

***Distinguishing the Middle  
from the Extremes***

***The root text by Maitreya  
and a Commentary by***

***The Venerable Khenchen  
Thrangu Rinpoche***

## ***Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes***

This treatise is one of the classic Mahayana texts written by Asanga in the fourth century who was visited by Maitreya, the next Buddha, and brought this text back as one of the *Five Books of Maitreya*.

This text was preserved by the Tibetans and is studied in the Tibetan monasteries, particularly, by the Kagyu lineage. This text explains what the fundamental nature of samsara and of nirvana is and gives a comprehensive explanation of emptiness. It also presents the five paths leading to enlightenment and the obstacles to these paths. It then presents the Four Noble Truths and the obstacles to understanding each of these truths. Finally, it presents the 37 harmonies to enlightenment, the definitive characteristics of suchness (dharmata), and the three natures.

This book presents a translation of the root verses by Maitreya and Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary elucidating this text. Taking these together allows the student of Buddhism to read and understand one of the fundamental texts of Mahayana Buddhism.

Thrangu Rinpoche has taught students for 40 years (20 of these for Western students) and is well-known for taking advanced topics and making them understandable to Western dharma students.

**Namo Buddha Publications**

This book is part of a series on the five works  
of Maitreya, the next Buddha

***Distinguishing  
the Middle from the Extremes***

(Skt. *Madhyantavibhanga*)  
(Tib. *ü ta nam ched*)

***by***

***Asanga based on the inspiration of the  
Buddha Maitreya***

***A Commentary by***

**Thrangu Rinpoche  
*Geshe Lharampa***

***Translated by***

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Finally, we would like to thank Michelle Martin who provided us with a translation of Chapter five of the root text that she did. We have used her translation for this important chapter of the text.

## *Notes*

Technical words are italicized the first time that they are used to alert the reader that they may be found in the Glossary of Terms.

The Tibetan words are given as they are pronounced, not spelled in Tibetan. The Glossary of Tibetan Terms gives their actual spelling. In some of the Tables, we have kept the actual Tibetan spelling so these terms can be looked up.

We use the convention of using B.C.E. (Before Common Era) for "B. C." and C.E. (Common Era) for "A. D."

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## Table 1

### *The Five Works of Maitreya*

1. *The Ornament of Mahayana Discourses* (Skt. *mahayana-sutramkara*, Tib. *theg pa chen po mdo sde rgyan*). This work consists of twenty-one chapters and is written in verse. It covers a discussion of Buddha-nature, refuge in the three jewels, the mahayana paths, and the doctrine of emptiness.
2. *The Ornament of Clear Realization* (Skt. *abhisamayalamkara*, Tib. *mngon rtogs rgyan*). This work is a verse commentary on the Prajnaparamita literature (which comes in the 100,000 and in 25,000, and in 8,000 verses) and like that literature is divided into eight vajra topics. This text is studied in all four Tibetan lineages and is used in the study of the sutra system.
3. *Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes* (Skt. *madhyantavibhaga*, Tib. *dbus mtha' rnam 'byed*). This work is a commentary expounding primarily on the Chittamatra school of Buddhism, especially the Shentong school. The text explores eternalism and nihilism and why these are not part of the middle way.
4. *Distinguishing Dharma and Dharmata* (Skt. *dharma-dharmata-vibhaga*, Tib. *chos dang chos nyid rnam 'byed*). This is a commentary on the tathagatagarbha doctrine and the Chittamatra school of thought.
5. *The Uttara Tantra* (Skt. *uttaratantra shastra*, Tib. *rgyud bla ma*). This work is written in verse and has seven vajra points. It is mainly a commentary on the three jewels, the seed of Buddha-nature which is inherent in all sentient beings, and the attributes and activities of the Buddha. It particularly deals with the subject of Buddha-nature and the development of the realization of the nature of phenomena through the purification of the disturbing emotions.



## *Foreword*

The Buddha's teachings may be categorized into the hinayana, the mahayana, and the vajrayana teachings. In the Theravada, or hinayana, teachings the Buddha taught the four noble truths, which explain the causes for our suffering in samsara and tell how we can reach liberation by engaging in meditation and the eight-fold path. The ideal was the arhat who had achieved complete mastery over the mind.

The Theravada teachings of the Buddha were practiced predominately for about 500 years, when a new movement, the mahayana, became prevalent. The mahayana movement can be traced to the teachings of Nagarjuna in about the first century of our era. Nagarjuna presented extensive treatises based on the Buddha's teachings, which showed that not only was the self empty of inherent existence, but that all phenomena—tree, rocks, people—were also empty of inherent existence. In the mahayana schools of Buddhism the teachings of Nagarjuna and the vast body of the Prajnaparamita sutras were extensively studied and analyzed. The ideal for this school was the bodhisattva, who vowed to forgo the liberation of nirvana until all sentient beings had reached enlightenment. The mahayana school, studied and practiced extensively in the countries of China, Japan, Korea, and Tibet, was further developed in the fourth century with the birth of two brothers, Asanga and Vasubandhu, in India. Vasubandhu, the younger brother, wrote an extensive commentary on the Abhidharma portion of the Buddhist teachings. The Abhidharma, to simplify greatly, was an attempt to classify and codify all the concepts that the Buddha had taught in his numerous scriptures—a body of knowledge which, incidentally, is the size of about thirty Christian bibles. His *Abidharmakosha* has been studied widely.

Asanga, the older brother, went into meditation retreat for twelve years and the fruition of this extensive practice was that he was able to meet with the Buddha Maitreya, who gave him five works. This meeting with a being of the sambhogakaya realm which we ordinary beings cannot even conceive is still being accomplished by highly evolved lamas in Tibet. Asanga published these five

books, which classified the mahayana path; The present text is one of these five works. The publishing of these texts actually led to the founding of a whole new school of Buddhism, called the Chittamatra school. The Chittamatra or Mind-only school emphasizes that all phenomena are just mind. This work could be considered a Chittamatra work, but as Thrangu Rinpoche points out, it has elements of many different Buddhist philosophies, not just the Chittamatra.

In *Distinguishing the Middle Way from the Extremes* we present, first of all, the original text of Maitreya. This text was preserved by early Tibetan translators who entered India in the seventh to tenth centuries, before the Muslim destruction of the Buddhist colleges. The original root text of Maitreya was translated into English by Khenpo Tsultrim's Marpa Translation Group. As the reader can see, just reading the root text leads to little understanding of the mahayana path. Nammo Buddha publications is pleased to present a commentary of this great work by Thrangu Rinpoche. Thrangu Rinpoche is particularly qualified to give a commentary on this work because he has worked tirelessly on the mahayana path himself, has done extensive meditation and study on this topic, and has taught the most important teachings of the Kagyu lineage. As pointed out in Rinpoche's introduction to this text, several other lineages of Tibetan Buddhism subscribe to the Rangtong view which does not study this particular work of Maitreya carefully. The Shentong school, however, does consider this text important and Rinpoche is a special lineage holder of the Shentong school.

If the reader were to study this text in a Tibetan Buddhist monastic college, he or she would most likely begin by memorizing the root verses. After the verses were memorized, typically a learned teacher would explain these verses line by line and allow the students to ask questions. In a similar fashion, this book presents the verses and gives Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary as it was presented at the Nammo Buddha Seminar in Nepal at Thrangu Rinpoche's monastery in 1992.

Graduates of Tibetan monastic colleges, khenpos, can often recite thousands of root verses of various Buddhist texts and if they cannot recite the actual root verses, they can easily recite dozens of categories of items listed in the text from memory. For this reason

## Foreword

we have helped the Western student by including charts of the categories, as well as an extensive glossary of technical and Tibetan terms, because different translators use different English words for these concepts.

This book is not one of the easier dharma books to read. If the reader wants a careful explanation of the mahayana path and an explanation of emptiness and the bodhisattva path, Thrangu Rinpoche's *The Three Vehicles of Buddhist Practice* should be read first. Because it was written 1,600 years ago by a Buddhist philosopher, this book may will seem like an endless list of categories, but *The Differentiation of the Middle and Extremes* is much more. It is an exposition, a road map, a guidebook of the path we take as a Buddhist from our ordinary confused state all the way to Buddhahood. The book devotes a great deal of time to the characteristics of Buddhahood so we can see what it is we are aiming our practice toward. As Thrangu Rinpoche once said, "If you don't know what enlightenment is like, it is like shooting an arrow without a target." The text also devotes a great deal of time to the characteristics of the path and stages to show what the proper path is. Finally, and most practical to the meditator, it explains the problems and misconceptions we may have and how to remedy them.

Clark Johnson, Ph. D.

**Table 2**

***The Eight Consciousnesses and their Functions***

**The Five Sensory Consciousnesses**

(The sensory consciousnesses take the information from the sense organ and send it to the mental consciousness without judging or analyzing it.)

1. eye consciousness

(Skt. *chakurvijñāna*, Tib. *mig gi rnam par shes pa*)

2. ear consciousness

(Skt. *shrotravijñāna*, Tib. *rna ba 'i rnam par shes pa*)

3. nose consciousness

(Skt. *ghra envijñāna*, Tib. *sna 'i rnam par shes pa*)

4. tongue consciousness

(Skt. *jihvavijñāna*, Tib. *lce 'i rnam par shes pa*)

5. body consciousness

(Skt. *kayenvijñāna*, Tib. *lus kyi rnam par shes pa*)

(The mental consciousness takes the information from the sensory consciousness and identifies the objects based on past experience stored in the eighth consciousness. This consciousness does evaluate and decide if the stimulus is pleasurable, unpleasurable, or just neutral.)

6. mental consciousness

(Skt. *manovijñāna*, Tib. *yid kyi rnam par shes pa*)

(The afflicted consciousness is always present and it brings a sense of “I” and “mine” to everything making the distinction between “I” and “other.”)

7. afflicted consciousness

(Skt. *kleshavijñāna*, Tib. *nyon mongs rnam par shes pa*)

(The ground consciousness stores all the latent imprints of the other seven consciousnesses and so it is the basis for the other seven consciousnesses).

8. ground consciousness

(Skt. *alayavijñāna*, Tib. *kun gzhi rnam par shes pa*)

# Chapter 1

## *An Introduction to the Text*

### *The Title*

*In Sanskrit: Madhyantavibhanga-karika.*

*In Tibetan: dbus mtha' 'byed bzhugs*

### *The Five Books of Maitreya*

The present text that I am going to present is known by its short title as *ü ta nam ched* in Tibetan, *Madhyantavibhanga* in Sanskrit, or *The Treatise that Distinguishes the Middle from the Extremes* in English.

Gampopa established the monastic training of the Kagyu lineage and directed his students, who were practitioners of *mahamudra*, to study the great texts of Maitreya.<sup>1</sup> Therefore the practitioners of the Kagyu tradition regard *The Five Books of Maitreya*, as extremely important. These came to us through Asanga. Asanga (4th century C.E.) went to the pure realm of *Tushita* where he met directly with Maitreya and received these texts. Nowadays scholars have some doubt about whether that meeting actually took place. In particular, Ganga Tsultrim who studied at the School in Varanasi and lived in Japan for some years wrote a text called *The Analytical Interpretation of the Books of Maitreya* in which he suggested that Asanga could not possibly have gone to the *sambhogakaya* realm of Maitreya to receive this text but that Asanga received it from a human being, a learned person whose name was Maitreyanatha. My own opinion is that his analysis shows evidence of pride and mistaken understanding. He states that it would not be possible through *samadhi*, or meditative stabilization, to visit another region not normally accessible. However, someone as accomplished as Asanga who had achieved the third *bodhisattva level* and was a master of meditation, could go to Tushita and since Maitreya does

dwell there, Asanga could receive these texts from Maitreya. Thus, I don't think there is any reason to doubt the case.<sup>2</sup>

Generally speaking, the word of the Buddha is divided into three sets of teachings. In the first turning of the *wheel of dharma*, the Buddha taught principally the *egolessness* of the individual, a person's lack of a self. In the second turning of the wheel of dharma, the Buddha taught principally the *egolessness of phenomena*, or *emptiness* (Skt. *shunyata*, Tib. *tong pa nyi*)<sup>3</sup> and decisively settled the meaning of emptiness. To demonstrate that this emptiness was not a mere blank voidness, in the third turning of the wheel of dharma, the Buddha elucidated the *sugatagarbha*, "the essence of the one gone to bliss." The mahayana tradition holds the second and third turnings as most important. The texts of the second turning of the wheel of dharma are principally the Prajnaparamita sutras of which the explicit teaching of the Prajnaparamita is emptiness. The implicit teaching, of the Prajnaparamita sutras are the ten bodhisattva levels and the *five paths*.

The Prajnaparamita sutras were clarified by Nagarjuna and his followers who composed a great many treatises (Skt. *shastra*) clearly elucidating the *Madhyamaka* or *Middle-way* and explaining through reasoning the nature of emptiness. The hidden meaning of the Prajnaparamita sutras was clarified by Asanga in his five books of Maitreya.

The first book of Maitreya is *The Ornament of Clear Realization*<sup>4</sup> (The *Abhisamaya-lamkara*) which clearly spells out the teachings on the bodhisattva levels and five paths that were presented in a hidden manner in the Prajnaparamita. This book is concerned with the meaning of the second turning of the wheel of dharma while the other four books of Maitreya are devoted to elucidating the meaning of the third turning of the wheel of dharma.

The words the Buddha spoke are contained in a great many sutras some which require further clarification. In particular, Maitreya composed a second treatise known as *The Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras* (*Mahayana-sutra-lamkara*) in which he gathered together a vast array of mahayana sutras and explained them extensively.

To help students avoid the extremes of *eternalism* and *nihilism*, Asanga wrote this third text, *Distinguishing the Middle Way from the Extremes*.

The fourth text by Maitreya is *The Differentiation of Dharma and Dharmata*<sup>5</sup> and the final treatise, the *Uttara Tantra*<sup>6</sup> is a commentary on the *sugatagarbha* or *Buddha-nature*.

When the Buddha-dharma reached Tibet, there arose four traditions of dharma: the Nyingma, the Sakya, the Gelugpa, and the Kagyu traditions. All four of these traditions consider the first text of Maitreya, *The Ornament of Clear Realization*, to be extremely important. However, those who follow the Gelugpa and Sakya traditions do not regard the other four books of Maitreya as particularly important. There is a historical reason for this. When Buddhism was introduced in Tibet, a great many learned scholars appeared and spread the dharma widely. They taught realization mainly by way of analytical reasoning. Taking that approach, they devoted themselves to long and extensive studies of the Buddhist literature, especially by carefully studying the texts of Nagarjuna, who primarily commented on the meaning of the second turning of the wheel of dharma. This topic was covered in *The Ornament of Clear Realization* but not in the other four books. For that reason, the other four of Maitreya's texts did not play a very important role in the Gelug and Sakya traditions. Also the Sakyas and Gelugpas practiced the *vajrayana* by focusing principally upon the *Guhyasamaja* practice, which does not emphasize the *creation stage* (Tib. *kye rim*). Of course, they do put a great deal of emphasis on the *completion stage* (Tib. *dzog rim*) which was explicitly described in the tantras, but not in the *quintessential instructions* that were given only as part of the oral tradition.

The other two traditions that flourished in Tibet, the Nyingma and the Kagyu, have taken the quintessential instructions on the nature of mind as the essential point for practice. In fact, Gampopa himself said that his practice lineage led back to the presentation of the mind's true nature and therefore it was important right at the outset to recognize the nature of the mind. If one does this, then the four other texts of Maitreya become extremely important because they clearly indicate just what the nature of the mind is. In particular, these four texts show that in the context of relative truth,

all phenomena are nothing other than appearances of mind. In this way Maitreya's other four texts lead to the Chittamatra or Mind-only school. They explain very clearly the mind's true way of being by indicating the ultimate nature of the mind. For that reason, the Nyingma and Kagyu traditions rely principally upon the tradition of oral and quintessential instructions.

Whether we are focusing on the meaning of the second or the third turning of the wheel of dharma, when it comes to actually practicing we need to rely on the quintessential instructions that show us very clearly the mind's actual nature. To understand the mind's nature, it is important to understand both the way in which things appear and the way in which they actually exist.<sup>7</sup> In that way, our understanding derived from studying the texts and our experience in meditation will come together. The last four books of Maitreya play a very important role because they explain exactly what is meant when we say that things exist or do not exist; what we mean by empty and not empty. This is made particularly clear in *The Differentiation of the Middle Way from the Extremes*.

The third turning of the wheel of dharma is called "the wheel of good discrimination," which is to say that in the final turning of the wheel of dharma the Buddha showed clearly what exists and what does not exist. The first turning of the wheel of dharma focuses principally upon the *four noble truths*, this turning indicates that everything exists. In the second turning, the Prajnaparamita, it seems that everything has been turned around and suddenly nothing exists. In the third turning, the Buddha differentiated clearly what is meant by saying that certain things exist and other things do not exist. That is precisely what is meant by "Distinguishing the middle way from the extremes." Understanding this differentiation makes it easy to practice meditation because the conclusion we arrive at through study and investigation and the experience we arrive at through meditation come together and are joined.

