in this text, does not provide the rubric of actual practice, much of its import is brought over to "stages of the path" [*lam rim*] literature, the practical use of which is certified by the great number of short texts in this genre aimed at daily meditation. The more complex system . . . provides a perimeter within which the more practical teachings can be enacted.

. . . the aim is not what would usually be considered practice (i.e., meditation cultivating what has been studied); rather, the goal is endless intellectual reflection . . . It appears that internal practice has given way to external debate on major and minor issues, but the emphasis on intellectual development also stems from stark recognition that these matters are not easily penetrated, requiring much intellectual exploration, and that immersion in topics—even to the point of entering a maze of conceptuality—can bear fruition over lifetimes. This is, at least, the system's self-justification for pursuing ever more refined conceptualization.

The third genre, “grounds and paths,” is generally comprised of . . . texts to structure . . . *Ornament of Clear Realization*. A straight reading of such a text can be an exercise in boredom, but with the oral commentary of a teacher who is versed in a lineage of exegesis, the technical vocabulary can come to life in a vivid realm of imagination, much like a novel about a mythic land. Such stimulation of the metaphysical imagination is at the heart of the process of study in this tradition; whereas it may seem dry and sterile to those for whom the terminology has not been enlivened through evocative commentary, for those who have undergone this process the same technical vocabulary reverberates with meaning and epiphanies of new connections. Exploration of the elaborate architecture of the path itself becomes an important phase of the path, not to the exclusion of actually generating these path-states in meditation, but as an important part of creating a worldview that itself exerts a transformative force on the mind.²⁹⁷

Relying on his own experiences of training as a Geshé in the Gelugpa tradition, Dreyfus aptly describes many of the issues around this kind of literature:

I believe, however, that although the various treatments of the path are meant to address the pragmatic emphasis of Buddhist traditions, it is a mistake to assume that teachings on the path are preparations for actual practice.

Robert Sharf has argued in the same vein, criticizing some modern Buddhist scholars and contemporary Buddhist practitioners for erroneously interpreting the literature describing the structure and results of the path in experiential terms. “In fact,” he declares, “it is difficult to imagine how somebody could mistake this kind of religious literature for ‘expressions’ of personal experiences; they are first and foremost scholastic compendiums, compiled by monks of formidable learning who were attempting to systematize and schematize the confused and often conflicting descriptions of practices and stages found scattered throughout the canon.”²⁹⁸ For Sharf, it is a mistake to assume that the literature dealing with the path either directly reflects Buddhist practice or directly prepares for it. This sweeping claim may not hold true for all traditions, but it applies quite aptly to the Tibetan presentations of the path . . .

I suggested earlier that the importance of the path in Buddhist tradition reflects the tradition’s pragmatic orientation. One

might therefore infer that since it teaches the Mahayana path, the *Ornament* must bear directly on actual Mahayana meditative practices and that those who study it intensively, as Tibetan scholars do, must be interested in this text for practical reasons. But though these assumptions are tempting, they are unjustified. We cannot simply deduce a text’s application from its content; rather, to understand such a text we must consider how it is used by the communities in which it is embedded.

. . . In the non-Ge-luk commentarial institutions, the *Ornament* is studied for its content—the eight themes, which are explained through seventy topics . . . In this way, students learn about . . . a number of elements of the Mahayana path . . . non-Ge-luk traditions complete this study of the path by examining the other texts attributed to Maitreya, as well as Asaṅga’s and Vasubandhu’s Abhidharma texts.

Ge-luk monastic universities, in contrast, take the *Ornament* as the central text for the study of the path; they treat it as a kind of Buddhist encyclopedia, read in the light of commentaries by Dzong-kha-ba, Gyel-tsap, and the authors of manuals. Sometimes these commentaries spin out elaborate digressions from a single word of the *Ornament*. Several Ge-luk monasteries . . . recognize this tendency to drift away from focused explanation of the text and call these subjects, which are only tangential to the *Ornament*, “special topics” (*zur bkol*). They are studied in relation to but separately from the *Ornament*. In this way, most of the topics relevant to the Buddhist path, generally or from a specifically Mahayana perspective, are covered in the course of studying this one text . . .

Notwithstanding these differences, members of neither Tibetan scholastic tradition find much practical relevance in the *Ornament*, despite some claims to the contrary. Few of the topics directly covered by the *Ornament* or studied in relation to it appear to be related to practice. Among the eight topics, the first three . . . are not meant to be practiced directly. They are taken as the objects of the path, which consists of the four practices [that is, the next four topics]. Similarly, the last theme, the dharma-body of the Buddha, is the goal of practice but gives no direct guidance on reaching it. To be sure, the *Ornament* presents the four practices or realizations, emphasizing particularly “the practice of all the aspects” (*nam rdzogs sbyor ba*), which is treated in the fourth chapter. In fact, that practice is the central topic of the text and may have been an actual practice in which all the aspects of the three wisdoms are brought together. Here, it is called “meditation summarizing the

three wisdoms" . . . this practice seems to be realistic. Rather than involving some extraordinary feat, as do the miraculous qualities of the buddhas and celestial bodhisattvas, it can be implemented by anybody who is interested.²⁹⁹

But—and this is point is crucial—no teacher I have ever met seems to have practiced this meditation or even have been clear on how to do so. Non-Ge-luk curricula treat this practice but generally offer no convincing understanding of the topic, even at the textual level. The students I interviewed appeared to have gotten very little out of this part of the text. And though Ge-luk scholars probably have a better theoretical understanding of the topic, nobody I encountered could plainly state how to practice this text. Clearly, the work's central themes are not practiced in the Tibetan scholastic traditions.

Of the auxiliary topics . . . some do have direct practical applications. For example, the mind of enlightenment . . . is studied in the first chapter. Similarly, the single-pointed concentration that leads to the attainment of tranquility (*zhi gnas*, *samatha*) is studied in great detail. Concentration [dhyānas and formless absorptions] is studied with considerable care for several months . . . Yet even though teachers point out the practical importance of studying these topics, to which much time is devoted, little time is given to those that are of direct relevance to actual meditation . . . The real focus is theoretical . . . When monks become really serious about the practice of concentration and begin extended retreats, they instead focus on the tantric path. At that time, special methods for the attainment of tranquility are introduced. The texts they have studied seem to have no application.

Worldview and the Study of the Ornament

Once we see how little relation the study of the *Ornament* and other similar texts presenting the path has to actual experience within the Tibetan scholastic traditions, we may wonder why so much time is spent studying them. What meaning do Tibetan scholars find in them?

One answer is suggested by Dzong-ka-ba's own career . . . In a moment of sudden insight Dzong-ka-ba understood the validity of the Buddhist path . . . These "impractical" studies are meant to bring about a strong faith in the validity of the Buddhist tradition, as they did for Dzong-ka-ba in Ngam-ring. The discussion

of the path is central to Tibetan traditions because it habituates students to the universe in which these narratives make sense, and thus strengthens their religious commitment.

. . . Most people do not live by quick fixes; instead, they decide on long-term goals and the means to reach them. Hence, they need narratives to direct them and persuade them that they are on the right track. They also need to sense closure in the narrative, to find a point toward which their efforts are aimed and that makes sense of those efforts. To construct such a universe of meaning and to strengthen the faith of participants in such a soteriological³⁰⁰ possibility are the main goals of the study of the *Ornament* and other related texts in the Tibetan scholastic tradition.

. . . Haribhadra . . . starts his discussion by stressing the role of faith . . . for Haribhadra, faith is not the central virtue of the tradition; wisdom and compassion surpass it. But faith is the basis from which the development of these virtues starts. Thus it is the paramount concern at the beginning of the process.

. . . The construction of a meaningful universe and the path that transcends it must be made to appear self-evident so that students feel confident in their practice. The steps along the path must appear to them as concrete stages whose relation to Buddhist practice they can understand. Yet that "concreteness" is itself a reification; the map provided by the *Ornament* literature does not refer to anything that exists independently of textuality. Rather, these mental constructs acquire, through texts and teaching, the solidity necessary to inspire and sustain people in their actions. They are best characterized, to use Kenneth Burke's term, as objects of symbolic actions, the representational forces that attempt to influence their audience.³⁰¹

Is this the explanation of the teachers who taught me the *Ornament*? No, or at least not completely . . . my teachers really believed that the descriptions provided by the text were correct, that such stages and paths existed . . . Nevertheless . . . they saw clearly that there are, in the Dalai Lama's own words, "no self-evident (*ldog ldog*) paths existing out there."³⁰² The more thoughtful members of the tradition take descriptions of the path as attempts to refer to complex individual processes. Thus, my teachers . . . would insist that this literature refers to some states actually obtainable by practitioners, though not necessarily in the exact ways in which this literature describes them.

... Topics such as the mind of enlightenment or the attainments pertaining to the form and formless realms are important not because they directly prepare for meditation but because they help elaborate a universe in which Buddhist narratives and the practices that they inspire makes sense. For Tibetans, the *Ornament* and similar texts are not reports on or direct preparations for Buddhist practice, but rhetorical representations of the meaningful universe envisaged by the tradition. As such, they have great soteriological significance since they develop the faith that participants have in their tradition.³⁰³

And:

Buddhist traditions ... involve a whole range of soteriological practices. Most of them have little to do with meditative experience and pertain to what is usually called merit making ... In particular, the scholastic studies examined here are understood by participants as a form of merit making. This type of Buddhist practice forms the core of much actual Buddhist practice. It should not be considered at odds with so-called higher meditative practices, but, on the contrary, as continuous with them. Merit making is part of the liberative ... dimension of the tradition. In some ways, the value that monks find in monastic studies derives from their being meritorious. Studying a text such as the *Ornament* is intrinsically valuable. It is in and of itself virtuous.

Nevertheless, this intrinsic virtuous quality of Tibetan scholastic studies is not their main value. Normatively speaking, the main value of studies ... is in their leading to the development of virtues such as inner calm, attention and inquisitiveness that will in turn enable the practitioner to be successful in the higher meditative practices.³⁰⁴

I agree with most of what Hopkins and Dreyfus say on how the AA and its related texts are treated in the Tibetan tradition. However, it should be clarified that the AA itself does not speak of its purpose being simply the development of faith, but explicitly says:

May the path of the knowledge of all aspects
That is explained here by the teacher,
Though not experienced by others,
Be seen by the intelligent

And, having committed to memory the meaning of the sūtras,
May they easily progress
In the tenfold practice of the dharma—
This is the purpose of this undertaking.³⁰⁵

Haribhadra's *Āloka*³⁰⁶ comments that the subject matter of the AA is the entire unmitigated path taught in the *prajñāpāramitā* sūtras, consisting of all realizations of śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas, and buddhas, as reflected in the eight clear realizations that lead to higher realms and nirvāṇa. Thus, to explain what is taught in the *prajñāpāramitā* sūtras is the purpose or goal of this treatise, which in itself is the means to do so. In other words, the unique result of easily internalizing the teachings of all seventy topics is the purpose. Here, the *prajñā* that arises from studying *prajñāpāramitā* easily commits to memory said subject matter—the path of the knowledge of all aspects that is not realized by non-Buddhists, who cling to inherent existence and have not familiarized themselves with the identitylessness of all phenomena. The *prajñā* that arises from reflecting on what one has memorized ascertains the path of the knowledge of all aspects and through the *prajñā* arising from meditation, one becomes thoroughly familiar with this path. Therefore, the final purpose—the result of having gone through this process—is to manifest this knowledge of all aspects.³⁰⁷