In *The Treatise that Differentiates the Middle from the Extremes*, what specifically is differentiated is what is empty and what is not empty; what exists and what does not exist when we say that all phenomena are emptiness. The notion that everything is empty doesn't fit with our experience, because in our experience things do appear and we do see and experience them. It doesn't



make any sense to deny that we see appearances. At the same time, we may wonder, “Do phenomena exist in the way that they appear?” No, phenomena do not exist in the manner in which they appear. In *conventional truth* they exist; in *ultimate truth*<sup>8</sup> they do not exist. If we say that all phenomena are just emptiness and do not exist, we are saying that there is no virtue to be practiced, no ill deeds to be abandoned, no possibility of falling into a lower realm or of achieving a higher rebirth. This is a dangerous assertion to make. If, on the other hand, we say that all phenomena really exist and are real, this view will not help us achieve liberation either.

What then is the relationship between the conventional and the ultimate truth? Is one correct, and the other not? No, there is no contradiction between them. The ultimate truth is the very nature of the conventional truth, while the conventional truth is the way in which the ultimate manifests. So, it is possible to take the middle way and avoid falling into either extreme. If one cannot understand the relationship between conventional and ultimate, then one will not be able realize the true nature of things, *dharmata*. If one does not realize *dharmata*, then one cannot meditate properly. Therefore, it is extremely important to differentiate between the middle way and the extremes.

There are some who say that this treatise, *Distinguishing the Middle Way from the Extremes* is a text of the Chittamatra Mind-only school and others who say it isn't. Both are accurate because there are ways in which it is a text of the Mind-only school and ways it is not. Its treatment of the *three natures* is from the Mind-only school view. These are the imagined nature, the dependent nature, and the thoroughly established nature, which are all important topics for the Mind-only school. However, the Mind-only school is somewhat inferior to the Middle-way or Madhyamaka school because it says that there are real, existing things. The Middle-way school is regarded as the superior interpretation because it goes beyond such a mistaken understanding.

### *The Text and Meditation*

In the practice of meditation in the Kagyu tradition, we are introduced to the nature of the mind and meditate on that nature. We

may ask how meditation on the nature of mind is going to help us abandon samsara. After all, the suffering of samsara is mainly in terms of what happens to our body, not the mind. It is precisely for that reason that the Mind-only school and its view of the nature of phenomena is helpful. The Mind-only school presents the view that everything is mind, a view which is elaborated in the treatises commenting on the teachings of the Buddha. There is a real purpose for this view; it is both meaningful and beneficial to understand the view that every thing is mind.

In the practice of mahamudra, the initial step is the pointing out of appearances as mind. In the Mind-only school the fact that appearances are just mind is settled through analytical reasoning. In the practice of mahamudra, we do not use analytical reasoning to arrive at this conclusion, but have it pointed out to us by directly examining the mind.

This text teaches that external phenomena do not truly exist, and this view also agrees with the Mind-only school. At the same time, the Mind-only school believes that the mind is a real entity which is a mistake. They conceive of the mind as truly existent. This treatise, however, does not teach that the mind is existent, and from that point of view we would have to say that this is not a Mind-only text. Rather, the text teaches that we all have the seed of enlightenment or sugatagarbha, the “union of wisdom and the expanse of reality” which is the principal teaching of the third turning of the wheel of dharma and of the mahayana school known as the Middle-way *Shentong* school.

In the practice of mahamudra, we are first shown that appearances are mind. Then we are introduced to the true nature of mind which is empty. In this treatise, however, the same point is made through a path of reasoning. Either way, what it comes down to is emptiness.

When the text says that all phenomena and the mind are empty, are they empty in the way that space is empty? No, because space is just a voidness, a nothingness, or what in Tibetan is called a “dead emptiness,” meaning that it has no quality of luminous clarity, no quality of knowing. Such space-like emptiness is just a voidness that does not give rise to the qualities of an enlightened person. We could meditate on space forever, but that will not result in achieving

enlightenment. Whereas, meditating upon the emptiness of which we are speaking results in Buddhahood, the state of knowing everything. The nature of the emptiness of mind is not just some sort of blankness, but rather is of the nature of wisdom. This wisdom is not a substance, but rather a luminosity; it is knowing. And from that point of view it is called “the essence of the one gone to bliss,” or sugatagarbha, in that it is the seed or essence that contains the capacity for achieving omniscience. Furthermore, the fruition of omniscience is bliss. The Buddha is called “the sugata,” or the “one gone to bliss,” which is not voidness, but luminosity. So, as the third step in the practice of mahamudra, emptiness is pointed out as spontaneous presence.

The *Differentiation of the Middle from the Extremes* holds that on the conventional level all phenomena are just mind. On the ultimate level, mind, or sugatagarbha, is of the nature of wisdom (Skt. *jnana*, Tib. *yeshe*). It is not a substance and its nature is emptiness. One might think that for mind to exist, for it to be such wisdom, it would have to be some sort of actual thing. In fact, it is not. It is the union of wisdom and emptiness and, being this, is capable of knowing everything.

**Table 3**

***The 12 links of Interdependent Origination***

<b>Link</b>	<b>Sanskrit</b>	<b>Tibetan</b>
1. ignorance	avidya	ma rig pa
2. connective action	samskara	‘du byed
3. consciousness	vijñāna	rnam par shes pa
4. name and form	nama-rupa	ming dang gzugs
5. sources (six senses)	ayatana	skye mched
6. contact	sparsha	reg pa
7. feeling	vedana	tshor ba
8. craving	trisna	sred pa
9. grasping	upadana	len pa
10. existence	bhava	srid pa
11. birth	jati	skye ba
12. aging and death	jara-marana	rga shi

## Chapter 2

### *The Characteristics of Phenomena*

#### THE HOMAGE

*I bow to the youthful, gentle and brilliant (Manjushri).*

#### FIRST VAJRA POINT: THE NATURE OF PHENOMENA

*Characteristics; obstructions; suchness; the antidotes,  
i.e. meditation, the phases and results; the unsurpassable vehicle.*

The root text is divided into seven root or *vajra* points which are arranged into the following five chapters: (1) characteristics, (2) obstructions, (3) suchness, (4) the antidotes, which includes the three vajra points of meditation, the phases and results, and (5) the unsurpassable vehicle.

The first topic, called “the definitive characteristics,” is concerned with the way in which all things exist; what their characteristic nature is. The second chapter, called “the obstructions,” takes up the matter why sentient beings wander in samsara. The reason for wandering in samsara is the various obstructions that exist within the continuum of sentient beings. So, the second chapter of the root text is a discussion of these obstructions. The method for abandoning these obstructions is the realization of reality, dharmata, which is the topic of the third chapter called “suchness.” The way in which suchness is to be realized is by generating the path that serves as an antidote to the obstructions. Because the fourth chapter has three vajra points, this text has five chapters and seven main vajra points. The fourth chapter of this text is called “the antidotes” and is a discussion of the antidotes to the obstructions. This chapter contains three antidotes

which are meditation, the stages of the path, and the effect of those antidotes. Finally, the fifth chapter is called “the unsurpassable vehicle” and this makes up the seventh vajra point.

## A. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SAMSA RA

The first chapter of the root text is a discussion of the general nature of phenomena. It has two divisions: the characteristics of cyclic existence or samsara and the characteristics of liberation or nirvana. This chapter on the characteristics of samsara has three divisions: a description of the way things exist, a description of the way things appear, and how to understand the topic. The characteristics of nirvana will be given in the next chapter.

The definitive characteristics of samsara are presented in terms of the way samsara really exists and the way it appears to us. Because we are confused, there is a discordance between the way in which things or phenomena appear and the way in which they actually exist. When there is no difference between the way in which things appear and the way they actually exist, then one truly understands phenomena. Because we do not understand how things appear and really are, we wander in samsara. This is followed by a discussion of the phenomena of samsara in terms of what is known as “the three natures.”

### 1. THE WAY THINGS EXIST

*There is incorrect conceptuality,  
in which there isn't the existence of duality.  
Emptiness exists in this;  
it also exists in those.*

*Appearances are neither empty nor non-empty.  
Everything is explained with that view.  
Since existent, they do not exist; since non-existent, they exist.  
That is the path of the middle way.*

In the mahayana, there is the teaching that all humans were originally a buddha and that they all possess sugatagharbha which is

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the union of emptiness and wisdom. Upon hearing this, we begin to wonder if originally we were a buddha. There is not an unaccounted for fault; there is a clear way of understanding how confusion has come about. It has to do with the way in which the various appearances dawn for us. In spite of the fact that their nature is emptiness, we have not realized it. The *dharmadhatu*, or “sphere of reality,” is emptiness, but it is not dead emptiness, but rather a luminous clarity. And because the *dharmadhatu* is of the nature of emptiness and luminous clarity, various sorts of appearances arise.

Phenomena are not existent, but rather are the play of luminosity. The appearance of phenomena is like a movie. When we see a movie, all sorts of things appear to us vividly, realistically and clearly. They are so vivid that we become involved in the movie, often feeling great emotion—yet the movie is actually, in essence, just small pictures on a strip of celluloid.

In the same way, the phenomena of the world such as people, buildings, mountains appear to us as real, when they are not. This confusing of empty appearances with reality is a mistake and is called “incorrect conceptuality” by Rangjung Dorje.<sup>9</sup> This confusion is given the description “not correct,” “not accurate,” “completely conceptualized.”<sup>10</sup> Incorrect conceptuality, or ignorance, is given as the root of confusion. Thus the first line of the verse begins by saying that confusion exists, “There is incorrect conceptuality.”

We might assume that if what we see are appearances and these appearances are mistaken, then seeing these appearances is wrong. This isn’t correct though, because appearances clearly arise in the mind and no one could ever refute this fact. It is not the arising of appearances that is wrong, rather it is incorrect conceptuality or ignorance as being the basis for all appearances. So, if indeed there is such ignorance and such mistaken concepts about appearances, then what is it that does not exist?

This basic ignorance concerns two things: external phenomena and mind. First we believe the appearances such as trees and rocks that we see in our mind are external and real objects. That is the nature of mistaken appearance. Second, we believe that internal mind is truly existent. For example, when we sleep dreams are an appearance that arise out of the luminosity of the mind. The luminosity of mind does not stop just because we go to sleep; the

mind's luminosity when we dream appears in our mind which "sees" those various appearances as external objects. We know, however, that those mountains and elephants that appear in our dreams were created by the luminosity of the mind and do not exist. Since we know that they do not exist, we can also understand that the "I" or the mind seeing all these appearances in the dream does not exist either.

Now when we apply this example of our experience of dreaming to our experience while awake, we can see that there are external appearances and internal appearances (thoughts and feelings) and that these also do not exist. Therefore, the text says, "Emptiness exists in those," meaning that the nature of appearances as such does not exist.

The text then says, "They are not empty and are not non-empty." When it says that the appearances are not empty, it means that on the conventional or relative level these appearances exist because we experience them. They are not utterly false because there is the clear relationship between cause and effect. We can understand this better by considering the example of a mirage. Both the mirage and real water are empty. However, we can reach, drink, and wash with real water; but we cannot do that with a mirage. Therefore, relatively speaking water is said to be real; it is not utterly non-existent. However, it is not utterly real either; rather it is like a reflection in a mirror. So, from that point of view the text says that it is not empty.

It is very important that we understand the way in which all phenomena actually exist: things are valid on the conventional level but mistaken on the ultimate level. Understanding the nature of appearances is extremely important for the development of inferential understanding of reality and for the practice of meditation.

For many people, the longing for meditation is a wish for peacefulness and having a relaxed pleasant state of mind. If we practice meditation, our mind becomes peaceful and relaxed, but this is not the final truth of the Buddha-dharma. When we practice meditation, we temporarily experience peace at times, but at other times we do not experience peace. But if we realize the way in which things actually exist, then we can overcome all hardships and trouble in our lives. Everything from the abandonment of the



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disturbing emotions (Skt. *klesha*) and the generation of prajna to the attaining omniscient wisdom will come from the understanding of the way in which phenomena actually exist. We now see why it is important to understand this topic.

It is possible to destroy suffering, obstacles, hardships, and the disturbing emotions because they are founded upon an incorrect assumption. This suffering is not caused by someone else, rather all suffering, obstacles, hardships, and disturbing emotions come about from an incorrect assumption about the nature of reality. If we realize the way in which things truly are, then we can abandon our confusion. By listening to the teachings on the nature of reality and contemplating their meaning, we can understand the nature of our confusion and then we can understand the truth that comes with the practice of meditation. In this way, we can abandon confusion by developing the wisdom that arises from meditation. It is through this prajna that we realize the way in which things exist. It is also true that there is no other method to gain the complete freedom of nirvana except through meditation.

### 2. THE WAY THINGS APPEAR

*The object to be known, living beings,  
self and partial awareness should be understood  
as aspects of appearances that are intensively generated.  
These objects do not exist.*

*Their non-existence does not exist either.  
Incorrect conceptualization is therefore present,  
But it is not like that; it is not primordially non-existent.  
Having become exhausted, there is liberation.*

We have the incorrect belief that external objects and internal thoughts that appear to us are separate, but they are actually not separate. Things appear as a result of the *eight consciousnesses*. The eight consciousnesses are not actually separate from one another, but they are treated separately to describe their certain qualities. For example, we could ask, "What is the color and what is the shape of that conch?" Perhaps the color is white and the shape is round, but

we can't say, "Well, the color is here and the shape is there." Nevertheless, we can talk about the conch shell by isolating out these different qualities even though in reality they are not separate.

Similarly, when talking about how appearances are experienced, we speak about the eight consciousnesses. The eighth consciousness is known as the *alaya consciousness*, which is called "the ground of all consciousnesses" because it is the foundation for all other appearances. Then there are the five *sensory consciousnesses* (eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body consciousnesses) which perceive visible forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible objects respectively. Next there is the sixth, the *mental consciousness*, and the seventh, the afflicted or *klesha consciousness*. The *afflicted consciousness* makes a distinction between self and other, between all various appearances arising to the first six consciousnesses and self. In that way this afflicted consciousness is the root of all disturbing emotions or *kleshas*.

### 3. HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE TOPIC

This section has two divisions: realization according to the three natures and realization according to the development of the obstructions.

*Although thoughts are dependent, imagined and  
thoroughly established,  
They are explained through the object (to be known),  
through incorrect conceptuality and  
through the non-existence of duality.*

#### (A) ACCORDING TO THE THREE NATURES

This point deals with how one comes to understand the topic, how one meditates upon it, and how one realizes it. This discussion is given in terms of "the three natures" which were developed by the Chittamatra (Mind-only) school. The three natures are the imagined nature (Skt. *parikalpita*, Tib. *kun tak*), the dependent nature (Skt. *paratantra*, Tib. *shen wang*), and the thoroughly perfect nature (Skt. *parinishpann*, Tib. *yong drup*).<sup>11</sup>

First of all, there is the dependent nature. The dependent is the foundation for that which is imagined. The imagined nature is what one mistakenly takes the dependent nature to be; one apprehends and fixates upon it. Many sorts of dependent phenomena appear through the dependent relationship that is established by habitual tendencies which have existed within one's mind since the beginning of time and to which one has become very accustomed. Dependent appearances therefore occur and are taken to be something other than what they really are.<sup>12</sup> It is like taking a reflection in a mirror to be the real object. In fact, a reflection (the dependent appearance) can never be established as the object and the absence of such establishment is thorough establishment. That which is thoroughly established is the dharmadhatu, non-production and the unborn.

We should understand what these three natures are and when we meditate on them, we will discover that they also lack any existence of their own.

#### (B) ACCORDING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF OBSCURATIONS

*Depending upon fixation, non-fixation is intensively generated.  
Depending upon non-fixation, non-fixation is intensively generated.  
If that is the case, then fixation exists as the nature of non-fixation.  
With that in mind,  
fixation and non-fixation should be known as equal.*

The understanding of the lack of any true nature is called "the effect of moving from fixation to non-fixation." Having overturned the notion that the three natures exist, one might still cling to the notion of their non-existence, conceiving them as actually non-existent. But then we must realize that consciousness which apprehends in itself is not real. In that way, one achieves freedom from both extremes, the extreme of existence and the extreme of non-existence.

*Incorrect conceptualization  
is mind and mental factors in the three realms;  
in which case the object seen is partially known.  
(Partial knowledge) arises from the mind as a  
distinctive feature.*

*One (distinguishing feature) is partial knowledge  
of a condition.*

*Duality accompanies near-experience.*

*Near-experience and complete isolation (distinction)  
are mental events arising from the mind.*

The way in which phenomena are differentiated as the afflictions, hardships, and difficulties of samsara comes about from incorrect understanding of the eight consciousnesses. The text next describes the mind's various movements, changes and transformations which take place in the three realms (the desire, form, and formless realm).

What then is mind and the mental factors? When we say "mind" (Tib. *sem*) in the second line above, we mean that faculty which is aware of what is happening. When we say "mental factors" (Tib. *sem jung*), we mean those features of our perception which decide whether the perception is good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, etc.

The root of samsara is the incorrect belief that appearances really exist outside of our mind. This incorrect conception must be abandoned because it leads to us to have disturbing emotions such as passion and aggression. These disturbing emotions give rise to samsara in a process called the twelve links of interdependent origination which is described next.<sup>13</sup>

*Due to engendering incorrect conceptuality intensively,  
due to enforcing it and clinging to it;  
bringing it to completion and  
the three isolations;  
the near-experience of an appearance,  
approaching it without hesitation,  
connecting it and directing it;  
with suffering, living beings are afflicted.*

*Although afflictions have three aspects, two aspects,  
incorrect conceptuality has seven aspects.*

The twelve links of interdependent origination (Tib. *ten drel*) describe in detail how our mind gives rise to samsara. Of these

twelve links, the first five are actually due to processes which occurred before we had ever perceived an outside event, that is before we were born. Due to our countless previous lifetimes, we developed a very strong ignorance, which is the first link. This ignorance means not realizing the true nature of phenomena (Tib. *nge luk*).

When we came into this world, we already believed that we were a solid being and that there was a real separation between “I” and “others.” This differentiation leads us to think about some things as being “mine” and other things as “not-mine.” This naturally leads to the disturbing emotions such as desire (“I want that” or “I deserve this”), aggression (“No, this is mine and you can’t have it,” or “you deserve unpleasantness because you did this to me.”), jealousy (“I deserve that, not you.”), and pride (“I worked hard and so I am better than you”). This way of thinking, which is fundamental ignorance about the true nature of things, creates habitual tendencies or latencies (Tib. *bak chak*) which leads us to the second link called karmic creations.

These latencies are quite important in our belief of what is real and what is not real. Let us take an example of an elephant—one that we see while we are asleep and dreaming and one that we see while we are awake. In both cases an elephant appears to us as a real elephant. While we are awake, the outside sensory impression of an elephant appears real, because our impression of an elephant matches these internal latencies which come from the eighth consciousness.<sup>14</sup> In a dream the latencies of the elephant also come from the eighth consciousness and appear to us, and we see it at the time as real. So we see that the dream elephant and the real elephant are the same in two respects: they really do appear due to latencies, and they are both truly empty. However, these two elephants are different in durability, meaning that the elephant in our waking state had a father and mother, grew up, and will later die and so go through the entire cycle of interdependent origination. The elephant of our dream arose from nowhere and does not go through any cycle of interdependent origination. So the second link in the chain of interdependent origination, called the *nidana chain* in Sanskrit, are these latencies or “karmic creations.”

Because we are fixated on the dualism of “I” and “other” and because we have these latencies planted in our mind so we develop the third link which is “consciousness.” When that seed which is a predisposition becomes more steady, the third link becomes more and more durable and leads to the fourth link called “name and form.” “Name” refers to feeling, discrimination, and all the other sorts of mental factors while “form” refers to the first physical aggregation of the body. The fulfillment of that birth is described as the fifth link called “the sense field.” The sense field refers to the six sensory consciousnesses that enable one to perceive objects (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mental consciousness). They are conditioned to perceive the world. The fifth link is the maturation or the completion of one’s birth.

The branches of interdependent relationship go step by step in a relationship of cause and effect. They are lengthened in a steady way and do not stop with the completion of the body as the six sense fields. They continue and once one has the six consciousnesses for apprehending the world there is “increase of awareness,” the literal name given the fifth link. Their completion brings one to the sixth link, called “contact” which means “meeting with an object;” as when the eye consciousness meets with a form, when the ear consciousness apprehends a sound, when the nose consciousness experiences a smell, and so on. Once contact is achieved, then the seventh link arises, which is “feeling.” Sometimes the feeling is good and sometimes it is unpleasant. Whichever one, it doesn’t stop the feeling, which solidifies into some sort of “craving” which is the eighth link. In this context, craving refers to “wanting more” if attractive or “wanting to get away” if thought unpleasant. Craving becomes very forceful and one engages in all kinds of activities to get rid of something or to get more of it. This leads to the ninth link, where one is engaging in all sorts of activities, accumulating karma; it is called “taking, grasping, and involvement.”

The tenth link is called “existence.” It is the effect of the ninth link and refers to the solidification of the actions that have been accumulated through the ninth link (the establishment of karma or actions within the continuum of one’s being in the form of habitual tendencies, latencies or predispositions). Because they become stronger and more forceful, one arrives at the eleventh link called

“birth” which can be considered from two points of view. Considering the broad perspective, birth refers to the way in which one takes birth in another life in samsara after death. In the short perspective, it refers to the way in which effects of one’s actions arise within this lifetime. Finally, after birth comes “aging and death,” described as the twelfth link which is unavoidable. Once something is born, it ages; once it ages, it eventually dies.

This, then, is the complete process of suffering and negative emotions, described in the sutras as “the great lamentation of samsara.” It is the fruition of the process of the twelve links and is of the very nature of pain, afflictions, and suffering. The root of all this is ignorance of the way in which things actually appear. If one abandons that ignorance and realizes the way in which things actually are, then the whole process of interdependent origination will collapse all by itself and one will achieve liberation.

## B. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF NIRVANA

This section has two divisions: a brief summary and a detailed description.

### 1. THE BRIEF DESCRIPTION

*If emptiness is summarized briefly,  
then one should understand  
(nirvana's) definitive characteristics,  
the enumeration of the name and the meaning,  
the classifications and the argumentation.*

### 2. THE DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Buddha Maitreya presented a detailed description of the definitive characteristics of liberation in the following five points: (1) the definitive characteristics of liberation, (2) the enumeration of the name, (3) the meaning, (4) the classifications, and (5) the argumentation.

(A) THE DEFINITIVE CHARACTERISTICS

*The definitive characteristics of emptiness are  
the non-existence of dualistic things and  
the entity of that non-existing thing.*

*It is not existent nor is it non-existent.*

*It possesses the characteristics of not being different or the same.*

The definitive characteristic of nirvana is the nature of emptiness. That is to say, external objects and internal mind do not exist in the way they appear. Because nirvana is free from any mistaken appearances, it is not polluted with false and deceptive things.

(B) THE NAMES OF NIRVANA

*If emptiness is summarized briefly,*

*then its enumeration is:*

*suchness, the limit of that which is genuine,*

*the signless, the ultimate and dharmadhatu.*

What are the various names given nirvana? One is “emptiness,” but there are others. Sometimes it is called *tathagata* in Sanskrit or in English “suchness” meaning phenomena “as it really is.” It is also called “the limit of that which is genuine” which means that nirvana is beyond everything incorrect or false. Nirvana is also called “signless” meaning that there are no signs that can point to it as being a solid entity. Nirvana has also been called “the ultimate” because it is higher or supreme among all objects that can be realized. Finally, nirvana is called the dharmadhatu meaning that it is in the sphere (Skt. *dhatu*) of dharma (meaning “reality” in this case).

The Tibetan term for *dharma* is *chö*, which has the connotation of repairing, healing, or restoring. This is to say that it is free from that which is faulty and bad; it is something healthy and good. It repairs and restores whatever is faulty. In the dharmadhatu, all that is faulty is abandoned and all that is pure is brought to perfection, so this is called the dharmadhatu or “the sphere of dharma.”



(C) THE MEANING OF THE NAMES

*Not being other than that, it is not deceptive.*

*That cessation, which is the object experienced by the noble ones  
is the cause of the qualities of the noble ones.*

*That is the meaning of the enumeration (of names) according to  
their sequence.*

The third topic is the meaning of the names for nirvana which were already given in the previous discussion of the names of nirvana.

(D) THE CLASSIFICATION OF EMPTINESS

*All-encompassing afflictions, partial purity;  
those with stains and those without stains.*

*The substances water, gold and space are pure;  
they are likened to purity.*

The fourth topic is the classification of emptiness. The first division is emptiness in terms of stained and unstained phenomena. The second division is the sixteen types of emptiness which may be found in the *Transcendent Knowledge* (Skt. *Prajnaparamita*) sutras. The first classification of stained and unstained phenomena is from the point of view of the conventional level, not the ultimate level of dharmadhatu. Stained phenomena refers to the disturbing emotions, while unstained phenomena refers to the pure state that is the fruition of the path or Buddhahood.

The text refers to three well-known similes for stained and unstained phenomena.<sup>15</sup> The first is water that is a pure substance that, when it is mixed with dirt, muddies and becomes impure. But if we just let the water still, the mud settles out and the clear water appears again. The mud is a stain that does not affect the purity of the water. Similarly, gold is a pure substance that gets stains on it in the form of tarnish. But the tarnish can be rubbed off leaving the original gold untouched. The gold again is pure so it is not affected by the tarnish. Third, space or the sky, is pure and is unaffected by the clouds which might cover it occasionally. The sky remains pure

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regardless whether clouds obscure it or not because clouds are not an inherent part of space or the sky. These three examples are likened to the disturbing emotions which stain or obscure the original buddha nature. These kleshas can cover or obscure buddha nature, but they will not affect the natural purity of the buddha nature.

*Nourishment and nourishing make up the physical body,  
the basis of one's situation which is empty.*

*Who sees it like that?*

*He too is empty.*

*Bodhisattvas engage in practice  
in order to attain the two benefits,  
in order to always help living beings,  
in order not to give up cyclic existence,  
in order not to exhaust what is positive,  
in order to completely purify predispositions,  
in order to attain the major and  
complementary marks of realization,  
in order to reveal a Buddha's pure qualities.*

*Just as for the individual,  
the non-substantiality of phenomena is here also emptiness.  
The existence of the entity of that non-substantiality  
is another emptiness than that.*

The second classification is an extensive description of the sixteen emptinesses that are presented in the *Transcendent Knowledge* sutras.

The dharmata, emptiness itself, is free from any divisions and classifications. However, we can speak about different emptinesses from the point of view of phenomena, which are the foundation for the appearances of emptiness. There are sixteen classifications of emptiness, which are divided into three sets: Those identifying emptiness, the reasons for meditating upon emptiness, and the emptinesses pervading all others.

### *Identifying Emptiness*

1. Internal emptiness is the emptiness of the six internal sense fields (the eye sense field, the ear sense field and so forth).

2. External emptiness is the emptiness of the six external objects (visible forms, audible sounds and so forth).

3. Internal and external emptiness refers to the subtle physical bases of each of the sensory faculties, which are concealed. They are in-between the above internal and external and are also empty.

4. Great emptiness is emptiness of the world that is the external vessel or environment.

5. The emptiness of emptiness is an emptiness to counter any fixation one might have that everything is empty except for emptiness itself. But emptiness also is empty.

6. The emptiness of the ultimate is the supreme of objects to be realized and it is utterly non-deceptive. Still, because we might begin to develop notions of it having a nature of its own, its lack of any such nature is pointed out by speaking about the emptiness of the ultimate.

7. and 8. The emptiness of the composite and non-composite which is also called the emptiness of the conditioned and unconditioned is the first of this group of eight. The composite and the non-composite refer respectively to the path and the effect. The nature of the paths to Buddhahood is composite or conditioned. The emptiness of these true paths is the emptiness of the composite. The effect is nirvana, the final goal, whose nature is non-composite or unconditioned. In both cases, the point of identifying both emptinesses is in order to eliminate attachment to the path and the fruition. As long as we have such attachment to the path and the fruition, we will not be able give birth to the good qualities of the path and the effect. When we abandon this attachment, then we will be able to give birth to the good qualities of the path and the good qualities of the effect. To achieve the path and the fruition, we have to realize the emptiness of the composite and of the non-composite.

The discussion of the sixteen emptinesses is presented in terms of three sets of emptinesses. The first set of eight identifies emptiness and its nature.

### ***Reasons For Meditating Upon Emptiness***

The second set of emptinesses has six members, which are the reasons why one meditates upon emptiness.

9. The emptiness beyond limits is the emptiness that is beyond all extremes to benefit all sentient beings. Beyond all limits refers to samsara on the one hand and nirvana on the other. As long as we have attachment for samsara, we will fall into the extreme of being too involved in worldly phenomena; as long as we have attachment to nirvana, we will fall into the extreme of resting in a solitary, peaceful state. By understanding that both samsara and nirvana are empty, we will not abide in either extreme. We meditate upon the emptiness that transcends all extremes in order to rest in neither extreme and thus be able to benefit all sentient beings.

10. The emptiness with no beginning or end refers to samsara which is beginningless and endless. We meditate upon this emptiness for the following reason: On the conventional level, samsara is full of faults. However, on the ultimate level, if we were to see samsara as faulty, then we would discard or leave samsara altogether. If a bodhisattva were to do that, then that bodhisattva would decide to remain in nirvana and not remain in samsara to benefit other sentient beings. By recognizing that samsara is truly of the nature of emptiness we do not have to regard it as faulty. This enables a bodhisattva to remain in samsara and thereby accomplish the welfare of other sentient beings. Samsara is without beginning and without end. Nevertheless, through meditating upon the nature of samsara as lacking any inherent existence, we pass beyond seeing it as faulty; beyond abandoning it, and we are thereby able to remain in it and to help sentient beings.

11. The emptiness of not abandoning is the fourth in this group. The previous emptiness of no beginning and no end and the present emptiness of not abandoning are intended to help sentient beings clear away obstacles. If we were afraid of samsara, we would want to escape it. By realizing its emptiness (that is to say, the emptiness which has no beginning and no end), we cease to fear samsara. The other obstacle to helping sentient beings is becoming attached to nirvana, when we value nirvana as supreme, excellent, and sacred. So, this emptiness refers to recognizing the emptiness of nirvana. Nirvana is that which has abandoned samsara. That meaning of

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nirvana is pointed out when speaking of “an abandoning,” which is one name for nirvana, and when speaking of “not discarding,” which means not being attached to and dwelling solely in nirvana, and when speaking of “the emptiness of a non-discarding.” Thus, one is pointing out the lack of any inherent existence, nirvana.

12. The emptiness of the nature is the fifth in this group. In this case, the nature refers to the potential for enlightenment that exists within all sentient beings, that is, sugatagarbha. We might mistakenly believe sugatagarbha is a thing, some sort of real actuality. If we take sugatagarbha to be a real solid thing, we would not be able to manifest sugatagarbha and therefore reach enlightenment. Therefore, for sugatagarbha to become manifest, we meditate upon its emptiness. That emptiness is then called “the emptiness of the nature.”

13. and 14. The emptiness that has its own characteristics and the emptiness of all phenomena will be discussed together because both are related with the nature of Buddhahood. Meditating upon these emptinesses is intended to counter attachment to a Buddha’s good qualities of body, mind, and so forth.

First, the emptiness of that which has its own characteristics refers to the nature of a Buddha’s extraordinary physical qualities, such as the thirty-two primary and the eighty secondary marks.

Secondly, the emptiness of all dharmas refers to the emptiness of a Buddha’s extraordinary qualities of mind. All dharmas then refer to a Buddha’s mind, such as the eighteen qualities of a Buddha, the Buddha’s ten powers, the Buddha’s four fearlessnesses and the other unusual, extraordinary enlightened qualities of a Buddha’s mind.

### *The Emptinesses Pervading All Others*

The third set of sixteen emptinesses has two members, which are said to pervade all of the others.

15. The emptiness of phenomena refers to the non-self of persons and the non-self of phenomena. The non-self or egolessness of persons refers to the emptiness of “I” and of “mine” and the non-self of phenomena refers to the emptiness of other phenomena.

16. *The emptiness of the non-existence of things* refers to the previous emptiness. One might think that the fifteenth emptiness of the non-existence of actualities (the two selflessnesses) were itself

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some truly existent thing; one might think that emptiness were a nothingness and that nothingness itself were an actuality. Thus one meditates upon this final emptiness in order to realize that the non-existence of the two selves is itself without inherent existence; it has no nature of its own either.

This has been the discussion of the classifications of emptiness, nirvana and liberation. It brings us to the fifth topic of the practice which describes the thoroughly pure, or liberation.

### (E) THE ARGUMENTATION

*If afflictions did not arise,  
then all living beings possessing a body would already be liberated.  
If complete purity did not arise,  
then all exertion would bring no results.  
There aren't afflictions, there aren't no afflictions;  
this isn't purity, and this isn't impurity.*

Relatively speaking, we can say that there are two types of emptinesses, the stained and the unstained. We are not speaking about the nature of emptiness, rather about the way in which it appears to a person on different stages of the path.

It is helpful to speak about emptiness or suchness as being stained and possessing defilements. If our perception were always pure, accurate and clear, then everyone would already be completely enlightened. At the same time, we can also speak about the unstained emptiness, that is to say, the way in which it appears when it is realized directly, clearly, non-dually, and non-conceptually. If there were no such unstained emptiness, then no matter how much we practiced the path and exerted, there would be no separation from afflictions and confusion. Although emptiness ultimately is neither stained nor unstained, in this context of practicing the path and achieving fruition, we can speak about it as both stained and unstained.