Thus, clearly the AA is intended by its author as a mnemonic device for conveniently understanding and remembering the entire path to a buddha's omniscience as taught in the *prajñāpāramitā* sūtras in order to actually use this knowledge by putting it into practice and thus becoming a buddha. Also, the *Vivṛti*³⁰⁸ (Haribhadra's other commentary mentioned by Dreyfus) clearly only speaks of the arising of faith—or rather an open mind or inspiration—for *prajñāpāramitā* (and not for an entire tradition) and it only identifies this as the purpose of the AA's opening stanza of paying homage to “the mother” of the four noble ones. There is no mention of the purpose of the entire text being the growth of faith, but that this homage by Maitreya is intended to first give rise to inspiration or certainty about mother *prajñāpāramitā*'s ability to bring forth the four noble ones (buddhas, bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas, and śrāvakas). In line with what was said above, the resultant yearning for *prajñāpāramitā*'s qualities then makes one study and practice, through which *prajñā*—the essential factor to be accomplished—arises and gradually leads one to buddhahood. This position of Haribhadra is followed by virtually all commentaries on the AA, with LSP, PSD, MCG, and others saying that the opening stanza is the branch of giving rise to an open mind, while AA verses 1–2 represent the branch of making those with realization engage in the treatise. Thus, Khenpo Shenga's prologue to his commentary on the AA says:

It was composed for the purpose of guiding those who are ignorant about how the stages of clear realization—the hidden meaning of the prajñāpāramitā sūtras—are to be made a living experience.³⁰⁹

Unfortunately, Dreyfus does not tell us whether the AA and its related texts indeed ever had the effects of increasing faith or of constructing a meaningful universe that he is proposing, be it for himself or any of his colleagues. Frankly, I find it very hard to believe that endless lists, subdivisions, and technical details of things to be accomplished and to be relinquished—which are what the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* mainly consists of—could serve as “faith-boosters” for anyone, and I never heard of anybody for whom the text performed this function. Rather, according to the reports by both Westerners and Tibetans who studied this text, the last thing anybody would think of is an increase of their faith through it. On the contrary, almost everybody has had a hard time stifling the exact opposite feeling of tremendous resistance to all these lists and subdivisions and the urge to run out of the class. Speaking of increasing faith (whether in the Buddhist teachings or their tradition), especially for a Western audience, there are definitely other teachings that seem to serve that purpose much better, such as the ones on buddha nature, mind training, how to work with emotions, or inspirational dohās and poetry. One may also wonder in this regard why this text is practically never taught in the West if it supposedly is so potent for increasing faith. As far as Tibetans are concerned, most of them already have a lot of faith in their Buddhist tradition anyway, but for Western practitioners new to that tradition, it seems much more necessary to work on such faith.

Also, at least for some people in the West, “creating a meaningful universe” and “the representational forces that attempt to influence their audience” may sound dangerously close to some kind of sophisticated brainwashing or cultural conditioning. As Anne Klein remarks:

Virtually no contemporary Western thinker would take seriously, much less agree with, the notion that conditioned persons can have an experience outside of historical, cultural, psycho-social, and other sets of conditionings. Neither Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, nor those following Kant, for example, would postulate or even seek a resolution between their own positions and the Buddhist claim that there are states of mind unaffected either by personal or cultural histories or by epistemic limitations. Here, the conditioning role of social and personal histories is emphasized in ways that are foreign to Buddhism. From the viewpoint of contemporary theo-

ries, Buddhist soteriological theories are but one more example of cultural construction.³¹⁰

In this vein, it may be added that, at least for critical Western minds, the many differing (and sometimes even contradictory) ways in which the numerous Indian and Tibetan commentaries on the AA treat certain of its topics can certainly not be considered as aids for enhancing faith in general or the AA's message in particular.

However, as Klein continues, things look very different from a general mahāyāna perspective and the particular point of view of the prajñāpāramitā sūtras and the AA:

From the Buddhist perspective, such a viewpoint is limited and reductionistic in its fascination with conditionality. The Buddhist position also emphasizes conditionality but does not subsume all other perspectives to it. For Buddhists, the unconditioned is epistemologically meta to the conditioned—not the other way round. For them, the emphasis that Foucault and Lacan put on cultural and linguistic constructions of experience is like theorizing the existence of dependent-arising without positing the emptiness that is its inseparable counterpart.³¹¹

Forman reports on the position of modern constructivists on the single nature of human experience:

Like any other experience . . . the mystic's experience of God, of Brahma, of the Tao, of śūnyatā and so forth is in significant ways shaped, formed, and/or constructed from his or her expectations and concepts of those notions. . . . Christians virtually never have a vision of multi-armed Kālī, and Neo-confucians never see Jesus. Expectations, concepts, and the background of beliefs clearly limit and form the mystic's visions.³¹²

And:

Modern constructivism argues from an *epistemological monomorphism* . . . that is, that all experiences are mediated and constructed.³¹³

On the other hand, Forman describes the Buddhist claim of the possibility of deconstructing every form of constructed experience and arriving at

an unconstructed form of experience that avoids the usual unpleasant by-products of the former:

Modern constructivists cannot logically accept Paramārtha's³¹⁴ assertions of an *epistemological duomorphism*, that is, that some experiences are conditioned and some are unconditioned. Nor can this position coherently admit that one can possibly follow common Buddhist instructions to cease thinking or perceiving in terms of such loaded notions as *Nirvāṇa*, *Bodhisattva*, and *samādhi*. Nor can the modern constructivist accept the common Zen assertion that one can and should cease thinking, using discriminative thought, and so forth. The claim of epistemological duomorphism is that there are (at least) *two* kinds of mental functioning and that they should not be conflated.

... I believe that we have something *very* important to learn from the likes of Dōgen and Paramārtha. Even though the constructivist picture may be applicable to most experiences, these men maintain that ... there are other epistemological structures, other forms of consciousness, if you will, of which human beings may be (and they would say "are") capable. One such structure results, they say, from progressively eliminating things like habitual expectations, conventional distinctions, emotions based on childhood experiences, and even that most ancient of epistemological structures, the dichotomy between subject and object.

Certainly such a process of dehabitation does not seem utterly inconceivable. Is it not conceivable that the human being is capable of realizing that such distinctions are more or less conventional? Even modern philosophers have noted the conventional character of all conceptual systems. Does the most likely next step—that one can existentially realize this in one's own life—not seem equally conceivable? Does it seem so impossible that, with practice, we can learn to live without employing the old pigeon holes?

... it should be clear that the distinctions that we draw between rich and poor, smart and stupid, beautiful and ugly, better and worse people, health and sickness, and perhaps even life and death, stand at the cognitive foundation of our self-perception and the choices that we make constantly. Even if presently satisfied, to *prefer* wealth or success or happiness over their respective opposites is to live in subconscious or conscious dread of just these opposites. As Buddha saw on his second and third excursions from his father's palace, to prefer health over sickness and life over death is

ultimately to face disappointment. Life perceived in terms of such distinctions will inevitably lead to suffering.

Paramārtha, in typical Buddhist fashion, prescribes his intellectual and meditative techniques as an antidote to the problem of the constructed nature of ordinary experience. He notes that with a life constructed in part out of terms like "I" and "you," "good" and "bad," "life" and "death" comes suffering. Perhaps, just perhaps, we in the West have something to be gained by an openness to this way of thinking. Given the level of pain, anxiety, and stress in our culture, perhaps it would be wise to remain open to the possibility that epistemologically and technically (that is, through meditation techniques), the Buddhist knows something we don't. This claim—that there may be more than one epistemological structure, and that the atypical (mystical) ones may not be exposed to suffering—may turn out to be more important than anyone expected.³¹⁵

The contemporary Kagyü scholar and yogin Khenpo Tsültrim Gyamtso Rinpoche explains the purpose of the AA as having all our coarse and subtle conceptions collapse or dissolve and realizing the inseparable unity of the dharmadhātu free from all reference points and its natural basic awareness. Accordingly, as will be elaborated below, the primary goal of the AA (like that of most Buddhist texts) is precisely this, to assist in the task of deconstructing our ordinary coarse and subtle conceptual overlays with their myriad ways of "black-and-white" thinking, thus giving way to increasingly more direct insights into what our mind is in its own true nature without any overlays.

of appreciation of the fact that, for some people, the content of these highly elaborate presentations has an inner dynamic impelling them toward practice.³²³

The point that a significant number of people in Buddhist cultures spend as much—or more—time and effort on inner mental technologies of contemplative inquiry as Western cultures do on material technologies and entertainments, and thus are able to achieve results in these areas that Western science only starts to acknowledge and investigate, is certainly a very significant one. However, if the practical significance of texts like the AA is limited only to the famous few “chosen ones” who reach the stratosphere of Tibetan monastic colleges, are these texts lost on the “average” Buddhist practitioner? Rather, the question is whether the just-mentioned—more technical—fourfold structure of the AA can be translated into something with which one can work in a direct and experiential manner without having to go through decades of study.

No matter how the AA and its commentaries may be used in their traditional setting (particularly in higher Tibetan monastic education) and no matter how technical most of these materials are, I would like to suggest that their basic intent and purpose is to convey and promote spiritual experience and realization, though their format may not necessarily make these readily accessible. However, it seems crucial to see that the often arcane quality of the material is not due to the fact that the realization of emptiness as such—or emptiness itself—is complex in any way. In itself, emptiness is extremely simple, being the very fact of nothing to hold on to, that is, the lack of all reference points (*niṣprapañca*). However, what is complex are the many layers of belief systems, projections, habitual tendencies, and reference points (*prapañca*) in our samsāric minds, be they on the more superficial conceptual level or the more deeply ingrained level of instinctive behavior. It is precisely for this reason that the texts on the grounds and paths for realizing the simplicity of emptiness seem to be its exact opposite, being as complex as one could imagine and even beyond. They are so discursive about nondiscursiveness because they address each and every tiny detail in the tightly woven and multi-layered cocoon of our mind's obscurations as well as their remedies. This is expressed by Mādhyamikas and also Wittgenstein:

Why is philosophy so complicated? It ought to be *entirely* simple. Philosophy unties the knots in our thinking that we have, in a senseless way, put there. To do this it must make movements as complicated as these knots are. Although the *results* of philosophy are simple, its method cannot be, if it is to succeed. The



Is There Any Practical Relevance to the Abhisamayālamkāra?