*That was the first chapter entitled "Definitive Characteristics" from The Treatise that Differentiates the Middle from the Extremes.*

# Chapter 3

## *The Obstructions to Enlightenment*

### VAJRA POINT TWO: THE OBSTRUCTIONS

#### II. THE OBSTRUCTIONS

Having come to understand dharmata, we need now to abandon obstructions. This discussion is divided into two sections: a brief description and a detailed description.

#### A. THE BRIEF SUMMARY

*Pervasive, trivial, excessive and all together;  
accepting and rejecting  
are taught as two obstructions.*

There are many different ways of classifying obstructions. The first classification distinguishes pervasive obstructions from trivial obstructions. The pervasive obstructions are those obstructions that impede a practitioner from proceeding along the mahayana path. Because the mahayana involves helping all sentient beings, these are termed “pervasive obstructions.” Trivial obstructions refer to obstacles that block someone proceeding on the hinayana path. Because the hinayana practitioner seeks improvement for him or herself, these obstacles are called “trivial obstructions.”

A second classification is between very strong negative emotions referred to as “pervasive, trivial and excessive” and “all together,” on the other hand.

The third classification is called “the obstructions of accepting and rejecting.” These are obstructions to wisdom or *prajna* on the one hand and *skillful method* (Skt. *upaya*) on the other hand. “Accepting” are obstructions to *prajna*, and these obstructions keep

## *Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes*

one bound to samsara. “Rejecting” are obstructions that cause one to see samsara as only faulty and therefore cause one to wish to abandon it. These rejecting obstructions are an impediment to method, in particular to compassion, for if one lacks compassion, then one does not help others.

So, we have at this point a threefold division of obstructions into twos. In fact, they are all speaking about the same things; they are just divided differently.

### B. THE DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The detailed explanation of the obstructions is divided into three sets: (1) the nine actual obstructions to liberation and the way that they impede progress, (2) the thirty obstructions, the ten things that are obstructed and the way in which the two correspond, and (3) the obstructions to the antidotes.

#### 1. THE NINE OBSTRUCTIONS TO LIBERATION

*The characteristics of afflictions have nine aspects;  
taking all together is the actual obstruction.*

*Weariness of samsara; equanimity; seeing suchness;  
the view that sees an absence of aggregations and its basis;  
cessation; the path; and the three jewels; appreciation; praise;  
perfectly understanding material contentment.  
The virtues are different than the ten.*

The first set is called “the obstructions to liberation,” which prevent one from achieving liberation from samsara. Nine different obstructions are disturbing emotions or kleshas. The text first identifies the obstruction and then says what is obstructed. However, I am going to put them together as I explain this.

The first obstruction is passion, or desire, which obstructs wishing to leave samsara. As long as one has desire, one does not feel discouraged or disheartened with samsara because samsara offers what we desire. If one does not feel disheartened about samsara, one will not be able to give it up.



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The second obstruction is anger which obscures or prevents equanimity. Here, equanimity has the sense of the mind being stable, steady, relaxed, comfortable, and spacious. As long as one is angry, one's mind is not steady or relaxed.

The third obstruction is pride, which prevents one from seeing the self as faulty. As long as one is proud, one thinks, "I am right. I am good." As long as one has such pride, one is not able to see self as an empty object.

The fourth obstruction is ignorance which prevents one from seeing the way in which all things exist. It causes one to perceive reality mistakenly.

The fifth obstruction is view referring to the incorrect view of believing in a self. It prevents one from achieving liberation through viewing the self as solid and permanent.

The sixth obstruction is holding bad views and bad behavior as desirable. Holding bad views as good prevents one from entering into the path; holding bad ways of behaving as good prevents one from entering into the path of genuine discipline.

The seventh obstruction is when one's mind is divided, literally "being two-pointed" thinking it may be this way or it may be that way. As long as one has such doubt, one is not able to distinguish the genuine from the false and one cannot enter into the correct path.

The eighth obstruction is envy or jealousy. One envies the material goods, honor, and praise that others enjoy. As long as one has such envy, one is not able to see others' value and to help them.

The last obstruction is not being able to allow one's resources and possessions to decrease. This prevents one from giving them away, to develop generosity that can lead to liberation.

These are the nine obstructions that block one's progress toward liberation and they must all be abandoned.

## 2. THE THIRTY OBSTRUCTIONS

The next set of obstructions discussed in this text is presented as thirty obstructions, followed by a discussion of ten beneficial qualities that are obstructed. This discussion is presented in a number of different divisions in this text. To make these easier to understand, I am going to put them all together.

## *Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes*

First, there is a discussion of virtue and three factors that obstruct virtue. The Tibetan word for “virtue” is *gewa* and meaning “that which brings forth happiness both naturally and as its own fruition.” Sometimes it is translated as “virtue” and sometimes as “wholesomeness.”

*[Thirty obstructions:]*

*Lacking exertion; of increasing and expanding;  
lacking faith and not training the mind (laziness);  
not highly completing the (two) collections;  
not possessing the potential (for enlightenment);  
not (having) a spiritual friend;  
discouragement; not having the practices (of the paramitas);  
having bad companions; friends (who dislike the mahayana);  
engaging in an unfavorable livelihood;  
affliction and karma from the three (body, speech and mind);  
not nurturing highest insight; naturally taking on bad livelihood;  
laziness; carelessness;  
attachment to conditioned existence (samsara);  
attachment to enjoyments; becoming depressed;  
lacking faith (in the mahayana);  
lacking admiration (and longing for the mahayana);  
rendering lip-service (only);  
not holding the sacred dharma as greatest;  
greed for profit; lacking compassion;  
bereft of hearing (the mahayana-dharma);  
only hearing little (of the mahayana-dharma);  
failure to practice samadhi (meditative absorption).*

*[Ten things that are obstructed:]*

*Virtue; bodhichitta; holding (the mahayana path properly);  
intelligence (of becoming a bodhisattva);  
non-delusion (on the path of seeing);  
non-obstruction (on the path of meditation);  
dedication (as skill in method);  
fearlessness (regarding the profound and vast mahayana dharma);  
non-miserliness (regarding the mahayana-activities);  
the (ten) powers (of a Buddha) are virtues, etc.*

## *The Obstructions to Enlightenment*

*Their obstructions should be known in sets of three.*

*[The way in which the two correspond:]*

*The ten active causes are*

*generating (the wish to engage in what is beneficial);*

*abiding (in that);*

*depending (upon what is beneficial);*

*teaching; transformation; separation (from confusion);*

*(skilled in helping) others;*

*relying (upon the mahayana dharma);*

*understanding (how to engage in the activities of the mahayana);*

*accomplishing (the ten powers).*

*Their examples are eyes, nourishment, earth, a butter lamp, fire, etc.*

*A sickle, a craftsman, smoke, ground, path, etc. (are) others.*

### (A) OBSTRUCTIONS PREVENTING ENTERING THE PATH

There are three different obstructions preventing that which is beneficial, meaning that they prevent us from entering the path:

The first obstruction is an attitude of carelessness is a laxness that causes a lack of conscientious exertion and attentiveness preventing us from entering into the path at all.

The second obstruction is not growing after having planted the roots of beneficial activity. After having entered the path we must listen to and contemplate the teachings of the Buddha and the commentaries. Failing to do so is an obstruction to the roots of virtue.

The third obstruction is not understanding how to meditate properly. Having heard and contemplated the teachings but not knowing how to engage in meditation and the yoga that leads to the wisdom arising from meditation is an obstacle.

This first set of obstructions prevent us from entering into activity that is beneficial and favorable.

### (B) OBSTRUCTIONS PREVENTING BODHICHITTA

The second set of obstructions prevent us from developing and increasing bodhichitta, or “the mind of enlightenment.” Once the

beneficial roots have been planted within the stream of one's being, they need to flourish as bodhichitta. There are three factors that prevent that flourishing:

4. Lacking faith and exertion which prevents us from giving birth to bodhichitta.

5. Not training the mind which prevents us from developing bodhichitta further.

6. Not completing the two collections which are the collections of merit and wisdom (*sönam* and *yeshe* in Tibetan) for bodhichitta to fulfill its potential.

### (C) OBSTRUCTIONS TO ENTERING THE MAHAYANA PATH

If bodhichitta has been born in the stream of our being, then we enter into the path of mahayana. We need to keep on that path properly. Holding that path properly is the third beneficial quality that is obstructed; there is a set of three obstructions to keeping on the mahayana path properly:

7. Not possessing the potential for enlightenment. This refers to lacking prajna and lacking compassion because everyone already has Buddha-nature.

8. Lacking a spiritual friend which is essential for staying on the mahayana path.

9. Discouragement because the path is difficult and we must be able to endure these hardships with patience (meaning not stupidly enduring, but rather doing something difficult with consistency), not becoming disheartened.

### (D) OBSTRUCTIONS TO BECOMING A BODHISATTVA

There are three obstructions that prevent one from becoming a bodhisattva:

10. Not practicing the six paramitas is an obstacle because this practice is essential for becoming a bodhisattva.

11. Those we associate with have an influence on us. Associating with bad companions causes our bodhichitta to decrease and our faults to increase; having bad friends is an obstruction to becoming a bodhisattva.

12. Associating with those who dislike the mahayana meaning associating with those who believe that the mahayana path is wrong. If one associates with such people, that will prevent one from becoming a bodhisattva who is on the mahayana path.

The four topics we have discussed are mostly concerned with the initial levels of the path, the levels called “engagement through longing and admiration,” meaning the levels of ordinary people.

What we have discussed so far are obstructions to the initial levels of the path. Now we come to the obstructions to the path of seeing which is the third of the *five paths* and begin the path at which the ten bodhisattva levels begin.

### (E) OBSTRUCTIONS TO THE PATH OF SEEING

There are three obstructions to achieving the path of seeing:

13. Engaging in unfavorable activities by way of body, speech and mind which keeps one from the path of seeing.

14. Afflictive and karmic obstructions, which refer to very strong emotional and strong karmic obstructions.

15. Not nurturing highest insight. To generate the highest wisdom, or jnana, of the path of seeing we need to engage in extensive and deep contemplation of the meaning of the Buddha’s teachings. Our understanding needs to increase so that we can give birth to wisdom, which we do by engaging in extensive hearing and contemplating. Not being able to do that is an obstruction to achieving the path of seeing.

### (F) OBSTRUCTIONS TO THE PATH OF MEDITATION

16. The first category discussed here is the same as the first category in the previous section on the obstructions to the path of seeing, i.e., wrong behavior by way of the three doors of body, speech and mind.

17. In order for our realization and wisdom to increase further we need to exert ourselves. Laziness is an obstruction because it is the opposite of exertion.

18. An inattentive, careless mind is an obstacle to the path of meditation.

(G) OBSTRUCTIONS TO SKILLFUL METHOD

Lack of skillful method is an obstacle to the path of meditation because the path of meditation requires extraordinary skill. There are three agents obstructing such skill and means:

19. Attachment to samsara, particularly attachment to our own five aggregates or skandhas.

20. Attachment to our possessions and pleasures in particular.

21. Depression caused by the feeling we will not be able to engage in the vast and beneficial activities of the path of meditation.

(H) OBSTRUCTIONS TO THE FEARLESSNESS  
OF THE MAHAYANA

22. The inability for one's faith to increase in the mahayana path.

23. Lacking admiration for the word of the dharma.

24. Inability to understand the profound thought, referring to the profound meaning of the mahayana dharma of emptiness.

These three are obstructions to fearlessness and to admiration or longing for the profound and vast dharma of the mahayana.

(I) OBSTRUCTIONS TO THE ACTIVITIES  
OF THE MAHAYANA

To engage in the activities of the mahayana one needs to have an attitude which is without stinginess in regard to the mahayana dharma. If one feels miserly about it, then one will not teach it to others. There are three obstructions that prevent one from being free from such miserliness:

25. Not regarding the mahayana dharma as important. If one does not regard the mahayana dharma as important, then one will not teach it to others.

26. Teaching in order to acquire wealth. If one were to teach for such purpose, then one would not be free from miserliness.

27. Lacking compassion. If one lacks compassion, then one will not generously teach the dharma to others.

## (J) OBSTRUCTIONS TO THE TEN POWERS OF A BUDDHA

There are three obstructions that block one from achieving the ten powers of a Buddha which one must achieve:

28. Not hearing the mahayana dharma. To be of benefit to others, we must understand the mahayana dharma very well. If we have not listened extensively, then we will not have such clear understanding of this dharma.

29. Having heard only a little of the mahayana dharma. Hearing the mahayana dharma just a little bit would be an obstacle.

30. Not undertaking the practice of samadhi. Even though we have heard and understood the mahayana dharma, that is not enough because we have to put it into practice to achieve the ten powers of a Buddha.

## 3. OBSTRUCTIONS TO THE ANTIDOTES

This section again has two divisions: a brief summary and a detailed description.

### A. THE BRIEF SUMMARY

*The obstructions are different than  
the view, the paramitas and the levels.*

### B. THE DETAILED DESCRIPTION

This section has four divisions: obstructions that prevent the thirty-seven factors for enlightenment which are also called the thirty-seven harmonies with enlightenment, obstructions to the paramitas, obstructions to the levels, and a summary.

## (1) OBSTRUCTIONS TO THE 37 HARMONIES

*As for the foundation, lack of skill and laziness;  
diminishing samadhi due to both;  
not engaging in practice due to laziness; weak faith;  
attachment to mistaken views;*

*taking up bad ways and familiarization with latent predispositions of confusion.*

#### (A) OBSTRUCTIONS TO THE PATH OF ACCUMULATION

One enters into the path by meditating on “the four foundations of mindfulness.” I am explaining these four foundations in terms of the mahayana, not in terms of the vajrayana, which has four different foundations. These four meditations in the mahayana are:

1. One looks at the body and views it as lacking inherent existence, lacking any nature of its own.

2. One looks at feeling and realizes that feeling lacks inherent existence.

3. One looks at mind and sees that mind lacks inherent existence.

4. One looks at all phenomena and sees that they lack inherent existence.

These are the first four factors of enlightenment. We need to connect the 37 factors of enlightenment with the five paths. The four foundations of mindfulness are associated with the first path of accumulation, which is the accumulation of merit. The path of accumulation has three divisions: the lower, the middle, and the great path of accumulation. The four foundations of mindfulness are associated with the lower path of accumulation.

Path (Skt. *marga*, Tib. *lam*) is basically of the nature of prajna or intelligence and knowledge. When one associates these four placements of mindfulness with the five paths, one is speaking about taking these four (body, feeling, mind and all phenomena) to mind, considering them, observing them and realizing their way of existing or their way of abiding. One’s prajna and the potency of the paths that one generates within the continuum of one’s being need to be increased, need to go higher.

#### *Obstructions to the Middle Path of Accumulation*

On the middle division of the path of accumulation, one cultivates “the four correct abandonments,” referring principally to the expressions of body, speech, and mind:



## *The Obstructions to Enlightenment*

5. One abandons negative deeds one has previously generated.

6. One does not generate any new negative deeds.

7. One gives birth to beneficial actions that one has previously generated.

8. One increases previously generated beneficial actions by taking them to a higher level.

The practice of the four correct abandonments mainly depends upon exertion and therefore laziness is a factor that obstructs the four correct abandonments.

### *Obstructions to the Great Path of Accumulation*

In the middle path of accumulation, we are trying to accumulate as much merit as possible, so this path is concerned mostly with behavior. In the high level of the path of accumulation, we are accumulating wisdom (Skt. *prajna*) which is done through meditation (Skt. *samadhi*). At this level this is through the practice of shamatha meditation.

The name for the factors of enlightenment that are practiced at this level is “the four legs of magical emanation” because we achieve magical emanation from the practice of *samadhi*. However, in the great path of accumulation one is not practicing the actual magical emanations, rather one is developing the *samadhi* for the four roots or “the legs” of magical emanation:

9. Aspiration or an admiration and longing for *samadhi*.

10. Exertion for the practice of *samadhi*.

11. Mind when it is resting in a relaxed manner.

12. Analysis which is the nature of *prajna*.

The obstruction obviously is lacking these four.

Because the path of accumulation is divided into three parts (lower, middle, and great) and each of these three has the four contemplative practices, we have what are called “the twelve stages of the path of accumulation.” Having traversed these twelve, we reach the second path of connection.

(B) OBSTRUCTIONS TO THE PATH OF CONNECTION

The path of connection is close to the path of seeing. One practices the path of connection mainly in terms of confidence and a knowledgeable certainty about what one is doing. The practice of the path of connection is described first of all in terms of the five powers which are:

13. Samadhi, which is meditation.

14. Prajna, which is the most important of these five. Because we use it in the practice of vipashyana. The other three powers are aids to the above two.

15. Strong faith in the three jewels, which allows us to achieve samadhi and prajna.

16. Strong exertion, which is also necessary to achieve samadhi and prajna.

17. Mindfulness, or being aware of where the mind is.

These three accompany and aid samadhi and prajna and cause them to increase.

The path of connection is divided into five parts:

18. The first is called heat because when beginning the path of connection, one experiences some signs arising from meditation and some signs of what is to come. It is metaphorically called “heat” because before the fire is lit and the wood blazes, there is a generation of heat and that heat is the sign of the fire that is to come. Similarly, this first level is called “heat” as a sign of experiences that are to come later.

19. As our samadhi and prajna increase further, we reach the second level of the path of connection, which is called peak, in the sense that our samadhi and prajna have reached a high point. The failure of not giving birth to strong faith, exertion, mindfulness, samadhi, and prajna would prevent us from achieving this level and are the obstacles of this level.

20. A greater capacity for faith, exertion, mindfulness, samadhi and prajna. These are the five strengths (Skt. *bala*, Tib. *tob*). They have the same names as the previous five powers, although at this point cannot be harmed in any way by faults; they are extremely strong and therefore are called the five strengths. The five strengths are associated with the two higher levels of the path of connection.

21. The first of these higher two is called forbearance or patience, (Skt. *shanti*), Tib. *zö pa*). This level is called “forbearance” because it is able to endure difficulty and its endurance is such that it cannot be damaged by any fault.

22. The final level of the path of connection is supreme worldly quality. Of the five paths, the first two—the path of accumulation and the path of connection—are the paths of ordinary beings and the next three paths are for superior (enlightened) beings. The path of connection is called the “supreme worldly quality” because it is the highest level of achievement for ordinary (unenlightened) beings.

Impediments to these strengths would be having insufficient faith, exertion and so forth, not having these qualities powerfully and strongly, but only weakly. Having such feeble faith and so forth would obstruct one from achieving the third and fourth levels of the path of connection.

### (C) OBSTRUCTIONS TO THE PATH OF SEEING

At the path of seeing, our mind is no longer separate from dharmata; we see it directly. By seeing dharmata directly we abandon everything that is contrary to the path of seeing, such as a belief in self, or the view of eternalism or nihilism. These are overcome and the latent predispositions that would give rise to them are destroyed. We develop and achieve at that point what are known as “the seven branches of a superior person”:

23. Prajna and samadhi are the most important qualities with the others being companions.

24. Samadhi

25. Mindfulness

26. Exertion

27. At this point faith has been transformed and that faith has become joy, so joy is the fifth branch. We feel very delighted at this point and therefore the first bodhisattva level is achieved simultaneously with achieving the path of seeing. This first bodhisattva level (Skt. *bhumi*) is called “thoroughly joyful.”

28. Along with this mental great joy one experiences a suppleness of the body, called *shin jang* in Tibetan literally meaning “thoroughly processed.” It refers to one’s body being pliant and

synchronized with one's mind such that one experiences pleasure; no matter how long one sits in meditation, it does not become uncomfortable.

29. Finally, one experiences equanimity such that one is not upset by anything.

What prevents one from achieving these seven branches of a superior person? In particular the disturbing emotions that are to be abandoned by the path of seeing.

#### (D) OBSTRUCTIONS TO THE PATH OF MEDITATION

As the result of our exertion in the path of seeing, we have achieved the fruition of seeing dharmata directly. However, from beginningless time we have been accustomed to confusion and contain within our stream of being the latent predispositions (Tib. *bak chak*) which have been laid down through countless previous lifetimes. These latencies were laid down when we were mistaken about the true nature of phenomena and we cannot abandon all such latent predispositions merely by seeing dharmata once. One is able to abandon such latent predispositions or habitual tendencies by becoming more and more familiar with dharmata. Therefore, the path of meditation is the process of becoming familiar with dharmata by seeing it again and again.

Within the path of meditation we have now reached the eight-fold path of the Buddha. The principal factors among these eight (which encompass numbers 29 to 37 of the factors of enlightenment) are prajna, exertion, mindfulness and samadhi. At this point one no longer requires great faith. We practice the path of meditation for long periods of practice called "mind placed evenly in dharmata" and in periods of post-meditation.

The first factor of meditation, prajna, is what is meant by correct view; it sees dharmata directly. In the later period of post-meditation we do not see dharmata directly. Rather, we have the realization of the meaning and import of dharmata based upon having seen it explicitly, unimpeded in meditation. Post-meditation is characterized as a period of certainty. Those are the two types of prajna that one has on the path of meditation.

There are three different branches of the eight-fold path: prajna, samadhi and the practice of discipline. We have discussed the practice of prajna. As for the factor of samadhi, it includes mindfulness, meditative stabilization and so forth, giving rise to genuine mindfulness and genuine samadhi.

As for the aspects involved with discipline, there is correct speech, meaning that one's words are meaningful and beneficial to others. One is not involved with harmful speech, and so is said to have correct, genuine and authentic speech. Similarly, just as one's speech is beneficial to others, one's physical actions also are beneficial to others; they are not harmful but accurate and straightforward. One has "the limit of actions" because one has the genuine limit of karma, which means that one's actions are beneficial and meaningful. Finally, it is said that one has correct livelihood, which means that the way in which one acquires food, clothing and so forth accords with the dharma and is beneficial to others. Those three—speech, action and livelihood, are the branches of discipline on the eight-fold path.

What obstructs one from possessing these eight branches of the path of a superior person? It is what is known as "the innate predispositions" those one has been born with since beginningless time. There are predispositions that are acquired and those that are innate. The acquired predispositions are created by one's mind. The innate predispositions have been in one's stream of awareness beginninglessly; they are there naturally and are not newly made. They are what obstruct one from giving birth to the eight-fold path.

In summary, we began with the four foundations of mindfulness continued to the eight branches of the path of a superior person. These are the 37 qualities that are on the side of enlightenment or "the 37 harmonies of enlightenment." They are principally skillful methods for progressing along the path of a bodhisattva; the practices at which, as bodhisattvas, we need to exert ourselves.

## 2. OBSTRUCTIONS TO THE TEN PARAMITAS

*Clinging to wealth and a demanding lifestyle;  
the obstruction of not caring for sentient beings;  
shortcomings and opportunism;*

*concern for loss and gain; perverse ways of thinking;  
exhausting what brings liberation;  
exhausting continuous and uninterrupted virtue;  
opposing certainty; and  
lacking great capacity that obstructs  
enjoying and bringing the dharma to full maturation.*

We now come to a discussion of the ten paramitas, the “transcendent actions” which we need to engage in. The discussion of the 37 factors for enlightenment was primarily a discussion of samadhi and prajna. Although the paramitas are also involved in samadhi and prajna, they are mainly concerned with action and behavior. Following is a list of ten things one needs to abandon in order to achieve the paramitas, with one point for each paramita.

1. Clinging to wealth prevents generosity. In order to achieve the paramita of generosity one needs to abandon miserliness.

2. A demanding lifestyle prevents discipline. A bad, mistaken, confused discipline is the opposite of the paramita of discipline. It is through the practice of discipline that one achieves birth in a higher realm, as a human or a god. If one engages in faulty ethics, or faulty discipline, then in the future one will not have a good body; as the basis for one’s practice.

3. Not caring for sentient beings prevents patience. The third paramita is patience or forbearance. Its nature is basically not abandoning others mentally; not casting out others with one’s mind. Forsaking others, not caring for them, is the essence of the obstruction that prevents one from having such a paramita of patience, endurance and forbearance.

4. Shortcomings and opportunism prevent exertion. The fourth paramita is exertion. Laziness is its opposite. Laziness prevents one’s faults from diminishing and one’s good qualities from increasing.

5. Distractions prevent a stable mind. The fifth paramita, dhyana in Sanskrit, *sam ten* in Tibetan, literally means “a stable mind.” It is often translated as “concentration.” The meaning of the term is “stability of thoughts” or “stability of mind.” Distraction, the mind wandering here and there is the principal obstacle to developing the paramita of dhyana.

6. Perverted thinking impedes prajna. The sixth paramita is prajna, *sherab* in Tibetan, “bright, clear, insightful, sharp knowledge.” At the level of being a paramita, prajna is completely marvelous. The opposite is called simply “faulty, crummy prajna.” It would consist in a mistaken and perverse way of thinking about things.

7. Not exhausting what hinders liberation impedes skillful method. The seventh paramita is that of skillful method (Skt. *upaya*). The function of such skill in method is that it enables the roots of that which is favorable to become vast; it prevents them from ever being exhausted or used up. If one does not have such skill in *upaya*, then the roots of whatever is beneficial that have been planted within the continuum of one’s being will not flourish, will not grow and become vast; these roots will be exhausted.

8. Exhausting the uninterrupted virtue impedes aspiration prayers. The eighth paramita is called *mön lam* in Tibetan and literally means “a path of wishing,” frequently translated as “aspiration prayer.” If one has such a paramita of aspiration prayer or wishing, if one has such a paramita of vision, then the roots of virtue that exist within one’s continuum will never be severed; all the way to complete enlightenment they will never be cut off.

When we speak of the paramitas, sometimes six are mentioned and sometimes ten. Now we are speaking about ten; the four further paramitas are skillful method, aspiration prayer, power, and wisdom. The later four are forms of prajna that has gone to a very high level. The nature of these paramitas is prajna that has become very special.

9. Exhausting the certainty of prajna impedes power. In that way, we speak of the ninth paramita, the paramita of power. Power refers to prajna having increased to a very high level and become extremely strong so that it cannot be overcome by klesha, by ignorance, by obscurations or by confusion, but rather outshines them all; literally in Tibetan, “it overpowers them with its brilliance,” “it suppresses them with its brilliance.” In this case, whatever is opposite to and discordant with such prajna is similarly an obstacle to the paramita of power.

10. Lacking great capacity impedes wisdom. The tenth paramita is wisdom, or *jnana* in Sanskrit and *yeshe* in Tibetan. Because of that wisdom one can teach knowledge to others and one can hold it

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oneself. Therefore, one enjoys all dharmas. One's power lacking great capacity would be the obstruction to such wisdom.

### 3. OBSTRUCTIONS TO THE BODHISATTVA LEVELS

*The goal of omnipresence; the goal of the supreme;  
the highest goal itself (is) the goal that accords with the cause.  
Clinging to completion does not exist;  
various continuums do not exist;  
there aren't afflictions nor purity;  
the goal itself is non-existing differences;  
the goal that neither diminishes nor increases exists.  
Abiding in the four aspects of strength;  
not aware of the vast expanse of space;  
the ten obstructions are not part of the afflictions.  
The antidotes are the grounds of the uncommon ten levels.*

We now come to the discussion of the bodhisattva levels of a superior person. The good quality of each level is described in relation to the ten paramitas. We have just considered the good qualities of the respective ground; thus generosity for the first ground, discipline for the second and so forth, all the way up to wisdom. And so, the good qualities that need to be understood and the obstacles that need to be abandoned have been discussed.

### 4. SUMMARY OF TEN INTO TWO OBSTRUCTIONS

*The obstruction of afflictions and  
the obstruction of knowledge are taught.  
All obstacles are (summarized) in them.  
(When they have) become exhausted, there is liberation.*

The text summarizes the meaning of all the obstructions that we have discussed; it gathers them all together and describes them in terms of two obstructions: the emotional obstructions (Skt. *klesha*, Tib. *nyön-sgrib*) and the obstructions to knowledge (Tib. *shes-byai-sgrib-pa*). The emotional obstructions are those that keep one in samsara and thus prevent one from achieving liberation. The



## *The Obstructions to Enlightenment*

obstructions to knowledge prevent one from understanding the nature of phenomena, that is, from knowing the way things actually exist and the variety of phenomena. All of the obstructions that we have discussed are included within these two and when one abandons them, one achieves Buddhahood.

*This concludes the second chapter entitled "Obstructions" from The Treatise that Distinguishes the Middle and the Extremes.*

We have completed the identification of obstructions. The antidote to such obstructions is the realization of suchness.

## Chapter 4

### *How to Abandon the Obstacles: Knowing Suchness*

#### THIRD VAJRA POINT: KNOWING SUCHNESS

In the root text this chapter is the third chapter, which concerns overcoming the obstructions, including obstructions to the foundation, obstructions to liberation, obstructions to the factors for enlightenment, and obstructions to the paramitas. All obstructions need to be cleared away and this is done by realizing dharmata, that is, the true way all things exist. The last chapter was devoted to the obstructions and this chapter discusses suchness (Skt. *tathagata*, Tib. *de-kho-na-nyid*).

Generally speaking, *tathata* is the ultimate dharmata, the true nature, the way all things exist. However, in this text suchness is discussed in terms of ten different meanings. The texts give first a brief description of these ten, then it is followed by an extensive commentary on each.

#### III. KNOWING SUCHNESS

##### A. THE BRIEF DESCRIPTION

*Root suchness; definition of suchness;  
the definitive characteristic (of suchness);  
the suchness of causes and results.*

*Coarse and subtle;  
renown and the perfectly pure objects;  
the summarized and classified characteristics;  
being learned in the ten aspects of suchness.*

## B. THE DETAILED DESCRIPTION

This section is on tathata, which is translated as suchness, and this chapter is divided into three parts: root suchness, the definition of suchness, and the definitive characteristics of suchness.

### 1. ROOT SUCHNESS

*The three natures are continuously non-existent;  
although present, there is no suchness.  
Suchness is existence and non-existence.  
The natures are taught to be three.*

The first suchness is called “root suchness.” It is that which is to be identified and is the basis for the designation of the name.

Root suchness is discussed in terms of the three natures, which are used by the Chittamatra (Mind-only) school. These three natures are: the imagined nature, the dependent nature, and the thoroughly established nature. The imagined nature lacks any establishment; there is no existent entity that has ever been experienced. It is primordially (i.e., right from the start) non-existent. The dependent nature is dependent relation. This means that on the relative or conventional level suchness does appear to those on the path, but on the absolute level it is empty. The nature of the thoroughly established does not exist, but that very non-establishment, just as it is, is true.

### 2. THE DEFINITION OF SUCHNESS

*As for those, phenomena and individuals,  
the apprehended and the apprehending — :  
imputed existents, non-existents and negating views  
do not arise if one understands them.  
Those are the definitions of suchness.*

The imagined nature here refers to the designation of persons and phenomena other than persons. The non-existence of such is the

definition of the imagined. Dependent nature in this case refers to outer (external phenomena) and inner appearances (mind). That also is not established. The thoroughly established nature refers to the knowledge of the way in which the imagined nature and the dependent nature actually exist, i.e., the thoroughly established nature is the knowledge of the non-existence of the other two, of their suchness.

### 3. THE DEFINITIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCHNESS

*The meaning of impermanence is the meaning of non-existence,  
the definition of becoming established and ceasing again,*

*The meaning of stained and unstained  
accords with the progression through the root of suchness.*

*Accepting suffering, the characteristics  
and being connected are described as other.*

*The non-existing entity is not an entity;  
it is taught to be empty by nature.*

*Since the characteristics do not exist, the self does not exist; the  
uncommon characteristics are taught to be specific characteristics.*

The definitive characteristics of tathata have ten divisions: (a) the first noble truth, (b) the second noble truth, (c) the third noble truth, (d) the fourth noble truth, (e) the conventional and ultimate truths, (f) the knower, (g) identifying the three natures, (h) the five dharmas, (i) the seven types, and (j) ten skills.

#### (A) THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH

*Therefore they are described as the truth of suffering.*

*Latent predispositions, everything that arises  
and not being free are just like that.*

The three natures are presented in terms of the four truths. The first noble truth that was the first teaching of the Buddha, is the truth of suffering. It has four aspects related to the three natures: the qualities of impermanence, misery, emptiness, and non-self.

The quality of impermanence is related to the three natures in the following way: The imagined natures are impermanent because they arise without any inherent existence whatsoever. The dependent natures are impermanent because they arise and then they vanish; they are produced and then they disintegrate. Their very nature is that they arise and eventually disintegrate. The thoroughly established natures have two phases: first the stained thoroughly established nature and later the unstained thoroughly established nature. From that point of view, even the thoroughly established nature is impermanent. Thus impermanence is related to each of the three natures.

The second characteristic of the first truth of suffering is misery. Misery relates to the three natures in the following way: Dependent natures are misery because they are confusion. Imagined natures are misery because one believes phenomena that do not exist to exist; through that particular mistake, one receives great trouble. The thoroughly established nature is related to the other two in the manner of being their reality or dharmata, in the sense that the imagined and dependent natures are those that possess qualities. They possess the quality of dharmata so there is a relationship between the thoroughly established nature and the other two. From that point of view, it too is related to misery.

The third and fourth aspects of true suffering are emptiness and selflessness. They related with the three natures in the following way: First of all, imagined natures are not established and do not exist. In that way, they are empty and selfless. Apart from merely appearing, dependent natures do not really exist and in that way they are empty and selfless. Finally, thoroughly established natures are in themselves empty and selfless.