In terms of the AA's relationship to actual meditation practice, as Dreyfus said above, its first three chapters “are not meant to be practiced directly.”³²² As for the remaining chapters, the fourth one only contains five verses that actually speak about practice (IV.35–37 and IV.62–63), while the remaining verses just include lists of the 173 aspects of the three knowledges, various defining characteristics, various sets of the signs of irreversibility on different paths, and so on. The fifth chapter mainly speaks about the four kinds of conceptions about apprehender and apprehended and certain signs and qualms. Its few verses that speak about meditation do so in a highly abstract way or just outline a progression of samādhis. The sixth chapter consists of a single verse with a list of practices, the seventh only speaks about the last moment of the tenth bhūmi, and the eighth is about the final fruition of the path. In sum, this seems to leave us without any practical relevance to the AA whatsoever. In the light of this and the above considerations and issues (in particular, the reactions toward what is perceived as overly scholastic spiritual literature), one may wonder whether the AA is only meant for traditional scholars, students who have to go through a set monastic curriculum, or people who simply have too much time. Hopkins suggests:

Although I am aware of the tendency in dGe-lugs-pa training to endless, conceptual proliferation, it is unwarranted to assume that because the path-structure is complicated, no one ever actually meditates it. There is a small but significant number of persons who, after much arduous study over many years, practice what, at superficial reading, seem to be a hopelessly complicated series of paths. This is not to say that *all* complicated structures are actually practiced; my point is that the assumption that *none* of them can be practiced springs from the lack of awareness that cultures that put at least as much energy into these topics as we do into learning about football, road complexes, and so forth—and from a lack

complexity of philosophy is not its subject matter, but our knotted understanding.³²⁴

In this way, one may compare studying these materials with the training of top-notch ballet dancers. Everybody admires their smooth, supple, and seemingly effortless movements, and would like to be able to move just like them. But what we usually tend to forget is that this so simple-looking display requires many years of sophisticated and dedicated training, in which one's attention needs to be focused on and return again and again to every subtle detail. Also, the Buddhist approach to learning and progressing on the path is not a linear one, and repeated familiarization with the same topics from different angles is a standard way of Buddhist spiritual training. Lopez says:

... the Buddhist path seems to be neither a straight line between two points nor a circle endlessly retracing itself but a cone, spiraling in smaller and smaller circles until it ends in a point—the *apratīṣṭhitanirvāṇa*, the nirvāṇa without location—and then continuing from that point, to line, to plane.³²⁵

Buswell and Gimello present an interesting analogy of the mutual dependence of the path and its “goal”:

Ninian Smart has offered the useful analogy of the relationship between the goal of a game and the rules of that game. Any effort to define a “home run,” for example, would inevitably lead to a systematic statement of the rules of baseball. Likewise, the only feasible description of an ineffable religious goal would seem to be an outline of the path leading to it. In both cases, the goal is implicit in the rules of behavior leading to its attainment, and thus may be said to be accessible only through such behavior. Conversely, the meaning of any one element on the path consists principally in the contribution it makes to the achievement of the goal. Hence the conditioned and unconditioned realms have meaning only in relation to one another (just as *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are said to entail each other); without a path there is no destination, and without a destination, no path.

This accords well with ... that *nirvāṇa* is not really a destination at all ... In *Mahāyāna* ... *nirvāṇa* is said to be “nonabiding” ... To “achieve” *nirvāṇa*, then, is not to “arrive at,” much less to “settle,” anywhere.³²⁶

As for the rules of the game in the AA, considering its many levels of complexities, often we seem to find ourselves in the situation of being told every bit of information about the intricacies and tricks on the twentieth level of a “nerd-only” computer game by aficionados of that game. Leaving aside that this information cannot strike any chord for someone who has never played this game in the first place, it cannot even concern or make sense to someone who is on the first or the second level.

However, just as in the *Madhyamaka* texts, the AA and its commentaries make it very clear that there is nothing to be realized or achieved *per se* as far as emptiness—or mind's nature, primordial pure awareness—is concerned. Thus, the actual “work” on the path as it presents itself from the perspective of those who are on it—and not from the perspective of the basic nature or the fruition of realizing it—consists of nothing but dissolving all the various obscuring levels of gross and subtle clinging that represent the natural tendency of dualistic mind grasping in terms of subject and object at whatever comes its way. When following the AA's meticulous scrutiny of the convolutions of our dualistic minds, it can be truly illuminating to see how this grasping works even on increasingly more subtle levels of the path and toward so-called “pure” objects. That is, even if one gets the basic idea of emptiness in general, it does not mean that this insight is readily available in every situation. The AA's recurring descriptions of taking our thoughts in terms of subject and object, which target both *samsāric* and *nirvāṇic* phenomena, to be real or true constantly point out the fact that our minds keep grasping even at the most rarified ideas, objects, and experiences. To understand that even *bodhisattvas* on the *bhūmis*, who have already realized emptiness directly, still grasp at this very realization to certain degrees may help us to create more awareness about our mind's constant tendency to keep jumping from one toy to the next, where the toys just become more subtle once the coarser ones have been taken away. No doubt, triggering this kind of awareness is something practically relevant even for ordinary beings on the Buddhist path right now. Once one progresses on this path, the *bhūmis* of *bodhisattvas* indeed provide a wealth of nice new subtle toys never seen before. However, as long as mind keeps being excited by them, no matter how subtle the toys may be—experiences of mental calmness, luminosity, bliss, pure lands, or *maṇḍalas* of deities—it has not yet found its own natural ease, the detached and utterly relaxed suppleness that is called *buddhahood*. In this way, the AA and its related materials are like lists of all the toys we have to throw out, and this concerns not only the factors to be relinquished, such as mental afflictions and obscurations, but also their remedies and even the wonderful qualities of *bodhisattvas* and *buddhas*. As a kid, we may have many boxes full of toys, but then we outgrow some, lose interest in them,

and replace them with new ones. Then, as an adult, we no longer care about any of these toys, but go after more sophisticated ones, such as fancy dresses, computers, cars, penthouses, and careers, eventually getting tired of these too. Finally, when we die, we must leave all of our toys behind. The five paths and ten bhūmis are just like that. As it is said, “The Buddhist path is one disappointment after the other, the only good thing being that buddhahood is the last one.” Of course, there is the difference in that each stage of letting go of a toy on this path is a step closer to the true freedom of having no more worries about anything to lose or to gain. This means that one moves from the superficial and deluded level of conditioned happiness and suffering—gaining and losing toys—to the unchanging state of no worries about anything needing to be removed or to be attained. This is simply mind’s own true nature being revealed, which does not lack anything since it is naturally perfect in itself. As the AA says:

There is nothing to be removed from it
And not the slightest to be added.
Actual reality is to be seen as it really is—
Who sees actual reality is released.³²⁷

Hopkins remarks on this:

Thus, on many levels, soteriological experience evokes a sense of dread—dread of the loss of directionality that pursuits of temporary pleasures afford, of the loss of permanence, of the loss of a solidly existent sense of self, and of the loss of one’s very being—because it means facing what is awesomely other than one’s present, very limited perspective. Nevertheless, after acculturation by means of paths of practice, the very insights that initially evoked a feeling of loss evoke instead the feeling of finding a lost treasure. As the Fifth Dalai Lama said about the experience of realizing emptiness:

This initial generation of the Middle Way view is not actual special insight; however, like a moon on the second day of the month, it is a slight finding of the view. At that time, if you have no predispositions for emptiness from a former life, it seems that a thing which was in the hand has suddenly been lost. If you have predispositions, it seems that a lost jewel which had been in the hand has suddenly been found. . . .

This discussion . . . has brought to the fore three phases of experience of the sacred—dreadful, overcoming obstacles, and totally “at-home.” All three must be emphasized in order to convey even a minimally rounded picture of the path.³²⁸

When Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche was giving oral explanations on the AA, at one point he referred to the well-known reports in the *prajñāpāramitā* sūtras about arhats in the audience of the Buddha when he taught on emptiness who were so shocked by these teachings that they had heart attacks or vomited blood and died. Rinpoche said that the good news is that obviously nobody had suffered this fate in the present audience so far, but the bad news is that this means that probably nobody really understood what emptiness is all about either. Such stories illustrate the profound and, for ill-prepared minds, deeply shocking experience of emptiness that shakes or even evaporates the entire frame of reference in which we seem to live. More often than not, however, the radicalness of the essential message of the *prajñāpāramitā* sūtras—the utter groundlessness of our being—seems to get lost in the maze of highly technical and verbose explanations of even the most minor points in the AA and its commentaries, and one starts to wonder what all of this was about to begin with. So, as far as the AA and the materials related to it go, the point seems to be to connect to this transforming experience right within the complexities of all the technical terms, definitions, classifications, and elaborations supposed to lead to it. As Edward Conze says:

. . . one must always bear in mind that in these Sūtras we have not to deal with a series of philosophical propositions about the nature of things, but with a set of practices designed to bring about a state of complete detachment by intellectual methods . . .

The AA treats the contents of the *Prajñāpāramitā* as statements of spiritual experiences. While general scientific propositions can be considered in the abstract, experiences derive their meaning and significance from the concrete circumstances in which they take place, and the spiritual maturity of the observer is a decisive factor in the situation. The spiritual world is an essentially hierarchical structure, and the Absolute must appear different on different levels of attainment. Buddhist tradition . . . evolved a clear and detailed picture of the Path which a Buddhist Saint has to traverse through countless aeons, and to each meditation it finds in the *Prajñāpāramitā* the AA assigns its appropriate place on that Path. The reader of the AA must constantly bear in mind the position from which events are observed. What at first sight seems to be a

dry and scholastic treatise does then become a fascinating contribution to transcendental psychology.³²⁹

Or, as Makransky writes about the commentator Ratnākaraśānti's perspective on the AA:

The core realization of Buddhahood is a nondual gnosis, a direct yogic experience, not a conceptualization.

What functions, then, do conceptualizations and descriptions of Buddhahood serve? If scholars are to discuss Buddhahood as the ultimate objective of a practice that people are actually trying to accomplish, how is it to be described so the practice to achieve it can be furthered rather than undercut? If scholars inadvertently mistake their own conceptualizations of Buddhahood for Buddhahood itself, and believe they have thereby comprehended it, they subtly point others away from the nonconceptual entry into nondual awareness that actually constitutes it . . .

Yogācāra formulations . . . assumed that the proper position from which to understand Buddhahood was the position of nondual yogic experience itself. Authentic scriptures that expressed that authentic understanding were therefore to be given great weight . . . Ratnākaraśānti . . . believed that such authoritative scriptures and treatises because they were taught by realized beings . . . expressed the actual nondual essence of Buddhahood as well as it could be expressed in language. Logical inference alone, independent of yogic experience, could not . . . For Ratnākaraśānti, the *Abhisamayālamkāra*'s teaching on Buddhahood, like other authoritative teachings by buddhas and great bodhisattvas, is not an expression of a system of human thought, but the revelation of a nondual awareness that is beyond human thought. Enlightenment points to itself through the language of the text.³³⁰



The Abhisamayālamkāra as a Contemplative Manual

In this vein, I would like to offer a few reflections on the AA being a text that not only speaks about spiritual experience and points to enlightenment, but, by doing so, may serve as a contemplative practice manual in itself. From a practice point of view, I suggest that most of the words and phrases in the verses of the AA can be regarded like little koans on their own, or as starting points for contemplations on emptiness. Just as koans point to the same single thing—emptiness—and represent various means to break through all kinds of rigid concepts that obscure this emptiness, the many individual points in the AA function in the same way, chipping away the thick walls of fixation and wrong views. However, as was said before, it seems crucial to see that the AA does not present a linear path and that there is no such path in the first place, but that it is more like spiraling towards a middle and thus passing and reviewing the same issues again and again from different perspectives. If we expect an outline of a linear path, the AA is very likely to be frustrating.³³¹ Almost all these points and their subpoints in the verses of the AA share the quality of being like hammers that drive home the single nail of emptiness again and again—sometimes from the point of view of various objects, be they virtuous or nonvirtuous; sometimes from the point of view of different subjects (the various mundane and supramundane states of mind of śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas, and buddhas); at other times from the perspectives of the five paths and the ten bhūmis; and at yet other times from the perspectives of the many factors to be relinquished or the signs of accomplishment. Thus, all these points resemble ever so many fingers pointing to the same moon of emptiness from ever so many angles. In this way, the entire AA becomes like one big koan because all of these little koans always point to the same point, no matter whether it is called prajñāpāramitā, emptiness, dharmadhātu, or lack of nature.