## (B) THE SECOND NOBLE TRUTH

The second noble truth, the origin of suffering, is related to the three natures in the following way: The imagined nature is related to the origin of suffering in that imagined nature comes about in dependence upon confusion. That confusion establishes latent predispositions for later confusion, then confusion arises again. The dependent nature is completely entwined with dependent arising; in

that way it is related to the origin of suffering. The thoroughly established nature exists together with imagined nature and dependent nature, and from that point of view thoroughly established nature exists connected with the origin of suffering.

### (C) THE THIRD NOBLE TRUTH

The third noble truth is the cessation of suffering. This is related to the three natures in the following way: The imagined nature does not exist; dependent nature is empty and the thoroughly established nature is free of any stains whatsoever. The lack of any inherent existence whatsoever is precisely what is meant by true cessation and true cessation refers to liberation. From that point of view, all three natures are related to true cessation.

### (D) THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH

*The nature itself, unborn duality and latent stains are described as two.  
Due to perfect understanding, abandonment and direct attainment,  
the truth of the path is completely described.*

The fourth noble truth is the eight-fold path. The three natures are related with true paths in that through knowing the way in which imagined nature exists one enters into true paths; through knowing the way in which the dependent nature abides one enters into true paths; and through realizing the thoroughly established nature one achieves both true paths and their fruition.

### (E) CONVENTIONAL AND ULTIMATE TRUTHS

*Imagined, consciousness (dependent) and related expressions are coarse (relative).*

*The ultimate truth is unique.  
The meaning, attainment and presence  
are described as the three aspects of the **ultimate**.*

*The two aspects of the thoroughly established are changeless and infallible.*

The fifth meaning of suchness is the discussion that correlates the three natures with the conventional and ultimate truths: conventional truth as the imagined nature refers to mistakes due to confusion, and the dependent nature is mere appearances. The thoroughly established nature is the way in which all things exist and is the ultimate truth.

#### (F) THE KNOWER

*The one learned in worldly knowledge only and the one learned in the three valid sources of knowledge.*

The sixth meaning of suchness is a discussion of literally “to whom are those renowned,” i.e., who knows about this meaning?

First of all, imagined natures are renowned in the world; worldly beings know of them because imagined natures refer to mistaken appearances. As for the other two, dependent and thoroughly established natures (either in terms of their mere appearance or in terms of their existence), they are validated by all three types of valid sources of knowledge, which are direct perception, inferential realization, and reliable scriptural authority. These are the three sources of knowledge and each certifies both the dependent and the thoroughly established natures.

#### (G) THE PURE OBJECT

*The perfect and pure object of experience has two aspects, expressed as one suchness.*

The seventh meaning of suchness is an identification of the three natures in terms of whether or not they are objects upon which genuine wisdom operates; whether they are vital for such wisdom. The imagined and the dependent natures have no inherent existence; they have no nature of their own. They are not established and are non-existent and therefore they are not the objects of genuine

wisdom. Thoroughly established nature is the object upon which wisdom operates; it is the object with which wisdom is concerned.

#### (H) THE FIVE DHARMAS

*The fundamental cause, conceptuality and name are summarized as two aspects: subject and object. Perfect primordial wisdom as well as highest suchness are summarized as one suchness.*

The eighth meaning of suchness is what is called “the five dharmas.” These are presented in the mahayana dharma: name, reason (which refers to objects), consciousnesses, wisdom, and suchness or the ultimate. It is said in the mahayana that these five include within them all phenomena whatsoever. Name and reason are the bases for the imagined nature and are therefore related to the imagined nature. Consciousnesses (meaning the eight consciousnesses) are connected with the dependent nature. Wisdom and suchness (the ultimate) are to be associated with the thoroughly established nature.

#### (I) THE NINE CLASSIFICATIONS

*There are two aspects to the suchness of entrance, abiding and wrong livelihood (in samsara). Definitive character, partial awareness wisdom and purity are one in the thoroughly established.*

The ninth classification of suchness coordinates seven suchnesses with the three natures. In which way are they related? From these seven suchnesses, the suchness of the entrance into samsara, the suchness of abiding in samsara and the suchness of the path through samsara (the experience of various types of suffering and pain) are related to the imagined and the dependent natures. The suchness of the definitive character of liberation, the suchness of the wisdom of liberation, the suchness of the purity of liberation, and the suchness of the practice of liberation are associated with the thoroughly established nature. If one looks at it this way, one sees that the seven



suchnesses, which are well-known and are described in the **sutras**, and the three natures are of the same character.

(J) THE TEN SKILLS

*The single, the fundamental (cause), the consumer, the creator; and having power; fulfilling one's own purpose; impermanence; mental affliction, a pure livelihood; having yoga; and the freedom of not being free are seen as being the self.*

*Complete conceptuality and the fact of conceptuality are pure due to the meaning of suchness.*

The tenth topic of suchness has ten subjects in which one needs to become skilled. They are called “the ten skills.” The text presents them first in terms of ten views that are to be abandoned and then as ten skills that are to be mastered. The mastery of the ten skills enables one to discard mistaken views. I am going to put them together instead of going about it in the traditional fashion.

***Being Skilled in the Skandhas***

*In the beginning there are many; that is the meaning of summarized and perfectly distinguished.*

The first subject area in which one needs to become skilled is the aggregates (Skt. *skandhas*) of form, feeling, discrimination, formations, and consciousnesses. The meaning of “skandha” is “the piling-up of many things.” If we consider, for instance, the skandha of form, then we take it to be just one thing. In fact, any form is a piling-up or massing together of many things. This is also true for all the other skandhas. In every case, they are a gathering together of many things. The understanding of the way in which all five skandhas are a collection enables us to abandon clinging to the false belief that we are a unified self. In the Buddhist tradition the main principle is to realize the non-existence of self. When one realizes

that the self depends upon the five skandhas and that the five skandhas themselves are a collection of many, many things, then one realizes that the notion of a self as one thing is incorrect. When one realizes that the self is in fact an aggregation of many things, then that particular obscuration of mind will be overcome.

### ***Being Skilled in the Elements***

*Apprehending, the apprehended and apprehension  
are compared with a seed, (which) is described differently.*

The second area in which one needs to become skilled is *the elements* (Skt. *dhatu*, Tib. *kham*). The reason for presenting the dhatus is to help us abandon the notion of a self as a cause that gives rise to other things. Everything that arises does so through the interaction of the eighteen elements. There isn't anything apart from them, therefore, the eighteen elements are causes. The elements are the six types of objects (visible forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects and phenomena), the six mental consciousnesses, and the six sense powers.

### ***Being Skilled in the Bases***

*Feelings, completely restricting the meaning (of a perceived object)  
and direct experience are different entrances which arise.*

We tend to regard the self as that which experiences pleasure and pain and that enjoys objects through sense fields. We tend to feel that the self exists as the sense fields. To demonstrate that this is incorrect the Buddha spoke about the twelve sense fields, which are actually another way of dividing the eighteen elements. For that matter, the five skandhas, the eighteen dhatus and the twelve ayatanas are just different ways of classifying the same phenomenon. But each of these is presented differently to eradicate a different form of misconceptions each of these systems is a different skillful method appropriate to eradicate a different misconception.

The twelve sense fields are six objects (visible forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, and phenomena for a mental

## *Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes*

consciousness), the six sense powers (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and the mental sense power). The twelve ayatanas are related to the eighteen dhatus because the six consciousnesses are included within the mental sense power. In that way, the twelve sense-fields are included in all phenomena. Through becoming knowledgeable and skilled in this particular presentation, we realize that the self is not the enjoyer, rather that there is only an interaction of the various sense fields. There is no self as a perceiver subject.

### *Being Skilled in Interdependent Origination*

*Not ascribing nor denying causes,  
effects and influences.*

The fourth topic is the twelve links of interdependent origination. What is abandoned through understanding interdependent origination is the incorrect notion that the self is the creator of the world. Rather, it is ignorance that creates the world. Ignorance transforms into karmic formation, the second link; then the third link, consciousness and so forth, as discussed earlier. Everything appears in these various aspects. If we understand and see how cause and effect are related to one another, then we know unerringly that the self is not the fabricator of the world.

### *Being Skilled in the Appropriate and Inappropriate*

*The unwished, the wished, perfect purity,  
arising together, mastering,  
attaining and always practicing  
are another connotation than dependent.*

The fifth topic is recognizing what are and are not the sources of things; the way in which they do and do not exist, i.e., what occurs and what does not occur, what sorts of opportunities there are, or not, for something to arise. This is presented as an antidote to the conception of the self as the controller or master.

We find that everything is dependent rather than in-dependent. To put it simply, happiness arises from favorable and virtuous

actions; such favorable actions never lead to suffering. Similarly, unfavorable and unvirtuous actions never lead to happiness; rather it is in their nature that unfavorable actions only lead to pain. For example, fire burns because that is the nature of fire. We need to become skillful in the way in which things exist and do not exist, in what occurs and what does not occur, how things arise and how they do not arise. By understanding the truth of interdependence we realize that our notion of a self as having power over objects is simply fictitious.

### ***Being Skilled in the Powers***

*Apprehending, abiding, uninterrupted;  
due to both experience and purity.*

The sixth topic is called “the powers,” *wang po* in Tibetan. The reason for teaching the topic of the powers is to dispel the notion of the self as the owner, or possessor. It is rather the powers that are the owners and controllers. Speaking in terms of samsara’s powers, there are six sense powers (the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the mental sense). These lead to feelings of pleasure or pain. In the context of nirvana, the five powers are faith, exertion, mindfulness, samadhi, and prajna. These five powers lead to liberation. Understanding the powers thoroughly overcomes the notion of the self as the possessor.

### ***Being Skilled In Time***

*Causes and effects which are already experienced or similarly not experienced are different.*

We need to become skilled in time. Through understanding time we overcome the notion of a self that is permanent. Understanding time means understanding the past, present, and future. The past means the termination of all causes and effects; the present refers to causes having effects, i.e., the effects have yet not ceased, and the future refers to not generating causes or effects. By understanding these we

begin to understand the notion of hours, days, months and years and through this we realize that the self is not permanent.

### ***Being Skilled in the Four Noble Truths***

*The meaning of the feeling (together with) the cause  
is established because of the cause,  
the truth of all that arises.*

*The meaning of pacifying and remedying them  
because of having them is described differently.*

The eighth topic is the four noble truths (true suffering, true origin, true cessation and true path). By understanding the four truths we abandon the notion that the self is a person that is afflicted by disturbing emotions. It is not the self that does that, rather karma and the disturbing emotions serve as causes for true origins; they lead to samsara, true suffering. It is through the bodhisattva levels and paths that we achieve nirvana, not that the self wanders within samsara and later achieves nirvana.

### ***Being Skilled in the Vehicles***

*Through understanding qualities, faults and non-conceptuality  
one understands that they are other than the self.  
Since they definitely arise they are called 'other'.*

The ninth topic is the vehicles (Skt. *yana*, Tib. *tek pa*). The meaning of *tekpa* is “something that lifts up, raises.” This treatment of the vehicles is slightly different from the usual treatment of the three vehicles in that it begins by discussing the worldly or samsaric *yana*. By engaging in good activities we can be born in the human realm and with extraordinary effort we can be reborn in the jealous god or god realm all of which are in the realm of samsara. On the hinayana path we are able to achieve the level of an arhat who is liberated from samsara. On the mahayana path we are able to achieve Buddhahood which is complete liberation from samsara.

By being skilled in the yanas we abandon the misconception of a self being the possessor of yoga. And one realizes that it is by way of

the worldly vehicle that one achieves a good situation in samsara and that it is through exerting oneself at the hinayana and mahayana vehicles that one achieves enlightenment. It is not the self that does this, therefore one can understand that there is no self that is the possessor of yoga.

*Being Skilled in the Composite and Non-Composite*

*Having imputations, having causes, the causal characteristics and perfect pacification (become) meaningful.  
They will be explained at the end.*

The tenth topic is called “the composite and non-composite” or “the conditioned and unconditioned.” A composite is something, such as a tree or mountain or person, that is made up of many different parts and that will eventually disintegrate into its elements. This refers to samsara here. Noncomposite or unconditioned phenomenon refers here to nirvana. If we understand the way in which causes and conditions lead to the creation of a composite object due to causality, then we become skilled in the nature of the conditioned and unconditioned. This understanding of the conditioned and unconditioned overcomes the false notion of the self is initially not liberated and later liberated. Rather, we understand that samsara consists of composite and conditioned phenomena and that liberation is the unconditioned. We also recognize and realize the true nature of the conventional and ultimate.

*That was the third chapter entitled “How to Abandon the Obstructions: Knowing Suchness” from The Treatise Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes.*

That then is the presentation of the third chapter of the root text on suchness or tathata that enables us to actually abandon misconceptions of all sorts. Therefore, we need to resolve the meaning of suchness decisively.

# Chapter 5

## *The Phases and Results of Meditation*

The text that we are studying is summarized in seven root topics, explained in five chapters. This chapter covers the fourth chapter of the root text and is a discussion of the paths that serve as antidotes to the obstructions. Of the seven root topics of the text, three of these are discussed in this chapter. These vajra topics are: identifying the paths, the stages of development along the paths, and the effect of those paths.

### **FOURTH VAJRA POINT: IDENTIFYING THE PATHS**

#### **IV. IDENTIFYING THE PATHS**

##### **A. DESCRIPTION OF THE PATHS**

##### **1. THE 37 FACTORS OF ENLIGHTENMENT**

We will be talking about identifying the paths by discussing the 37 factors of enlightenment, also called harmonies with enlightenment, because the 37 factors of enlightenment make up the five paths. This was presented in the second chapter of the text, which considered the obstructions to the 37 factors of enlightenment.

The 37 factors are the antidotes for the various obstructions and so are presented in this chapter, which describes the paths as serving as antidotes to misconceptions. The presentation of the 37 factors of enlightenment in this chapter of the root text is in many respects very similar to the earlier presentation; however, a few distinctive and unusual features are found in this chapter. I do not see any reason for explaining the ones that are basically the same, so I will only address the ones that are different.

(A) THE FOUR FOUNDATIONS

*Because of taking up bad ways,  
because of the causes of conditioned existence,  
because of the foundation and  
because of an obscured mind,  
(one should) engage in the four truths,  
which are the close-placement meditation of mindfulness.*

As you know, the path of accumulation is divided into the lower, middle and great parts. On the lower path of accumulation one practices and cultivates the four foundations of mindfulness.

The first foundation is mindfulness of body. The reason for developing mindfulness of the body is that the body is the root of true suffering. If one understands the body well, then one will understand true suffering well.

The second foundation is mindfulness of feeling. Disturbing emotions of craving are principally caused by feeling. If one understands the nature of feeling properly, one will be able to relinquish craving and thereby not give birth to the disturbing emotions. This practice is related to the second noble truth of the origin of suffering and understanding how this comes about.

The third foundation is mindfulness of mind in which one comes to understand the third noble truth of cessation. Cessation refers basically to understanding selflessness, and mind is the basis of understanding selflessness. Therefore, by carefully paying attention to the mind one can actualize true cessation.

The fourth foundation is mindfulness of phenomena which is related to the fourth noble truth of the eight-fold path. If one understands the phenomena of samsara and nirvana without obscuration, one can generate the eight-fold path in the continuum of one's being. For that reason, it is important to understand phenomena by cultivating mindfulness.

(B) THE FOUR ABANDONMENTS

*If the opponent's side and antidotes  
are perfectly known in all aspects,*



*then due to abandoning them,  
joyful exertion arises in four aspects.*

The middle path of accumulation is the point of practicing the four abandonments: abandoning negative deeds, not generating new ones, giving rise to beneficial actions, and resting in their power. This discussion is identical with the one given earlier, so I will not go into it in more detail.

### (C) THE FOUR POWERS

#### THE BRIEF SUMMARY

*Resting in them and appropriate activities  
become the accumulation of all purposes.  
Abandoning the five faults,  
relying on the eight applications  
which arise from the cause.*

On the great path of accumulation we develop the four legs of magical emanation. These four legs are principally samadhi. At this point, the text gives an outline of the methods for practicing meditation. In particular, it discusses the five faults that occur in the practice of meditation and the eight antidotes to those faults. These five faults and eight remedies come from the sutra rather than the vajrayana tradition. Although we meditate according to the vajrayana, the faults and remedies are common to both traditions and understanding them will be beneficial for our practice.

#### THE DETAILED DESCRIPTION

##### *The Five Faults*

*Laziness, forgetting the oral instructions,  
stupor and excitement, under-reacting and over-reacting  
are described as the five faults.*

We can think of the practice of meditation in terms of the process of applying oneself to it, getting oneself to practice, the actual practice of meditation, and the conclusion of meditation. If one is lazy, then one will not even enter into meditation at all; one will not exert oneself at it. For that reason, laziness is the first fault that obstructs one from entering and joining with meditation at all.

The second fault is called “forgetting the oral instructions.” The oral instructions are the reasons one would want to practice meditation, the advantages of practice, and the disadvantages of not practicing meditation. If one understands the good qualities of meditation and the disadvantages of not practicing meditation, then exertion toward meditation will arise naturally. So, it is important to understand the oral instructions and not to forget them. Once one has begun the practice of meditation, one needs the oral instructions that present the actual methods of meditation. If one forgets those, then one will not be able to meditate.

As for the body of meditation, there are basically two problems that one experiences: a sinking mind on the one hand and a wild mind on the other. Sometimes one’s mind is dark and heavy, sunken and depressed, and at other times one’s mind is scattered, running everywhere and wild. A sinking mind is the third fault and a wild mind is the fourth fault.

The fifth fault is under- and over-application of the antidotes. If one’s practice of meditation is to advance to a higher level, one needs to know when to apply the various antidotes and when not to apply them. That is to say, when recognizing that one’s mind is either sunken or wild and to apply the correct antidote. If, however, the mind is neither sunken nor wild, then it is important to know not to apply any antidote.

After the presentation of the practice and development of meditation in terms of five faults, there is a discussion of eight types of applications that serve as antidotes to those problems.

### *The Antidotes of the Eight Applications*

*One’s situation and abiding in it  
are cause and result.*

*Not becoming forgetful of the reference and*

## *The Phases and Results of Meditation*

*recognizing stupor and excitement;  
directly responding and  
Returning to genuine stability.*

The first four antidotes or remedies of faith, aspiration, exertion, and being thoroughly processed are directed at the fault of laziness. Being completely processed or disciplined, the actual antidote to laziness. Once one has such suppleness, then however long one sits in meditation, one can enter and remain comfortable in the meditative state; one does not fall under the sway of laziness. Therefore, the pliant synchronization of body and mind which arises from exertion is the actual antidote to laziness. We initially lack exertion, so we have to look for the causes of exertion. Exertion arises from aspiration, and this aspiration, which one might translate as inspiration, is liking meditation, feeling very joyful about it, believing that it is very important, and having a longing for meditation. If one has this feeling, then one will naturally give rise to exertion in the practice of meditation. For that reason, one needs longing, admiration, aspiration and inspiration for meditation.

Such inspiration comes from faith. This faith is understanding that meditation is an activity that has a desirable benefit unlike any others. The abandonment of obscuration and realization on the path depend upon meditation. It is through meditation that wisdom increases. Faith in the good qualities of meditation will naturally lead to aspiration. Aspiration will lead to exertion and exertion will lead to becoming completely processed. For that reason, the four antidotes of faith, aspiration, exertion, and being thoroughly processed are taught as the antidotes to laziness.

The fifth antidote of mindfulness serves as the antidote to forgetting the oral instructions. Mindfulness allows one to remember the instructions, to maintain awareness of them, not to forget them. Through the power of mindfulness one does not forget the oral instructions either during meditation or subsequent to meditation.

The sixth antidote is knowing something personally, in the sense of either awareness or introspection. It serves as the antidote to the faults of a sunken or wild mind. It means simply recognizing them with the faculty of knowing what is going on in one's mind. One sees the wildness or dullness of mind and is able to apply the proper

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antidote. This is the faculty which enables one to abandon these faults.

The seventh antidote is turning one's mind toward the proper antidote. The antidote to the five faults of under- or over-applying the antidote is literally called "intention," in the sense of impelling one to exert oneself in the antidote. It is a turning of one's mind toward the proper antidotes. That is the particular technique whereby one can dispel the fault of not applying oneself.

Equanimity is the eighth antidote and is the proper anti-dote to the fault of applying oneself unnecessarily to various sorts of remedies. In other words, if the mind is resting peacefully and one engages in the antidote to a sunken or wild mind, then that would not be helpful or necessary. What one should do instead is just rest in equanimity. Therefore, equanimity is the eighth antidote. At this point, it refers to the mind resting in a very relaxed, easy and comfortable way.

*Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes* then takes up the topic of the five powers, the five strengths, the seven branches of enlightenment and the eight branches of a superior path. The discussion that occurs at this point is not very different from the earlier discussion. It is important to understand, however, that with the 37 factors of enlightenment one moves from the path of accumulation, to the path of connection to the path of seeing. Following is the path of meditation and finally the path of no more learning. These are the methods whereby one can move along the five paths. Thus they are a presentation of the way in which the fruition of practice can be achieved.

### (D) THE FIVE STRENGTHS

*After liberation which partially corresponds has been generated:  
aspiration; application; mastery;  
not becoming forgetful of the perspective;  
not becoming distracted; and also perfect differentiation.*

### (E) THE FIVE POWERS OF ENDURANCE

*Since the inappropriate side is shallow,*

## *The Phases and Results of Meditation*

*the power is a later result.*

*The capacities and powers each correspond as two partial definitive differentiations.*

The five paths can be gathered together into three stages. The first are the path of accumulation and connection from the point of view that they are not the basis of a superior being. Because one has not realized dharmata directly on these two lower paths, they are said to be incomplete or to be mistaken. However, they are important because they lead to the two higher paths where dharmata is recognized. This is the first stage.

### (F) THE SEVEN HARMONIES

*The branch of own nature; the branch of the matrix;  
the branch of definitive arising is the third.  
The fourth is the branch of benefiting;  
the branch of lacking afflictions has three aspects:  
they are taught to be the basis, matrix and the essence itself.*

The second stage is the path of seeing in which one sees dharmata directly and one passes beyond error.

### (G) THE EIGHT-FOLD PATH

*Perfect distinction and making comprehensible;  
three aspects bring others to have faith.  
The antidotes to the opposite side  
are the eight branches of the path.  
The view, ethics and modesty are described as being those  
one can make others aware of.  
Afflictions, complementary afflictions and power are  
the antidotes of the opposing side.*

On the third stage of the path of meditation and the path of no more learning the individual, because of his or her high achievement, no longer makes any mistakes and cannot fall back into a lower state.

## 2. THE THREE PHASES OF THE PATHS

*Following, accordingly and yet fallible.*

*Following, being connected and the opposite:*

*Infalible and fallible.*

*Following, not being connected is meditation.*

## 3. THE RESULTS OF THE PATHS

*The reference, mind development and attainments of bodhisattvas are especially noble.*

The text describes the topic of the distinctive features of the path of a bodhisattva and how a bodhisattva's path surpasses that of the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas.

Generally speaking, the path of a bodhisattva is discussed in terms of the 37 factors of enlightenment and the three different stages of the path that we just looked at. The exceptional and unusual features of a bodhisattva's path are described in terms of the special way in which a bodhisattva's mind is turned toward enlightenment, i.e., the development of the mind which has three different aspects to it.

The first aspect is the object of observation, that which is to be taken to mind and considered by hinayana and mahayana practitioners. Shravakas, for instance, are concerned with their own welfare alone, achieving happiness for their own sake. In order to do so they meditate upon the non-self of the individual. Bodhisattvas are concerned with the welfare of themselves as well as others; they consider how to accomplish the welfare of all sentient beings. For that reason they meditate upon both the non-self of persons and the non-self of phenomena.

The second way in which a bodhisattva's path is elevated above that of shravakas and pratyekabuddhas is in terms of mental application. The shravakas meditate upon impermanence and suffering, the first two of the four aspects of true suffering. Bodhisattvas, however, meditate on dharmadhatu that is beyond being either permanent or impermanent. They don't stop at meditating on impermanence as the antidote to the conception of

## *The Phases and Results of Meditation*

permanence; they don't stop at just meditating on suffering and misery as the antidote to the conception of samsara as pleasant. They set their minds upon something that is beyond pleasure or pain, beyond permanence or impermanence, which is dharmadhatu.

The meditations on impermanence and misery are the antidotes to believing that the things of samsara are lasting or that the nature of samsara is happiness. To cross over the ocean of samsara and those mistaken conceptions, shravakas take to mind the truth of impermanence and misery as the nature of samsara. Bodhisattvas go even further.

The third way the bodhisattva path is superior is in terms of the effect achieved, in that shravakas and pratyekabuddhas accomplish the hinayana which insures their own welfare alone. Bodhisattvas do not dwell in the extreme either of existence or of peace and thus can act for the welfare of others.

This completes the discussion of the fourth of the seven vajra points of the fourth chapter of this text.

### **FIFTH VAJRA POINT: LEVELS OF THE PATH**

#### **V. THE LEVELS OF THE PATH**

The fifth vajra point is the various levels of the paths. There are two different ways these levels are presented: the nine phases and the three phases.

##### **A. THE NINE PHASES**

*The causal matrix, entrance, preparation, expression of the result, actions, especially non-actions.*

*There are the highest and the unsurpassable.*

*Faith, entering, definitely arising, prophecy, expressing, bestowing authorization, gone, benefiting and accomplishing actions are taught.*

1. Entrance refers to awakening the potential for enlightenment that exists within oneself and feeling a great joy about that.

2. Mind generation is turning one's mind toward enlightenment and the entrance into the path.
3. Connection is the period from the time that one sets one's mind upon enlightenment until the time when one achieves the first bodhisattva level.
4. Effect refers to the point of achieving the first bodhisattva level. It is the effect of what one has accomplished so far.
5. Accomplishing actions refers to the period from the second bodhisattva level through and to the end of the seventh bodhisattva level. During that period a certain amount of exertion and striving is required.
6. Without striving and exertion refers to the eighth bodhisattva level; at that point striving and exertion are no longer necessary.
7. The elevated occasion is achieved on the tenth bodhisattva ground. It is superior, it is distinctive and raised to a very high level.
8. Distinctive and special good qualities are achieved; in particular, one achieves "the four correct knowledges."
9. The unsurpassable is Buddhahood.

### B. THREE ASPECTS

*There are three aspects in the dharmadhatu:  
impure, impure and pure, as well as completely pure;  
they are described respectively.  
Based upon them and accordingly,  
the status of individuals is determined.*

The nine phases can be gathered into three different aspects:

1. Not purified due to stains refers to the fact that dharmata is, from one's own point of view, still covered over with stains. The paths of accumulation and connection (the first two of the five paths) are this period, in which the dharmata appears to be stained. From that point of view, this phase is called "not purified due to stains."
2. Slight purity occurs on the paths of seeing and meditation when dharmata is seen more and more clearly; defilements are being removed. It is therefore said to be somewhat pure.
3. Thorough purity is Buddhahood in that all of the defilements have been removed.



## SIXTH VAJRA POINT: RESULTS OF THE PATH

This brings us to the sixth vajra point which is still in chapter four of the root text and is a discussion of the effects of the path. Usually when we speak about the effects of cultivating the mahayana path, we talk about Buddhahood. However, here are presented the various effects that are achieved along the way to Buddhahood. This is done in terms of five different effects.

### VI. RESULTS OF THE PATH

#### A. THE BRIEF SUMMARY

*That which becomes a vessel (and) has perfectly matured.  
Influential power, wishes, increasing (abilities)  
and perfect purity are the results in subsequent order.*

#### B. THE DETAILED DESCRIPTION

*Following successively, beginning, becoming accustomed and perfection.*

*Following, (what accords) and (what) does not accord.*

*Freedom (is) special.*

*Highest and unsurpassable are other results which are briefly summarized.*

1. One always has a good body meaning one is never reborn as a hell-being, or as a hungry ghost.
2. One begins to have real power with regard to beneficial actions. One's ability to benefit others never fluctuates, i.e., sometimes one has such ability and at other times one has none, rather one's ability increases higher and higher and becomes greater and greater.
3. One enjoys beneficial practice or, as it says, the effect accords with the cause. By becoming accustomed to the practice of helping others, one enjoys it all the time. One does not sometimes feel delighted about doing beneficial things and other times that one just couldn't be bothered.

4. Increasing one's ability from lifetime to lifetime results from having become familiar with many beneficial actions in one lifetime, then in later lifetimes one continues in that way and one's ability increases further.

5. Separation from discordance with the path means one is able to stop entirely from engaging in non-beneficial actions.

In this way, the various effects that one experiences as a result of practicing the path can be summarized and characterized in terms of these five.

*That was the fourth chapter entitled The Antidotes: The Phases and Results of Meditation from Distinguishing of the Middle from the Extremes.*

## Chapter 6

### *The Unsurpassable Mahayana Vehicle*

We have completed the fourth chapter of the root text and have now arrived at the fifth chapter about uncommon features, that is, the features special to the mahayana.<sup>16</sup>

#### CHAPTER FIVE OF THE ROOT TEXT

#### THE SEVENTH VAJRA POINT: THE MAHAYANA

#### VII. THE MAHAYANA VEHICLE

##### *The Brief Summary*

*The teachings describe as unparalleled: The practice, the focus, and the perfect accomplishment.*

##### *The Detailed Description*

The mahayana or great vehicle is superior to the hinayana or low vehicle and for that reason it is called *maha* in Sanskrit or *chenpo* in Tibetan both of which mean “great.” The greatness of this yana is explained in terms of the unsurpassable practice, the unsurpassable view, and the unsurpassable and authentic accomplishment.

#### A. THE VAST MAHAYANA PRACTICE

##### *The Brief Summary*

*There are six aspects to the practice which accomplishes the paramitas: what is genuine, mental cultivation, being in accord with*

*the dharma, discarding extremes, practice with specific focus, and without a specific focus.*

Practices that are undertaken in the mahayana are unequaled by any other; they are distinctive, they are fast, they are authentic, and we can describe them in terms of six aspects. Generally speaking, the distinctive and unsurpassable practice of the mahayana is just the practice of the six paramitas; the mahayana practice is unsurpassable from this point of view.

### ***The Detailed Description***

#### **(1) THE TWELVE ASPECTS OF THE MAHAYANA**

*The essential character of what is genuine can be expressed in the twelve aspects of genuine: Vastness, long duration, purpose, inexhaustibility, continuity, absence of difficulty, mastery, permeating, striving, attainment, the result in concordance with the cause, and accomplishment.*

Discussing what is genuine about the unsurpassable mahayana practice is done here in terms of twelve excellent features of the mahayana. The practice of the excellent mahayana is authentic, pure, utterly faultless and elevated.

The first group of four features show that this practice is excellent in four ways:

(1) It is extremely vast. One is not practicing for temporary comfort and happiness and not simply for the purpose of one's own welfare and liberation from samsara alone, rather one is practicing in order to help all sentient beings who are limitless in number, whose state is limitless in extent. From that point of view the practice is vast.

(2) One practices it for a long duration meaning for many, many eons and not just for a short period of time. At the conclusion, when one has arrived at the end (Buddhahood), one's activity for the welfare of others continues. The stream of such activity is never severed.

(3) The purpose is excellent because it has the intention of helping all sentient beings.

## *The Unsurpassable Mahayana Vehicle*

(4) One's practice is inexhaustible in that having achieved Buddhahood one does not stop; rather, one's enlightened activity never comes to a conclusion.

The second group of four features describes the four important qualities of these features.

(5) The continuum of this practice is never severed. Generally speaking, when one is talking about the stream of activity not ceasing, it means the same thing we just discussed as the inexhaustibility of a Buddha's enlightened activity. In this particular instance, it points to the way in which a Buddha's enlightened activity is extended to that Buddha's students, and then those students teach it to their students; and so on until the enlightened activity of a Buddha enters into everyone. For that reason it is unceasing.

(6) The practice is without difficulties, without hardships. Generally speaking, the practice of the mahayana involves an extremely great accumulation of merit and wisdom. However, the practitioners of the mahayana are skilled in method and for that reason are able to accumulate a great and vast collection of wisdom and merit without difficulties. For example, they understand how to rejoice in the beneficial activities of others, such that they are able to create and accumulate a tremendous amount of merit through the practice of generosity, which is beneficial both to oneself and others, by way of rejoicing in the beneficial activities of others.

(7) Mastery is the seventh excellent feature. Although engaging in generosity, discipline and so forth is hard work for most people, it is not so for mahayana practitioners because they do it from the vantage point of their great skill in samadhi. Having the basis in samadhi, whatever generosity they would like to practice, whatever discipline they wish to maintain, whatever exertion they want to undertake, they can do so; that is their mastery.

(8) It is held and protected by wisdom, which is to say that although ordinary people such as ourselves might engage in generosity, discipline, etc., we do not do so from the point of view of the practice being affected by having seen the nature of reality directly. Bodhisattvas engage in all of these practices (such as generosity) in such a way that it is affected by the force of having realized the dharmata, having realized the actual nature accurately and directly,

without any intermediary. In that way, their practice is thoroughly embraced by and fused with their realization of emptiness.

The third group of four features presents the illustrious nature of mahayana practice in terms of the various stages, the way in which the practice matures at various levels.

(9) The ninth is beginning, in the sense that it points to the excellent way in which one undertakes the mahayana path right from the beginning, at the paths of accumulation and connection; one begins in a genuine way and sets out on a very vast path. Thus, the manner in which one initiates or undertakes the practice of the mahayana is excellent.