As others have remarked before, if one looks at the prajñāpāramitā sūtras with their endless repetitions, they were not just intended simply to be read, but to be recited and reread again and again, in fact being contemplative manuals or road maps meant to be used as practice texts to facilitate the single message of emptiness sinking in through repeatedly familiarizing with it by

multifaceted contemplations. Since the AA represents the contents of these sūtras in a nutshell, it just seems to be natural to work with it in the same way—as a contemplative manual—and not get caught up in the sheer numbers of all its lists. Obviously, these numbers are not the main point and, from the fundamental point of view of emptiness, completely irrelevant. The main point is to use those lists as the above-mentioned fingers pointing to emptiness. In principle, it does not matter whether the number of these fingers is four, thirty-six, 110, or any other number, but from a pedagogic point of view, the more fingers that point to emptiness until one cannot help but seeing what they all are pointing at, the better it is. For example, if a single person points to a star in the sky at daylight, it is very hard to see, but if many people point in the same direction from different places on earth and others fly up in the sky, pointing at this star from above, below, left, and right, and the same is repeated at dusk, dawn, and at night, one will eventually see this star clearly. Likewise, if one wants to buy some real estate, to really get a comprehensive picture of it, one may want to look at it from all sides, walk around the property, check out all the rooms from the attic to the basement, test the doors, floors, and windows, take pictures everywhere from all angles, and then study and compare these pictures at home, and so on.

When adding all the additional explanations on those pointing fingers in the commentaries on the AA, they not only broaden the contemplative perspective on the about twelve hundred individual points of the AA as well as their overall picture, but emptiness is virtually encircled by a host of pointing fingers. At the same time, the clinging to a real self, persons, and things is besieged by these fingers until it surrenders into its own utter groundlessness. In this way, the journey through the AA may be regarded like a rollercoaster ride during which you look at the same things again and again from different perspectives—the main point being to enjoy the ride and not just get sick and vomit.

So, it seems not so much a question whether the AA speaks *about* spiritual experiences and how what it says *relates* to one's practice (whatever that practice may be), but how to *make* the AA itself a practice—or allow it to *be* one, for that matter. At least this approach seemed to suggest itself to me as I, for many years, was translating and pondering over the many different points of the AA, many of which furthermore are presented in greatly differing ways by the various commentaries (sometimes even saying the exact opposite). Such differing comments not only broaden the contemplative perspective by adding more pointing fingers, but also highlight the fact that many of the points of the AA do not have just one single or fixed meaning. Especially in the case of the Eighth Karmapa's JNS with its many unexpected twists, which often feel like more than one carpet being pulled out from under one's feet, one cannot but wonder whether such commentarial activity does not in itself

represent an increasingly obvious attempt to make one's dualistic conceptual mind—which wants things to be orderly and rationally make sense—collapse and give up through applying its own weapons against itself. On the nature of such deconstruction in Buddhism, Forman says:

Like most instructions, words like “place your right foot on your left thigh, and your left foot on your right thigh” function as a *description* of the act of getting into the lotus position, and as an *instruction* to do so. Similarly, words like “do not think” also seem simultaneously to *describe* and *instruct*. Hence, it would appear from surface grammar that these two statements function similarly.

Having heard the instruction “place your right foot . . .,” someone may perceive or imagine such an act in just these terms. Having done so, she/he may employ these words or notions in part to construct his/her perception. To perceive something as a foot, as over or under, or as a religious act (an act in a religious context) already introduces interpretive and discriminative categories. It acts, *mutatis mutandis*, like “look at the door” or “paint those Gothic archways!”

“Do not think” seems to be similar. It appears at first glance to be another constructive perceptual description or instruction which sets up a category by means of which one will see or perceive something. Here, however, is where the mistake is. The advocate of this position [the constructivist] is mistaking a *deconstructive* instruction for a constructive perceptual description or instruction.

Not every instructive utterance serves to set up experiential categories. If you say to Monet, “forget about your Gothic expectations and look again,”³³² you will not be providing him with new categories for his experience. Perhaps some other of his previously acquired expectations or beliefs about buildings may start playing a role . . . But in giving your instruction, you, the instructor in this case, *have not introduced that expectation or any other* to him. You have only told him that his old one had misled him. You have spoken in the *via negativa*, if you will. You have simply deconstructed, in more modern parlance, his constructive expectation on the basis of which he had painted. If he obeys you, your statement will have played a role in stopping him from constructing his experience in terms of his habits and expectation.

Many instructions serve to deconstruct: “Forget it,” “Put aside your expectations,” “Just listen!” and so forth . . . Such instructions do not attempt to provide a new set of expectations; all counsel

someone to stop perceiving or behaving on the basis of old perceptual or behavioral patterns . . .

The fact that there are deconstructive instructions may go largely unnoticed. That is because had Monet been told that he had imposed his expectations onto his perception, he might have dropped "Gothic" but he would not have been able to drop every expectation and belief. There are many complex and interconnecting levels of construction in ordinary experience, and no one, relatively simple deconstructive process could possibly address all of these.

However, Buddhist instructions and meditation practices are not as simple as a single deconstructive remark. The Buddhist procedures are, as I see them, complex and polyvalent systems of physiological, psychological, and intellectual practices and performances which together, it is hoped, will bring about a progressively less discriminated form of experience until an entirely nondiscriminatory event occurs . . . taken together and practiced for years, [they] are designed to reduce systematically the number and significance of perceptual and behavioral discriminations. Such interactive deconstructive techniques together may serve to do what the system claims for itself, that is, to allow one to cease discriminating and seeing in terms of subject and object . . .

Since the constructivist lays such stress on the formative role of the tradition itself, it is especially revealing that Buddhist texts like the *Diamond Sūtra* and the *Fukan zazengi* overtly attempt to dissuade the practitioner from employing expectations about Buddha, *Nirvāṇa*, Bodhisattvaship, and so forth. When Dōgen instructs, "having stopped the various functions of your mind, give up even the idea of becoming a buddha," he singles out the key concept which may lead one to expect and construct in Buddhist terms. He encourages his reader or disciple to cease employing such a loaded idea. As any piece of language must, this utterance does stand as part of the language of the tradition; yet his intention is clearly deconstructive. His instruction is not designed to function like a constructive perceptual description. To confuse the two forms of instruction would be a mistake.³³³

Evidently, the *prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, the AA, and its commentaries are among the clearest embodiments of this dismantling approach, constantly speaking about the emptiness and the lack of nature of all phenomena up through the omniscience of a buddha, and equally constantly driving home

the point that the person or the mind that realizes all this is just as empty and unreal as everything else. In other words, these texts are true "de-construction manuals," prescribed for repeated application.

To be sure, I am far from any attempt to advertise here for the *prajñāpāramitā sūtras* or the literature on grounds and paths in order to make them sound like more palatable "products" that sell better to a contemporary Western audience (which sometimes seems to be an almost inescapable expectation about Buddhist texts these days). I can only say from my own limited experience of having been taught and studied these materials for about a decade at this point that, behind all the words and complexities, it seems possible to at least have some glimpses of the radical but healthy shock of groundlessness as it is exemplified by the dramatic fate of the poor arhats mentioned above, managing to at least poke a few holes into the stuffy cocoon of our fixed ideas and letting in some breeze of fresh air. There may be moments of a few of our fixations exhibiting a more "see-through" quality, when conceptual fixating mind has been defeated with its own weapons.

The classical analogy for this is that if one rubs two sticks against each other, heat is produced that eventually results in fire. The fire burns the two sticks and then dies itself. In the same way, in conceptual analysis during reflection and meditation, we rub the two sticks of the factors to be relinquished and their remedies against each other. This increasingly subtle conceptual activity produces the heat that is an early sign of the actual fire of nonconceptual wisdom on the path of seeing, when the nature of phenomena is directly seen for the first time. When this luminous wisdom blazes forth, both the factors to be relinquished and their remedies melt away. Thus, although the sticks and the fire are different, when rubbed against each other, the sticks have the capacity to give rise to the fire. Likewise, our wrong ideas and their remedies appear to be different from both each other and nonconceptual wisdom, but when we work on our mistaken notions through study, reflection, and meditative analysis, there is definitely the chance to see that the factors to be relinquished and their remedies are alike in being illusory, which makes this wisdom shine forth in an equally illusionlike manner.

Conceptual thinking—by overheating, so to speak, in the process of such analysis—is potentially self-dissolving. Thus, it has its ordinary quality of being discursive and referential, but it also has a liberating quality of acute sharpness. In a way, it is a matter of how we direct and use its energy. For example, a soft, diffuse light does not illuminate very much, and its glare might even blind us and prevent us from seeing things clearly. However, if this light is concentrated into a laser beam, it is very sharp and penetrating, and we can use it for a lot of purposes, such as cutting hard materials, running sophisticated technical equipment, and heating up things. Likewise, when we

use a pencil sharpener, we are not interested in the sharpener, or the pencil, or even the sharpening of the pencil as an end in itself. Rather, what we really want is to write legibly or draw nicely, which is the outcome of having sharpened the pencil. From one point of view, Buddhist studies (and the texts on grounds and paths are no exception) are just like that. For the crucial point is not so much *what* we study—which is just some means—but the outcome of these means, which is invariably intended to be an increase in *prajñā*. Once the pencil of our *prajñā* has been sharpened, we can write or draw whatever we want, and finally be the great artists who are called buddhas. In other words, such studies are always primarily about what happens to the one who studies, that is, our mind, while doing it. They are about the subject, not the object, so the focus is on what a certain text or topic does to our mind, how we react to it, and how it challenges our own belief systems. Also, if we try to make everything in the Buddha's teachings just very general and oversimplified, it is like trying to draw a finely shaded sketch with a blunt pencil—we simply lose the precision that is the hallmark of *prajñā*.

However, these days, it seems that many people at least attempt to "live by quick fixes," successful or not, wishing for swift and easy solutions for their lives and spiritual journeys. So who would ever even dream of spending twelve years supplicating in a cave to meet Maitreya face to face, as Asaṅga did, or studying the AA and its commentaries for seventeen years, as Haribhadra and many others did? Especially in an age in which, for many people, the most important thing is "how it feels"; in which we find an ever-growing lavish buffet of all kinds of spiritual fast food; in which attention deficits are rampant; and in which many people respond only to "sound bites" and video games, being intimidated by any sentence that uses more than five words (let alone reading complex materials), the things that people like Asaṅga and Haribhadra did sound completely absurd to almost everybody, just as in those kung fu movies in which the apprentices first have to sweep the floor for many years before they are even allowed onto the training ground. Unfortunately, texts like the AA and its related materials are the absolute antithesis of any type of spiritual fast-food that is free of religious or philosophical jargon (or complies with the particular jargon of the want-to-be spiritual consumer). Instead, these materials require considerable amounts of time and effort to just familiarize with the terminology, let alone the time and effort to digest their meanings. In other words, to get a glimpse of what these texts are all about, at least a certain degree of commitment to seriously immersing oneself in them seems indispensable.

Also, many people seem to like just hearing and being inspired by the highest and most profound Buddhist teachings, similar to being touched by some masterfully played piece of music or an award-winning movie, and then

move on. In this way, there is no follow-up on such initial inspirations and no opportunity to let these teachings sink in and thus turn them into a readily accessible experiential part of one's mind. In this way, such teachings may become more like an entertaining show, maybe recorded in a book or on a tape on one's shelf, or just something one has heard. If asked about their contents, apart from just recalling some vague pleasant feelings while listening, many people are unable to repeat or retain even a single word. Moreover, whatever they may have heard in such a way often becomes mixed with their own ideas and inclinations, which have little to do with a profound, thorough, and undistorted understanding of the Buddha's essential messages. Even people who have been Buddhists for decades and have heard hundreds of dharma teachings or read many books surprisingly often show an amazing lack of active knowledge about even basic Buddhist principles. The same people have no problem with intensely studying for ten or more years to become a surgeon, engineer, or psychotherapist, but seem to deny the need for applying the same seriousness and persistence to studying the dharma. Who would dare to perform open-heart surgery after just having listened to some lectures on how to do this and without having thoroughly familiarized oneself with every little detail of the necessary techniques and procedures? But this is precisely the approach of many people when they think they can perform the most advanced Buddhist practices without a thorough grounding in the underlying view and an idea of the bigger picture into which such practices fit.

In addition, it should not be forgotten that almost all major Buddhist texts were originally written by the highest caliber of Buddhist master scholars for other masters, and not for any "generally informed reader," since such readers simply did not exist at a time when education and literacy were restricted to a small intellectual elite. Thus, without a rather specific background, which is hard to acquire in the West, it is all the more difficult to access such texts. How effective can it be to read books on the latest developments in modern physics without having at least gone through high school? So, if one cannot or does not want to prepare for the "higher teachings," it seems better to study some "lighter" Buddhist reading since frustration is almost guaranteed.

In 1973, the pioneer Buddhistologist Edward Conze addressed the issue of whether Buddhist texts in general and the *prajñāpāramitā* sūtras in particular are still "up-to-date" for a "modern Western audience." This issue is still very much relevant, maybe even more so, today:

Finally one could also treat them as *spiritual* documents which are still capable of releasing spiritual insights among people separated from their original authors by two thousand years and vast disparities in intellectual and material culture. There is, however, a certain

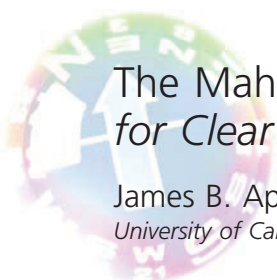
absurdity about interpreting spiritual matters in the abstract and in general terms since everything depends on concrete conditions and the actual persons and their circumstances. Some will regard this literature as rather strange and alien, and may long for something more homespun. They will, I hope, allow me to retort with a remark that so endeared me to my students at Berkeley. Asked what Buddhism should do to become more acceptable to Americans, I used to enumerate with a smile a few concessions one might perhaps make respectively to the feminist, democratic, hedonistic, primitivistic and anti-intellectual tendencies of American society. Though in the end I invariably recovered my nerve and reminded my listeners that it is not so much a matter of the Dharma adjusting itself to become adaptable to Americans, but of Americans changing and transforming themselves sufficiently to become acceptable to the Lord Buddha.³³⁴

Of course, this applies not only to North American society, but to all so-called "modern societies." Among both Buddhists and non-Buddhists there is a strong tendency of just wanting to extract from the Buddha's teaching what one likes or thinks is interesting, relevant, or "sexy" enough, leaving everything else behind as ancient scriptures or rituals of only cultural or historical nature. With buzz words such as "modernizing" or "westernizing" Buddhism (whatever that means), "getting to the essence," "avoiding cultural trappings," "working with emotions," or "it needs to be immediately relevant to my life and my problems," the preliminaries are skipped and one jumps to the "highest" teachings right away, more often than not ending up in just happily superimposing one's own cultural biases on the Buddha's teachings and then pretending to have found something culturally neutral or "modern." It seems necessary, however, to take a closer look at, become aware of, and question one's own hang-ups too, which are not at all any better than those of other cultures. Also, the question is why one needs teachers and teachings if one just follows what one likes anyway.

To be sure, I am not advocating some kind of fundamentalism, strict conservatism, having to study the entire Buddhist canon, or simply mimicry of certain Asian forms of Buddhism. I am all for adapting the Buddha's teachings to the present times, societies, cultures, and problems, as it always has happened in each era and country during the long history of Buddhism, but there is much more that is needed to do so than just following whatever is the latest spiritual fashion. In its long history, Buddhism never succumbed to the idea of spiritual fast-food, but usually always spoke from a long-term perspective. First, we need to be well-informed about the Buddhist teachings in

a comprehensive way before we can decide what their indispensable contents as opposed to external cultural forms are, and not just look for what we can get rid of if we don't like it or don't see its significance right away.

In that vein, the nowadays ever-present question of what the immediate benefit of a certain Buddhist teaching like the AA is like asking how sharpening a pencil enables you to immediately be a master drawer. Well, it obviously doesn't, but there are many conditions that are all necessary to become someone like Leonardo da Vinci. Some conditions, like being inspired by nature or an intense experience, or taking part in a course on sketching may be of more immediate benefit, while others are more like the sharpening of a pencil. Likewise, some Buddhist teachings are of a more inspirational and immediate nature, while others are more of the "slowly grinding away" type. Moreover, nobody would seriously expect to see the full picture of a thousand-piece jigsaw puzzle when they have just laid out the first five pieces here and there, but precisely this seems often to be the attitude among Western Buddhists. Given the long-term perspective of the Buddhist path, many things one studies often only fall into place once one has proceeded a bit further on that path, and/or assume a different or greater significance when one has had certain experiences on it. Then, one may think, "Oh, that's what these teachings were referring to," which can enrich one's perspective tremendously. To avoid further ado—as the Buddha always said, "I can only show you the path, but you need to check it out for yourself and decide whether you want to walk on it or not."



The Mahāyāna Path of the Bodhisattva in the *Ornament for Clear Realization*

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Abstract

Buddhists have articulated the central notion of the ‘path’ in a variety of different ways and in a great number of texts throughout the history of their traditions. Among texts related to the path, the *Ornament for Clear Realization*, a commentary on the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, has had a significant impact on Mahāyāna Buddhist notions of the path and became the dominant Indian text for the study of the path in Tibetan traditions. This article focuses on two general descriptions of the bodhisattva path found in the *Ornament for Clear Realization*. The first description centers upon eight ‘clear realizations’ (*abhisamaya*) that constitute the knowledges and practices of *Prajñāpāramitā* textual systems. The second description elucidates a system of five paths, shaped by Indian Abhidharma and Yogācāra texts, that is commonly used by Tibetan commentators. The article demonstrates how the eight clear realizations and five paths are interrelated, yet distinct, modes of envisioning the bodhisattva path in the *Ornament*. While these path structures do not provide details of actual meditation experience, they do provide Tibetan Buddhists who follow the *Ornament* a structured worldview where a narrative of spiritual progress is possible and where the altruistic goal of Buddhahood can be attained.

Introduction

Buddhists have conceived of the prescriptive teachings attributed to the Buddha as analogous to a ‘path’ (*mārga*) from the very beginning of their traditions. In the wide variety of Buddhist traditions that develop throughout history one of the central metaphors is that of the path (*mārga*). As Buswell and Gimello (1992, p. 6) suggest, the path

incorporates, underlies, or presupposes everything else in Buddhism, from the simplest act of charity to the most refined meditative experience and the most rigorous philosophical argument. [It]... directs attention...to a general pattern of discipline encompassing both the whole life of the individual and corporate life of the whole Buddhist community.

In conjunction with this focus and attention on what the Buddha prescribed, an abundant amount of literature concerned with the path developed throughout the Buddhist world. The historical conditions and interests of the Buddhist authors who composed the literature shaped the structures and ideals that underlie Buddhist conceptions of the path. Among Theravāda Buddhist traditions, Buddhaghosa’s *Path of Purification* (*Visuddhimagga*) (Ñāṇamoli 2006) is a well-known example; similarly, an important example found in East Asia is *The Great Calming and Contemplations* (*Mo-ho chih-kuan*) by the Chinese Tiantai master Zhiyi (538–597 CE) (Donner and Stevenson 1993). In India, a number of exegetical texts provided accounts of how the path could be conceived and practiced. These included Asaṅga’s (c. fourth century CE) *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (*Ornament of the Mahāyāna Scriptures*) (Thurman *et al.* 2004) and *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (*Stages for the Bodhisattva*),

Candrakīrti's (c. seventh century) *Madhyamakāvatāra* (*Introduction to the Middle Way*) (Huntington & Wangchen 1989), and Sāntideva's (c. eighth century) *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (*Introduction to the Practices of a Bodhisattva*) (Crosby & Skilton 1996). Among such texts, the *Ornament for Clear Realization* (*Abhisamayālaṃkāra*) (Conze 1954; Sparham 2006, 2008, 2009), attributed to Maitreya-nātha (c. third century), had a great impact on the Mahāyāna Buddhist notions of the path and became the dominant text for the study of the path in Tibetan traditions.

The *Ornament for Clear Realization* (hereafter *Ornament*) is a commentary on the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, discourses attributed to the Buddha which outline the attainment of Buddhahood through cognizing non-dual wisdom (*advaya-jñāna*) and the practice of the perfections (*pāramitās*). As a technical treatise (*śāstra*), the *Ornament* consists of an encyclopedic table of contents, communicating in an abridged form the subject matter of the entire *Large Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* corpus. The treatise presents a condensed summary of all the instructions, practices, paths, and stages of realization to Buddhahood that are mentioned in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*. The primary focus of the *Ornament* is to describe the stages of the Mahāyāna path, which are thought by Indian and Tibetan scholars to be implicitly stated in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*. Indian and Tibetan scholars describe the content of the *Ornament* as stages of realization that are the hidden meaning (Tib. *sbas don*) of these *Sūtras*. The *Ornament* provides an outline of the realizations and practices for bodhisattvas ('Buddhas-in-training') in order to achieve Buddhahood.

While soteriologically significant, the objectified, codified, and detailed scholastic descriptions of path structures and stages mentioned in Buddhist accounts of the path do not serve as practical guides to Buddhist practice, nor do they provide details of actual meditation experience. Rather, descriptions of the path in Buddhist texts such as the *Ornament* serve as an archetypal pattern of the worldview in which liberation is possible for the individual practitioner. Buddhist scholastic accounts of the path are constructs or 'prescriptive systemizations of scriptural material' (Williams 2009, p. 356n27), that were "compiled by monks of formidable learning who were attempting to systematize and schematize the confused and often conflicting descriptions of practices and stages found scattered throughout the canon" (Sharf 1995, pp. 261–2). As Dreyfus (2003, p. 173) articulates, the path serves as a structure through which a Buddhist tradition will formulate their practices, doctrines, and narratives. In the case of Tibetan Buddhist traditions, "[t]he discussion of the path is central...because it habituates students to the universe in which these narratives make sense, and thus strengthens their religious commitment" (Dreyfus 2003, pp. 179–80). Although the descriptions of the path must appear as concrete relations to Buddhist practices for followers of a tradition, Dreyfus argues that this concreteness is itself a reification. The model of the path outlined by texts such as the *Ornament* are mental constructs which serve as representational forces to influence and support people in their practices (Dreyfus 2003, p. 181). In this manner, the *Ornament* constructs a soteriological worldview that outlines a narrative of progress to Buddhahood but does not describe meditative experiences or provide practical guidelines of how to cultivate such experiences. The *Ornament* "provides the Tibetan tradition with the framework that makes a narrative of spiritual progress possible and introduces an element of closure without which the commitment required by Buddhist practices cannot be sustained" (Dreyfus 1997, p. 62).

In terms of general content and structure, the *Ornament* is comprised of 273 Sanskrit stanzas within nine chapters that present the hidden meaning of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*. The *Ornament* lays out the same subject matter numerous times, yet with each repetition of the presentation, the subject matter is covered in successively greater detail (Apple

2008, p. 50; Sparham 1987). The main subject matter of the text is presented five separate times. The (1) homage encapsulates the main principles that flow throughout the whole text. The homage is followed by a restatement of these main principles in (2) a versified table of contents (*Ornament* 1.3–4). These main principles or topics are then slightly expanded and contained in (3) an elucidation of the ‘body of the text’ (*Ornament* 1.5–17). The fourth repetition is the most expansive and consists of (4) a detailed articulation (*Ornament*, 1.18–penultimate) of the paths and stages. Finally, (5) summation verses (*Ornament* 9.1–2) are given which condense the subject matter of the text into three categories (aims, practices, and result; see Table 1). The *Ornament* presents its subject matter in terse verses that are often vague in meaning and difficult to understand without the assistance of a commentary. The text presumes that the reader has a background in Buddhist scholasticism, including a knowledge of Abhidharma path structures, categories of mental defilements, meditational attainments, analytical procedures, and cosmology, among other topics. Along these lines, the path systems presented in the *Ornament* are quite complex with multiple divisions and subdivisions pertaining to each aspect of the path from several different angles.

For the purposes of this article, we may focus on two general descriptions of the bodhisattva path found in the *Ornament*. The first description of the bodhisattva path found in the *Ornament* centers upon eight ‘clear realizations’ (*abhisamaya*) that constitute the subject matter of the whole text. The terms and concepts used in the *Ornament* to describe and outline these clear realizations, such as Total Omniscience (*sarvākārajñatā*) or Path Omniscience (*mārgajñatā*), are unique to the *Ornament* and rarely appear in other texts of Buddhist scholasticism. The second description of the bodhisattva path found in the *Ornament* is the system of the five paths (*lam lnga*, **pañcamārga*). The description of the bodhisattva path within the *Ornament* in terms of five paths is one that is commonly used by Tibetan commentators and is influenced by Indian Abhidharma and Yogācāra literature, particularly texts like Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośa* (Pruden 1988) and Asaṅga’s *Abhidharmasamuccaya* (Rāhula and Boin-Webb 2000). In the description of these two models of the path for bodhisattvas as found in the *Ornament*, we will present a general outline of the material that conforms to the expectations of most Indian and Tibetan commentators. At the same time, we will bracket controversial exegetical points related to the *Ornament* and will not explore specific doctrinal points subject to debate.

Eight Clear Realizations of Prajñāpāramitā

The *Ornament* is a summary of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, the discourses on the ‘Perfection of Wisdom’. *Prajñāpāramitā* or ‘Perfect Wisdom’, in addition to referring to a genre of

Table 1 Eight Subjects in the *Ornament for Clear Realization*

A. Aim (<i>viśaya</i>)	1. Total omniscience (<i>sarvākārajñatā</i>)
	2. Path omniscience (<i>mārgajñatā</i>)
	3. Empirical omniscience (<i>sarvajñatā</i>)
B. Practice (<i>prayoga</i>)	4. Full realization of all aspects (<i>sarvākārābhisambodha</i>)
	5. Realization that has attained the summit (<i>mūrdhābhisamaya</i>)
	6. Progressive realization (<i>anupūrvābhisamaya</i>)
C. Result (<i>phala</i>)	7. Instantaneous realization (<i>ekakṣaṇābhisambodha</i>)
	8. Dharma-body (<i>dharmakāya</i>)

Buddhist literature, is synonymous with the perfect non-dual wisdom (*advayajñāna*) of a Buddha, and the teachings of the path leading to this wisdom (Apple 2008, p. 48). The *Ornament* (1.3–4) states that “the perfection of wisdom is proclaimed through eight subjects: (1) Total Omniscience, (2) Path Omniscience, (3) Empirical Omniscience, (4) Full Realization of All Aspects, (5) Realization that has attained the Summit, (6) Progressive realization, (7) Instantaneous Realization, and (8) the *Dharma*-body” (see Table 1). The *Ornament* contains nine chapters, eight of which address each subject in turn. The eight subjects (*padārtha*) that comprise these eight chapters (*adhikāra*) of the *Ornament* correspond to eight clear realizations (*abhisamaya*) that explain the multiple meanings of *Prajñāpāramitā*.

The eight subjects found in the *Ornament* are usually understood in terms of three categories that are mentioned in the final verses of the text’s ninth chapter. The first three clear realizations (1–3) are aims or objects (*viśaya*) to be known by bodhisattvas. The next four realizations (4–7) are practices (*prayoga*) to be cultivated by bodhisattvas in order cognize the first three realizations. Finally, the dharma-body (*phala*) occurs as a result of the practices that actualize the clear realizations (see Table 1).

An initial distinction in the *Ornament* describes *prajñāpāramitā* or the ‘perfection of wisdom’ in terms of three types of omniscience (i.e., *sarvākārajñatā*, *mārgajñatā*, *sarvajñatā*). The *Ornament*’s main purport and path structure is for the training of bodhisattvas to attain unsurpassable complete awakening (*bla na med pa'i yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas*) through cognizing Total Omniscience (*sarvākārajñatā*). Total Omniscience or the wisdom of all aspects (*sarvākārajñatā*, *mam pa thams cad mkhyen pa nyid*) is regarded as the fundamental wisdom and the central concept of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* (Obermiller 1932, pp. 72–4, 1933, pp. 3–4; Sparham 2006, pp. 4–5, 188–90). Total Omniscience is direct unmediated knowledge which understands exactly the manner of reality (*ji lta ba bzhin yod pa*, *yathāvadbhāvika*) to its fullest possible extent (*ji snyed yod pa*, *yāvadbhāvikatā*) in all its aspects (Yeh 1984). Only fully enlightened Buddhas attain this knowledge. Understanding the manner of reality relates to a Buddha’s cognition of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and the fullest possible extent refers to any and all possible objects of knowledge. In order for bodhisattvas to accomplish the goal of attaining Buddhahood, as well as to facilitate their ability to teach various levels of future disciples, they must train in acquiring an understanding of all Buddhist path systems, both Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna. This understanding of all paths is called path-omniscience (*mārgajñatā*, *lam shes nyid*) (Obermiller 1932, pp. 74–5, 1933, pp. 192–6; Sparham 2006, pp. 191–3, 2008). In the *Ornament* three types of path systems are mastered by bodhisattvas: the paths of *śrāvakas*, the paths of *pratyekabuddhas*, and the paths of bodhisattvas. A *śrāvaka* (Tib. *nyan thos pa*, ‘Listener’) is a type of individual who has heard or studied the Buddha’s teachings and who seeks the peace of *nirvāṇa* through cultivating a direct realization of the Nobles’ Four Truths. A *pratyekabuddha* (Tib. *rang sang gyas*, ‘Solitary Buddha’) is an ‘individually awakened one’ who cognizes the emptiness of external objects through realizing dependent arising but does not thereby attain the full omniscience of a Buddha. *Pratyekabuddhas* do not have much compassion and attain their awakening in solitude. A bodhisattva (Tib. *byang chub sems dpa'*, ‘Buddha-to-be’) is an individual who is intent on achieving full Buddhahood for the welfare of beings through cultivating wisdom and compassion. The third chapter or third clear realization is Omniscience (*sarvajñatā*) or Empirical Omniscience (*vastujñāna*, *gzhi shes*; lit. ‘knowledge of bases’) (Obermiller 1932, pp. 75–7; Sparham 2008, pp. 51–67, 299–328). This clear realization cognizes empirical objects which are to be abandoned in conditioned existence. Such realization correlates to knowledge that is comprehended by *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*. Empirical Omniscience is mastered by bodhisattvas as

well, but bodhisattvas do not cling to the pacifying results of this realization's cognition. This knowledge leads *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, as well as bodhisattvas, to comprehend the entirety of unconditioned and conditioned things (*dharma*s) in Buddhist classification, including the five aggregates (*skandha*), the twelve sense spheres (*āyatana*), and the eighteen sense objects (*dhātu*).

The path to Buddhahood itself and the detailed means of its application are covered in the *Ornament* by the fourth through seventh clear realizations. The fourth chapter of the *Ornament*, devoted to the realization of wisdom of all aspects (*sarvākārābhisambodha*, *mam rdzogs sbyor ba*), is a yogic practice which enables a bodhisattva to gain a cognition of all the aspects of the three types of omniscience (Obermiller 1932, pp. 77–9, 1933, pp. 318–404; Sparham 2009). This realization is comprised of twenty methods for meditative training (*prayoga*) and 173 aspects (*ākāra*) that relate to the three forms of omniscience. The *Ornament's* chapter five pertains to the summit of full understanding (*mūrdhābhisamaya*, *rtse sbyor*) or 'culminating insight' (Obermiller 1932, pp. 79–80). This *abhisamaya* is comprised of eight factors and refers to phases of yogic practices which reach culmination while cognizing emptiness. Among the five paths (which will be described below), this clear realization begins in the Path of Training (*prayogamārga*, *sbyor lam*) and the Path of Meditation (*bhāvanāmārga*, *sgom lam*) and extends until the instant before the attainment of Buddhahood. The sixth chapter defines, by reference to thirteen topics in one verse, the gradual full understanding (*anupūrvābhisamaya*, *mthar gyis sbyor ba*) of the three forms of omniscience (Obermiller 1932, p. 81). This clear realization of 'gradual insight' consists of engaging in the six perfections of bodhisattva practice (*pāramitās*), giving, moral virtue, patience, diligence, concentration, and discernment, as well as concentrating upon six forms of recollection (*anusmṛti*), including recollection of the Buddha ('teacher'), Dharma ('teaching'), and Saṃgha ('community'). The gradual full understanding also involves cognizing the lack of essence of all things. This realization is present, beginning in the path of accumulation, and slowly increases until the final moment before Buddhahood. The seventh *abhisamaya* clarifies the 'instantaneous realization' (*ekakṣaṇābhisamaya*, *skad cig gcig pa'i mngon par rdzogs par byang chub pa*) through four modes (Galloway 1988; Obermiller 1932, pp. 81–3). 'Instantaneous realization' occurs at the final moment right before Buddhahood. *Abhisamayas* four through seven are known as 'the four methods of realization' of the three types of knowledge.

The last subject in the *Ornament*, the result of the path, is the realization of the Dharma-body (*dharmakāyābhisamaya*, *chos sku mngon rtogs pa*) in its four aspects. Indian and Tibetan commentators debate about what exactly is the correct interpretation of these four aspects (Makransky 1997). A number of Tibetan scholars, following the Indian scholar Haribhadra, will understand these four as (1) the body of dharma (*dharmakāya*), (2) the embodiment of Buddhahood in its essence (*svābhāvikakāya*), (3) the embodiment of communal enjoyment (*saṃbhogakāya*), and (4) the limitless forms of awakened manifestation (*nairmāṇīkākāya*). The realization of the Dharmakāya is brought about as a natural result of the preceding practices found in the fourth through seventh clear realizations.

In this way, the eight subjects of the *Ornament* articulate a worldview in which bodhisattvas may actualize Omniscient Buddhahood. The eight subjects in terms of three categories are given in Table 1. The eight subjects found in the *Ornament* are further expanded into seventy topics (*arthasaptatiḥ*, *don bdun cu*) that outline the individual topics to be mastered within each subject. The eight subjects and seventy topics often serve as a topical outline of the *Ornament* and develops into a genre of literature in Tibet to facilitate the study of paths and stages (Obermiller 1932, pp. 61–85).

The Fivefold Path of the Bodhisattva

As mentioned above, the *Ornament* documents a highly complex schema of ‘classical Mahāyāna path-systems’ that has an intimate relationship with the contents of the *Prājñāpāramitā Sūtras*. The *Ornament* standing on its own, without close scrutiny, may appear as no more than a list of topics summarized from these *sūtras*. However, beginning in the sixth century CE with Ārya Vimuktisena and in the eighth century CE with Haribhadra, we begin to see commentaries to the *Ornament* which provide detailed definitions on particular subjects supported by the testament of doctrinal digests, such as the *Abhidharmakośa*, *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, and *Pramāṇavārttika* (Sparham 2006, 2008, 2009). This trend found among Indian commentaries extends into Tibet and Tibetan-based commentaries beginning in the early eleventh century up until the present day. By the time the *Ornament* commentarial tradition had reached its apex in mid-fifteenth century Tibet, an all-inclusive method of exegesis allowed for Tibetan *Ornament* commentaries to evolve into a *tour de force* of encyclopedic Buddhist doctrinal knowledge where even minor topics could be expanded into hundreds of pages and for specific topics to even develop into separate books and genre categories of Tibetan literature (Apple 2008, pp. 21–46).

The *Ornament* commentarial tradition in its exegesis of path systems began to utilize a model of five paths to describe practices and stages of attainment. The system of ‘five paths’ is one the best known among path schemes found in Buddhist literature (Buswell and Gimello 1992, pp. 7–9). The system is associated with Abhidharma traditions, although its exact historical beginnings are not clear (Watanabe 2000, pp. 38–48). One of the most influential formulations is found in Asaṅga’s *Abhidharmasamuccaya* (Rāhula and Boin-Webb 2000, p. 141). The path system of the *Ornament* and its commentaries incorporates a generally accepted Mahāyāna soteriological system of five paths that was most likely influenced by the *Abhidharmakośa* and the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*. The list of five paths correlated to the path systems of the *Ornament* is as follows:

- (1) The path of acquiring the provisions (*sambhāramārga*).
- (2) The path of preparation (*prayogamārga*).
- (3) The path of seeing (*darśanamārga*).
- (4) The path of meditation (*bhāvanāmārga*).
- (5) The path of no more training (*aśaikṣamārga*).

Indian and Tibetan scholars present these five paths for each of the three vehicles, i.e., *śrāvaka*, *pratyekabuddha*, and bodhisattva, that are alluded to in the *Ornament*. In general, the first two paths are considered mundane paths (*laukika*) and the latter three are considered to be supramundane (*lokottara*) as they generate the attainments of Noble Beings (*ārya*) within each of the three vehicles. The paths of preparation, seeing, and meditation are the most important for commentators as these paths represent the preparation phase for abandoning mental afflictions that impede liberation and knowledge, as well as the paths where such afflictions are actually considered to be abandoned (*prahāṇamārga*) (see Table 2).

Our focus here is on the fivefold path system of the bodhisattva in the *Ornament*. As previously mentioned, a bodhisattva (Tib. *byang chub sems dpa*’, ‘Buddha-to-be’) is an individual who is intent on achieving full Buddhahood for the welfare of beings. In order to achieve this aim, a bodhisattva undertakes a long and arduous journey through innumerable lifetimes lasting three incalculable aeons, accumulating provisions of wisdom (*jñāna*) and merit (*punya*), while employing tactical skill (*upāya*) in the course of perfecting

Table 2 Bodhisattva Path Structure Overview [read from bottom to top]

Individual	Path type	Path	Path practices	Cognition	Result
Noble being (ārya)	Supramundane (lokottara)	Path of no more training		Total omniscience	Buddha 1. Dharma-body 2. Essential body 3. Enjoyment body 4. Emanation body Bodhisattva stages 2 thru 10 Abandonment of 108 innate knowledge obstacles
Ordinary individual (<i>pīrthagjana</i>)	Mundane (laukika)	Path of meditation	Repeated uncontaminated awareness on Nobles' Four Truths	Full realization of all aspects	Abandonment of 108 imputed knowledge obstacles Abandonment of 112 defilements Complete illumination Expanded illumination Attained illumination Illumination of wisdom
		Path of seeing	Sixteen moments on the Nobles' Four Truths	Dissolution of subject/object dichotomization via cognition of <i>sūnyatā</i>	Word of the doctrine
		Path of Preparation	Highest mundane dharma Forbearance Peak Heat Factors conducive to liberation Special instructions Altruistic thought of awakening	Preparatory analytical factors Meaning of the doctrine	
		Path of acquiring provisions		Word of the doctrine	

such practices as generosity (*dāna*), moral virtue (*śīla*), patience (*kṣānti*), diligence (*vīrya*), concentration (*dhyāna*), and discernment (*prajñā*).

The basic structure of the Mahāyāna path as discussed in the *Ornament* is the same five-fold division that is derived from Abhidharma texts and is applied to *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha* vehicles. However, although the structures are the same for each of the vehicles, the bodhisattva path is considered to be superior for a number of reasons. The *bodhisattva* path in this system of interpretation is synonymous with Mahāyāna, the ‘Great (*mahā*) Vehicle (*yāna*).’ The eighth century *Ornament* commentator Haribhadra (Sparham 2006, p. 301), drawing from the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (19.59–60) and the *Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣyam* (Skilling 2004, p. 145), notes that Mahāyāna is called as such on account of seven greatnesses (*mahattvam*): greatness of support (*ālambana*), of practice (*pratipatti*), of understanding (*jñāna*), of energy (*vīrya*), of skilled means (*upāyakaūśalya*), of attainment (*prāpti*), and of deeds (*karma*). Another way that the *Ornament* and its commentators speak of the fundamental difference of Mahāyāna from the other vehicles is that Mahāyāna is considered to be superior in its aspiration, abandonment, and realization (*Ornament* 1.42). Bodhisattvas, according to this view, are superior in that they aspire for unsurpassable complete awakening (*anuttarasamyakṣambodhi*), not only for themselves, but also for the sake of all other beings. With emphasis on the altruistic intention for the welfare of all sentient beings, one primary distinction over other vehicles is that bodhisattvas have great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*). Bodhisattvas abandon not only the afflictional obscurations (*kleśāvaraṇa*) but also the obstacles that impede omniscience (*jñeyāvaraṇa*). The understanding that actuates their abandonment, is not only cognizing the essencelessness of the person (*pudgalanairātmya*), but realizing the essencelessness of things (*dharma-nairātmya*) through the apprehension of emptiness (*śūnyatā*).

In the course of cognizing the two types of essencelessness and abandoning the two types of obscurations, a bodhisattva will travel through ten levels or stages (*daśabhūmi*) (*Ornament* 1.48–70). A bodhisattva is no longer bound to the cycle of rebirth and redeath (*saṃsāra*) through eradicating the afflictional obscurations. Through eradicating obstacles that impede omniscience, bodhisattvas achieve Buddhahood, which enables them to help all beings.

The individual who travels in the Mahāyāna path may be of two types: (1) the bodhisattva who from the very beginning sets out on the Mahāyāna path lineage (*rigs nges*), and (2) the *Hīnayāna* *arhat*, either *śrāvaka* or *pratyekabuddha*, who is not firm in the lineage (*rigs ma nges pa*) and subsequently enters into the Mahāyāna path. The foundation of the Mahāyāna path is the seed potential for enlightenment, the *tathāgatagarbha*, which is considered to be latent in all sentient beings (*Ornament* 1.39). This seed potential must be activated by means of special reflection concerning the nature of *saṃsāra*, the realm of repeated rebirth and redeath, such that this potential becomes engaged in the process of spiritual development (Ruegg 1968–1969, 1969, 1977).

The special reflection that takes place according to the *Ornament* and its commentaries is the altruistic aspiration to achieve full awakening for oneself and for the sake of other beings. This is known as the generation of the thought for awakening (*bodhicittotpāda*, *byang chub tu sems bskyed*) (Sparham 1987). The bodhisattva produces the altruistic mind set on achieving perfect awakening (*saṃyaksambodhi*), a mind having for its essence (*garbha*) emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) and consisting in the twofold stage of resolution (*prañidhi*) and engagement (*prasthāna*). The *Ornament* (1.18–20) provides a list of 22 forms of this altruistic mind generation that increases throughout the bodhisattva path leading to Buddhahood. Production of this altruistic mind is often referred to by Tibetan commentators as the ‘gateway into the Mahāyāna’ (Tib. *theg chen ’jug sgo*) (Sparham 1987,

p. 143), and marks the beginning of the Mahāyāna path phase called acquiring the provisions (*sambhāramārga*).

One who desires to sustain the qualities that are produced from this mind generation must hear and place firmly into his or her mind (*Ornament* 1.22) special instructions (*avavāda*), the practices and applications (*pratipatti*) that develop his or her advancement in the Mahāyāna path. A bodhisattva who wishes to sustain and expand the altruistic mind generation is said to be able to travel to many world realms by means of meditative stabilization, supernormal powers, or attainments for the purpose of serving and hearing doctrinal teachings from Buddhas in other world realms. *Ornament* commentators outline this mode of acquiring instructions based on a meditative absorption known as the stream of the doctrine (*śrotānuṣṭāsamādhi*). A bodhisattva is thought to acquire extensive qualities of quiescence and wisdom through obtaining special instructions from other-world Buddhas by means of this meditative stabilization. Then, having received the special instructions, a bodhisattva cultivates the roots of virtue (*kuśalamūla*), which are characterized by qualities such as faith (*śraddhā*), and are obtained by excellence in learning (*śruta*). In the *Ornament*, this is referred to as 'factors conducive to liberation' (*mokṣabhāgīya*) and it is in this stage of the path where a bodhisattva begins to collect the provisions necessary to make the aim of the altruistic mind generation possible. A bodhisattva will acquire a whole series of provisions, or equipment, throughout his or her career in order to attain highest awakening and the *Ornament* (1.46–47) enumerates 17 types of provisions. The bodhisattva develops virtuous qualities such as faith, enthusiastic perseverance in giving, mindfulness, stabilization, and wisdom. At this phase of the path, a bodhisattva is represented as having acquired a basic understanding of the essencelessness of things and as having initiated the unified path of calm abiding and special insight (*śamathavipaśyanāyuganaddha*). A bodhisattva then enters into the Mahāyāna path of preparation (*prayogamārga*).

Proximate to the time that a bodhisattva enters the path of preparation, the *Ornament* (1.6, 1.43–47, 1.72–73) specifies a series of practices (*pratipatti*) that develop and expand as the bodhisattva journeys toward Buddhahood. These are the practices of donning the armor (*saṃnāha*) of the perfections (*pāramitā*), the practice of setting out (*prasthāna*) through mastering concentrations and absorptions, gathering equipment (*sambhāra*), and going forth (*nirvāṇa*) to the victory of full Buddhahood. These practices assist the bodhisattva to achieve the threefold Omniscience found in the first three chapters of the *Ornament*. This achievement is based on the bodhisattva acquiring an immense amount of wholesome and virtuous qualities through engaging in the six perfections while cultivating the four realizations found in chapters four through seven of the *Ornament*. According to Haribhadra (Obermiller 1933, pp. 103–6; Sparham 2006, pp. 271–4), the practices of armor and setting out occur at the path of acquiring the provisions, beginning equipment practices are included in the path of preparation while advanced equipment practices are found in the path of seeing and cultivation. The going forth practice correlates with the path of cultivation.

The Mahāyāna path of preparation begins when a bodhisattva, who is still an ordinary individual (*prthagjana*), obtains for the first time a forceful experience of special insight directed at the emptiness of all things (*sarvadharmaśūnyatā*). As with the paths of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha*, this stage of developing insight on the path of preparation consists of the fourfold preparatory analytical factors (*nirvedhabhāgīya*) (*Ornament* 1.25–26; Sparham 2006, pp. 52–78, 221–60). These four factors of the *nirvedhabhāgīya* are heat (*uṣmagata*), peak (*mūrdhagata*), forbearance (*kṣānti*), and highest mundane dharma (*laukikāgradharma*), and they constitute a mundane meditative realization (*laukikabhāvanāmaya*) even though they focus on realizing truths for Noble Beings (*caturāryasatyā*). Each of these

four preparatory analytical factors has a subdivision into small, medium, and great. They are considered to be superior to the Hīnayāna preparatory analytical factors in five ways: (1) distinctive in terms of objective support, (2) in terms of mode of cultivation, (3) of causing realization of all three paths, (4) in terms of having a spiritual friend characterized by skill-in-means, and (5) having divisions correlated with the stages of dissolving the bifurcation of conceptualized subject and object.

Haribhadra (Apple 2008, pp. 85–6; Sparham 2006, pp. 248–50) provides the following description of these four preparatory analytical factors and the meditative stabilizations associated with each factor. When a bodhisattva is in meditation focusing on the essencelessness of all things, they begin to experientially understand that cognitive objects are constructed by their own mind. Then, through a slight illumination of wisdom (*jñānāloka*) that dispells imaginative entanglement in various external objects, the bodhisattva sees merely the mind. At this time a bodhisattva is absorbed in the stage of heat (*uṣmagata*). This meditative stabilization is called ‘attaining illumination’ (*ālokalabdha*). At this point, a bodhisattva has begun to develop the fire of non-conceptual wisdom (*nirvikalpajñāna*) which will penetrate the Nobles’ Four Truths. When that illumination of the discernment of things expands through extensive effort in cultivating the meditative object of essencelessness, there is some clarity and a moderate illumination of wisdom is cultivated. At this point the bodhisattva is absorbed in the stage of peak (*mūrdhagata*). A bodhisattva at this phase of the path has reached the peak or end of the roots of virtue (*kuśalamūla*) becoming unstable. This state is a meditative stabilization which is called ‘expanded illumination’ (*vrddhāloka*). Then, through absorption in merely the mental continuum, a particularly clear illumination of knowledge is generated because there is no imaginative entanglement at all. The bodhisattva during this phases is absorbed in the stage of forbearance (*kṣāntī*). A more pronounced cognition of emptiness is developed at this point and a bodhisattva loses fear of the concept of emptiness. At this time, the bodhisattva develops the meditative stabilization which understands suchness one-sidedly (*tattvārthaikadeśapraviṣṭa*). This terminology draws attention to the assertion that the bodhisattva has attained for the first time a cognition of the emptiness of objects but he or she has not yet perceived the emptiness of subjects. The stabilization is considered one-sided with respect to emptiness. After this stage, when a bodhisattva attains a complete illumination of wisdom in which there is no appearance at all that grasps at objects, then he or she is in the stage known as the highest of mundane dharmas (*laukikāgradharma*). A bodhisattva now cultivates the uninterrupted meditative stabilization (*ānantarya samādhi*). This meditative stabilization is called uninterrupted because in the same session of meditation the bodhisattva will proceed without interruption to the path of liberation on the Mahāyāna path of seeing (*darśanamārga*).

It should be noted at this point that the *Ornament* (4.38–45; Sparham 2009, pp. 61–97, 287–362) specifies that as the bodhisattva progresses to full Buddhahood through the cognitive attainments and mental purifications that occur on the paths of preparation, seeing, and cultivation that they become irreversible (*avaivartika*) from full Buddhahood. The term ‘irreversible’ in this instance generally signifies a point reached in the career of a bodhisattva after which there can be no turning back from the attainment of full Buddhahood. The *Ornament* (Apple 2008, pp. 65–6) distinguishes three phases of a bodhisattva becoming increasingly endowed with marks and signs of being irreversible: (1) while on the path of preparation cultivating the preparatory analytical factors, (2) while on the path of seeing cognizing eight moments of receptivity and eight moments of knowledge, and (3) while on the path of meditation. As the bodhisattva progresses through these path phases they increase their cognition of emptiness and thereby turn away from attachment

to sensory objects and gain a multitude of moral, ascetic, and even hygienic qualities. The *Ornament* and its commentaries (4.40–43; Sparham 2009, pp. 289–90) specify, for example, that the irreversible bodhisattva will abstain from taking life, engaging in theft, or drinking liquor as well as have clean robes with no worms in their bodies.

Haribhadra notes (Sparham 2009, p. 317), drawing from the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra-bhāṣya*, that dichotomous conceptualization (*vikalpa*) is the fundamental affliction for bodhisattvas. Dichotomous conceptualization in the *Ornament* consists of erroneously reifying objects that are cognized as well as reifying the subject who cognizes. The *Ornament* will outline, primarily in its chapter five, multiple types of *vikalpa* that a bodhisattva eradicates on the paths of preparation, seeing, and meditation in order to reach Buddhahood. During the Mahāyāna path of preparation, the experience of the preparatory analytical factors begins to dissolve the bifurcation of conceptualized subjects and objects. The conceptualization of objects (*grāhya*), and the conceptualization of subjects (*grāhaka*), are each classified into two to make four kinds of concepts. The two kinds of objects concern (1) the reification of things which are pursued (*pravṛttipakṣādhiṣṭhānagrāhyavikalpa*, 'jug gzung rlog) and (2) the reification of things to be relinquished (*nivṛttipakṣādhiṣṭhāna-grāhyavikalpa*, ldog gzung rlog). The two kinds of subjects concern (3) substantially existing persons (*pudgaladravya*), which conceives the person to be substantially existent (*rdzas 'dzin rlog*), and (4) nominally existing beings (*prajñaptipuruṣa*), which conceives the person to imputedly exist (*btags 'dzin rlog*). Comprehensions connected with these four types of concepts, formative in the path of preparation, become the dominate focal point on the Mahāyāna paths of seeing and cultivation.

The Mahāyāna path of seeing in the *Ornament* is similar to the paths of seeing in the lower vehicles in that there are sixteen moments of consciousness directed at the Nobles' Four Truths. However, the elements of existence within the context of these Truths are directly cognized as not being merely selfless, and not merely unreal as external objects, but as being dependently co-arisen and having no essence of their own. This occurs as a meditative stabilization and comprehension consisting in the non-perception of the bifurcation of subjects and objects. This comprehension understands subjects and objects as being completely the same or non-differentiated. In this instance, 'non-perception' means the cessation of ordinary dualistic appearances and the manifestation of ultimate reality (*dharmadhātu*).

Through this manner of comprehension a bodhisattva will abandon artificial defilements and imputed knowledge obstacles on the path of seeing. In regards to artificial defilements to be abandoned by the path of seeing, there are ten afflictions for each of the four Nobles' Truths in the desire realm. There are six fundamental afflictions consisting of desire, anger, pride, ignorance, doubt, and wrong view. Wrong view is in turn classified into five types: [false] view of the perishable aggregates (*satkāyadrṣṭi*), extreme view (*antagrāhadrṣṭi*), false view (*mithyādrṣṭi*), holding a [wrong] view as supreme (*drṣṭiparāmarśa*), and holding [wrong] ethics and rituals as supreme (*śīlavrataparāmarśa*). These 10 afflictions separately occur with respect to each of the four truths such that within the desire realm there are 40 artificial defilements. With the exception of anger (*pratigha*), which does not arise in the form or formless realms, the remaining afflictions likewise occur for each of the four truths in the form and formless realms allowing for 72 artificial defilements. The 40 artificial defilements of the desire realm and the 72 of the form and formless realm make for 112 artificial defilements to be removed by the Mahāyāna path of seeing (Obermiller 1932, pp. 51–2; Sparham 2006, pp. 289–90). Along with these artificial defilements, there are 108 imputed knowledge obstacles which are removed by the Mahāyāna path of seeing. This number of imputed knowledge obstacles

is calculated by multiplying the four types of conceptions times the nine aspects that occur within each type of conception from among the divisions of desire, form, and formless realms. The removal of these imputed obstacles to knowledge correlates with the first bodhisattva stage (*bhūmi*) known as 'joyous' (*pramuditā*).

The Mahāyāna path of meditation is a continuation of the comprehensions that were beheld during the preparatory analytical factors of the path of preparation and the 16 moments of the path of seeing. This path of meditation repeatedly considers, assesses, and contemplates the four types of concepts which proliferate subject/object dichotomization throughout the serviceable levels of meditative stabilization (*Ornament* 4.53). Similar to the Hinayāna paths of meditation, the most weak of the weak paths are antidotes to the coarse of the coarse defilements and the most strong of the strong paths are antidotes to the subtle of the subtle defilements (Sparham 2009, p. 316). By means of this repeated practice or familiarization, the path of meditation abandons the instinctual or innate afflictional obscurations and innate knowledge obstacles (see Table 2). There are 16 innate defilements to be removed by the path of cultivation. Six fundamental afflictions are associated with the desire realm: desire, anger, pride, ignorance, false view of the perishable aggregates, and extreme view. Then, due to the lack of anger in the upper realms, there are five each in the form and formless realm resulting in 16. There are 108 innate knowledge obstacles in correlation with the concepts of subjects and objects, by divisions of the desire, form, and formless realms, each with nine aspects for each of the four concepts.

These 16 innate afflictional obscurations and 108 innate obstructions to omniscience are gradually abandoned by the path of meditation in nine stages consonant with the bodhisattva stages two through ten (*Ornament* 5.26–31). When the bodhisattva, standing firm on the tenth stage, attains the last of the uninterrupted paths, the innate afflictional obscurations and innate obstructions to omniscience are simultaneously abandoned. This is known as the simultaneous illumination (*ekakṣaṇābhisambodha*) and the culmination of the bodhisattva's development. The bodhisattva at this time reaches the Mahāyāna path of no more training (*aśaikṣamārga*). In this moment, the cognitive differentiation into subject and object ceases, the latent subtle seeds of ignorance are totally removed, and the state of highest enlightenment is attained (*anuttarasamyaksambodhi*).

Conclusion

The *Ornament's* path systems for the bodhisattva as outlined in the eight clear realizations and five paths are complex and interrelated. The eight clear realizations are explicitly mentioned in the *Ornament* in relation to the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*. The eight clear realizations consist of four practices (*prayoga*) that aim at cognizing three modes of omniscience (*viśaya*) in order to achieve the result (*phala*) of multidimensional Buddhahood. The five paths provide a complementary, yet alternative, structure to the bodhisattva path in the *Ornament*. The five paths are a path structuring schema incorporated into Indian and Tibetan commentarial exegesis on the *Ornament* from Abhidharma and Yogācāra texts. The five path system of the bodhisattva as articulated in the *Ornament* and its commentaries replicates structures, terminology, and concepts found in the exegesis of *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha* path systems. At the same time, the cognitive attainments and mental purifications attained by a bodhisattva are amplified and transvalued toward the aim of full Buddhahood, rather than just the peace of lower nirvāṇa. The eight clear realizations and five paths are therefore two interrelated, yet distinct, modes of envisioning the bodhisattva path in the *Ornament*. While these path structures do not provide details of actual meditation experience, they do provide Tibetan Buddhists who follow the *Ornament* a

structured worldview where a narrative of spiritual progress is possible and where the altruistic goal of Buddhahood can be attained.

Short Biography

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Note

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