(10) The tenth is achievement and points to the first bodhisattva level, the first achievement in the sense of an effect. In particular here one has achieved an effect or fruit that is beyond the world, beyond worldly grounds. One has achieved a transcendent level.

(11) Causally concordant or in accordance with the cause refers to the way in which the practice of each of the paramitas is extended throughout all of the first nine bodhisattva levels.

(12) The excellence of the tenth and eleventh bodhisattva levels are excellent. It is called accomplishment and points to the excellent nature of that accomplishment.

Thus this first topic, the excellence of the mahayana practice, is a discussion of the six paramitas in terms of their twelve excellent features.

## (2) THE TEN PARAMITAS

### *The Brief Summary*

*Because of these twelve ways, the ten paramitas are said to have the meaning of being genuine.*

### *The Detailed Description*

#### (a) THEIR ESSENCE

*Generosity, discipline, patience, joyful striving, meditative stabilization, higher knowledge, skillful means, aspiration prayers, strength, and primordial wisdom. These are the ten paramitas.*

The text then discusses the paramitas and begins with a discussion of the nature of each paramita. I will not discuss that now because it is a repetition of what we have already discussed.

## (b) THE FUNCTION

*Their functions are: taking care, not harming, forbearance of harm, increasing positive qualities, ability to lead into the teachings, bringing to complete liberation, rendering inexhaustible, always engaging, making definite, and practicing and bring to maturity.*

The text then discusses how the paramitas are beneficial.

- a. The practice of the paramita of generosity helps those who have received our generosity and causes them to rejoice in the dharma.
- b. The paramita of discipline prevents us from harming others.
- c. The paramita of patience prevents us from harming even those individuals who have tried to harm us. It prevents any harm either to oneself or to others.
- d. The paramita of exertion causes our good qualities to increase to a higher level.
- e. The paramita of concentration allows us to help others through direct knowledge that others would not have, through magical emanation, and so forth.
- f. The paramita of prajna enables us to have beneficial actions that surpass ordinary actions with temporary benefit. It is not just something for a particular occasion, rather our activities lead to release and liberation beyond samsara.
- g. The seventh paramita is given the name “dedication” rather than skillful means in this particular instance. However, they have the same meaning. The paramita of dedication prevents our virtuous and beneficial activities from ever being exhausted.
- h. The paramita of aspiration prayers causes beneficial activities to continue and flourish at all times.
- i. The paramita of power endows our activities with great capacity.

j. The paramita of wisdom causes our activities to be non-mistaken; rather our activities ripen others and help them enter into the dharma.

## ***Mental Cultivation***

*While examining the teachings just as they are put forth in the mahayana, bodhisattvas at all times cultivate their minds through the three higher knowledges.*

There are three ways in which the mahayana is an unsurpassable practice. Within unsurpassable practice there are six different ways in which the practice is unsurpassable. The first is the practice of what is excellent. We have now reached what is called “mental engagement.” This is described briefly in terms of the three types of prajna, which are the prajna of hearing, the prajna of contemplating, and the prajna of meditating.

### ***1. The Function of Mental Cultivation***

*Causing the basic constituent to emerge, entering into the meaning, and the perfect accomplishment of objectives.*

The first prajna arises from hearing. We all have within us the sugatagarbha, the essence of wisdom and faith, but if we do not meet with the appropriate conditions, it will not be awakened. The appropriate conditions with which one needs to meet are the Buddha’s word, the treatises that enable one to understand clearly what the Buddha taught, and the oral instructions, which show one precisely how to practice. Having listened extensively to the Buddha’s word and the other instructions which help one to understand it properly, then the element that exists within oneself, the seed of enlightenment, can increase. That is the function of the prajna that arises from hearing.

The second prajna, which arises from contemplating, allows one to recognize the true nature of things. Having analyzed and investigated again and again and again, one finds and realizes the



truth in the manner of a reasoned understanding and inferential knowledge. One then will be able to enter into the meaning.

The third prajna, which arises from meditation, allows one to achieve the final effect or fruition.

### ***2. Cultivation Through Ten Dharma Activities***

The text then discusses the way in which one does the practice of taking to mind, or mental application, in the manner of the ten dharma activities.

#### ***The Brief Summary***

*This mental cultivation is known as perfectly encompassing the twelve types of dharma activity.*

#### ***The Detailed Description***

*Writing the letters, making offerings, generous giving, listening, reading, memorizing, explaining, reciting, considering, and meditating. The essential character of these activities contains immeasurable merit.*

The practice of mental engagement in this particular form has ten different aspects of dharma activity:

1. One writes down the letters that contain the meaning of the scriptures taught by the Buddha; one writes these meanings in one's own hand. That is the first way in which one takes such practices to mind.
2. One makes offerings such as to the *three jewels* (the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha).
3. One practices generosity, for instance, by giving poor people what they need.
4. One listens to the dharma.
5. One reads and then trains in the texts of the dharma.
6. Then the meaning one has heard and read about is held in one's mind; it remains there.

7. Rather than just stopping with oneself, one explains the meaning to others.
8. One does not forget the meaning.
9. One contemplates the meaning again and again.
10. One meditates upon it.

### ***The Special Benefit Of The Dharma Activities***

*Because it is superior  
because it does not become exhausted,  
because it benefits others without entering an inactive state of  
peace.*

Generally speaking, the ten types of dharma activities are common to both the hinayana and mahayana. The practice in the mahayana surpasses that of the hinayana in that one's motivation in the mahayana is extremely vast; one does this for the purpose of helping all sentient beings and not just for oneself. Also, one continues in such practice for an extremely long period of time, and so in this way the mahayana practice of the ten dharma activities surpasses the practice of those activities as they are undertaken in the hinayana.

### **3. PRACTICING IN ACCORD WITH THE DHARMA**

The third section on the mahayana practice is called being in accord with the dharma and is a discussion of shamatha and vipashyana meditation.

#### **(A) SHAMATHA OR TRANQUILLITY MEDITATION**

##### ***The Brief Summary***

*Practice without distraction and without error  
is in accord with the dharma.*

##### ***The Detailed Description***

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*The wise should know the distractions: drawing out, engaging an object, accordingly savoring experience, dullness and agitation, thoughts that believe, mental activity involving ego-clinging, and the mentality of the small.*

Tranquillity or shamatha meditation means that our mind does not wander, is not distracted. Six ways in which the mind would wander are described here and those six are abandoned in this type of practice.

The first is said to be a natural wandering due to the basic character, which is the analysis of the characteristics of the five physical sense consciousnesses. The nature of the five consciousnesses is that they are faced outwards and there is no way to set them into samadhi. The eye just naturally goes to whatever is seen, the nature of the ear consciousness is that it just goes somewhere, likewise for the nose consciousness and so forth. They cannot be set in samadhi, so that type of distraction is to be abandoned.

The second is wandering to the external, which discusses the way in which the mind wanders to objects externally.

The third is a discussion of the way in which the mind is distracted internally. It is a discussion of distractions within meditative stabilization, within samadhi. When one practices samadhi, one sets the mind internally and generally speaking, through doing so, good qualities increase. However, it does happen that when one sets the mind internally in that way, one experiences a very pleasant and comfortable feeling. It can happen that one would take up meditation simply in order to produce that pleasant and comfortable internal feeling rather than as the method for having good qualities increase; one is just pursuing that pleasant feeling in order to taste samadhi.

The fourth type of wandering is a wandering to signs, and refers to the way in which one could take one's meditation to be something truly marvelous and supreme and become deeply attached to it.

The fifth type of distraction is a wandering into bad states. One might think that one is an extremely good meditator, that one's meditation is of a very high quality and thus become proud, so that one's meditation is mixed with klesha.

The sixth type is distraction to the hinayana, in that one's practice of shamatha might degenerate to the point where one would practice it only for one's own welfare; one's motivation and the scope of one's practice have shrunk, have become very small.

By abandoning these six types of distractions one achieves a faultless shamatha.

## (B) SUPERIOR INSIGHT OR VIPASHYANA

### *The Brief Summary*

*Letters, actual meaning, mental activity, not projecting, the two characters, impure and pure, temporary, no aversion, and no pride.*

### *The Detailed Description*

Vipashyana has ten characteristics which make it faultless.

#### *(1) The Letters*

*Meaning arises through the connection of letters and through association. Meaning does not arise without this connection or without this association. This understanding is unmistakable about letters.*

First of all, one is unmistakable in regard to the letters in which the Buddha's teachings have been represented, the letters that are the agents which express the Buddha's teachings.

#### *(2) The Actual Meaning*

*What comes into being as dualistic appearance does not exist in this way: completely discarding existence and nonexistence—  
This is being unmistakable about the actual meaning.*

Secondly, what is non-mistaken about the meaning that those letters express? It is recognizing that imagined natures are without any nature of their own.

### ***(3) Mental Activity***

*Mental activity involves thoughts that are conditioned by previous thoughts. Knowing its origin as the cause of dualistic appearances is being unmistaken about mental activity.*

The third characteristic of vipashyana is not being mistaken about dependent phenomena, the factor of appearance itself. This has two aspects: one recognizes the dependent nature as being merely knowledge, merely of the nature of mind, and secondly one recognizes it as being like an illusion. So, the recognition of the dependent nature as being merely mind or merely knowledge is the third of the ways in which vipashyana is not mistaken.

### ***(4) Not Projecting***

*Not existing ultimately and existing are said to resemble an illusion and so forth.*

*This understanding is unmistaken about not projecting, because neither existence nor nonexistence are projected.*

The recognition of appearances as being an illusion is the fourth point. This is realizing that the dependent nature is merely mind and realizing that it is like an illusion; one avoids falling into either extreme. Through recognizing them as being merely mind, one does not fall into the extreme of annihilation; through recognizing them as being like an illusion, one does not fall into the extreme of eternalism.

### ***(5) The True Character***

*No concepts apply.*

*For that reason all phenomena are mere names.*

*This is being unmistaken about the true character.*

*It is the true character of the ultimate truth.*

The fifth point is that one is not mistaken about the specific character of the thoroughly established nature. One realizes that the thoroughly established nature is free from apprehended and apprehender, of that which is grasped and that which grasps, of that which is fixated upon and that which fixates.

***(6) The Comprehensive Character***

*Not included within the dharmadhatu—  
such a phenomenon does not exist.*

*For that reason, understanding the comprehensive character  
in this way is to be unmistaken about it.*

Sixth, vipashyana is non-mistaken in knowing the general character, which is that the thoroughly established nature pervades all phenomena. The emptiness of duality or suchness pervades everything; there are no phenomena that transcend it, pass beyond or are beyond its reach.

***(7) The Pure and Impure***

*Depending on whether mistaken mental activity is discarded or not  
discarded, an individual is impure or completely pure.*

*This understanding is also unmistaken about that which is pure and  
impure.*

The seventh characteristic is non-mistaken about purity and confusion. One is non-mistaken in that one understands that to realize suchness is purity and that not to realize suchness is to be impure or confused.

***(8) Adventitious***

*Since dharmadhatu is by nature pure it is like space;  
the adventitious arises from duality and is not wrong.*

The eighth point is to understand that the distinction about impurity and purity is itself something adventitious<sup>17</sup> and superficial. On the

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one hand, through knowing suchness one is pure, while not knowing suchness is impurity; nevertheless, these are in any case adventitious.

### *(9) No Aversion*

*In the true nature of phenomena and a person,  
there is nothing totally afflicted nor completely purified.  
Since there is no self-essence, there is no aversion and no pride.  
Here this understanding is unmistakable about these two.*

Not to be mistaken about what is to be abandoned, not to be mistaken about samsara, is the ninth point; it is recognizing that afflictions are to be abandoned.

### *(10) No Arrogance*

The tenth point is not to be mistaken about nirvana, not to be mistaken about realizing the necessity for good qualities to grow and increase.

## 4. ABANDONING THE TWO EXTREMES

We now come to the fourth of the six aspects of unsurpassable practice. It is called "the practice that abandons the two extremes." It is a discussion of practice that is free from the extreme of existence (the extreme of eternalism) and non-existence (the extreme of nihilism); freedom from the extremes of being identical and being different, freedom from the extremes of superimposition and deprecation.

### (A) THE FIRST SEVEN PAIRS

*The extremes of being separate or the same,  
the extremes of both the tirthikas and the shravakas,  
the two extremes of superimposition or denial in relation to either a  
person or a phenomena,  
the extremes of unfavorable conditions and their remedies,*

*the ideas of permanence and extinction,  
and the extremes of a perceived object and a perceiving subject in  
relation to the totally afflicted and the completely purified.  
There are three aspects to the totally afflicted.*

**(B) THE SECOND SEVEN**

***The Brief Summary***

*The extremes of two concepts are stated in twelve aspects.*

***The Detailed Description***

*The existence of an entity and the nonexistence of an entity,  
what is to be pacified and what pacifies,  
something to be feared and the fearing of it  
perceived object and perceiving subject,  
what is correct and what is mistaken,  
acting as an agent and not acting as an agent,  
and not arising and simultaneously present.  
These are the extremes related to two concepts.*

**5 & 6. PRACTICES WITH AND WITHOUT A SPECIAL FOCUS**

*Practices with a special focus and without a special focus are  
understood in relation to the ten levels.*

The fifth and sixth aspects of unsurpassable practice are discussed together in this text. The first is called “having a difference” and the second is called “being without difference.” This means that on the first bodhisattva level the practice of the paramita of generosity is particularly eminent. On the second level the paramita of discipline is brought to perfection and so forth, through the ten levels. From that point there is a difference which can be observed. At the same time, one practices all ten perfections on all ten grounds. It is not the case that, for instance, although one would have the perfection of the paramita of generosity on the first level, that one would not have the



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paramita of discipline; rather on the first level one has all ten. So from that point of view, there is no difference.

That completes the discussion of the six different topics of the unsurpassable practice. We now go onto the second section of this fifth chapter which is the unsurpassable focus or the mahayana view.

### B. THE VAST MAHAYANA VIEW

*The focuses are stated as:*

*The presentation, suchness or the dharmadhatu, what is to be practiced, the practice (itself), comprehension, definitive comprehension, perfect comprehension, perfect realization, perfectly expanding, conceptualization, resting in naturalness, and perfectly accomplished.*

We come to the second of the three ways in which the mahayana is unsurpassable, called “the unsurpassable view.” Generally speaking, the mahayana is the practice of the ten paramitas. In particular, one practices these paramitas within threefold purity. One does not conceive any of the three phases or spheres of one’s practice to exist inherently. From that point of view one practices within threefold purity, that is to say one’s practice of the paramitas is sealed, stamped, and marked with the dharmadhatu itself.

### C. THE VAST MAHAYANA ACCOMPLISHMENT

*Perfect accomplishment embodies:*

*Nothing missing, not abandoning, not straying, perfect accomplishment, perfect generation, increasing, completely workable, not abiding, no obscurations, and no interruption.*

The third aspect of the unsurpassability of the mahayana is called “the unsurpassable and authentic accomplishment” and has two phases. The first is called “the temporary” and is a discussion of the good qualities that bodhisattvas develop as they traverse the paths to Buddhahood. The second is called “the final” and is a discussion of Buddhahood, which is itself the unsurpassable. In particular within the discussion of Buddhahood, there is a discussion of the way in

## *Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes*

which Buddhas manifest, emanate the sambhogakaya and the nirmanakaya, and by way of , two present the dharma and bring great benefit to students. In terms of those two kayas, the mahayana is the unsurpassable, authentic accomplishment.

*That was the fifth chapter called The Unsurpassable Vehicle from Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes.*

# Chapter 7

## *Concluding Words*

In the very beginning this text was divided into four major areas. We spent almost all of our time on the third and have now arrived at the last portion, which is a discussion of the meaning of the conclusion.

### THIS TEXT IS DIFFICULT TO COMPREHEND

*The Treatise Distinguishing the Middle from Extremes is difficult to realize and embraces the heart of the teachings.*

*It brings great benefits, and accordingly, it is meaningful for all three vehicles.*

*All that lacks meaning is cleared away.*

*Sarva Mangalam*

The value of this treatise is summarized in this way:

First of all, it is something that would be very difficult to realize with the ordinary kind of conceptuality that ordinary people have. This treatise is not fabricated, rather it is the meaning of the scriptures taught by the Buddha, presented again by Maitreya; the meaning would be very difficult to fabricate with conceptuality.

Secondly, this treatise is meaningful and of great purpose because it is beneficial both to oneself and to others.

Thirdly, it contains within it everything that is of benefit to students of any of the three paths, i.e., the shravaka path, the pratyekabuddha path, and the mahayana.

From among these three, whatever family or type one belongs to, this treatise holds within it that which is of benefit.

Finally, this treatise is extremely clear. Because it is clear it dispels doubt, it dispels wrong views and enables one to become free from the obstructive afflictions and the obstructions to omniscience.

THE AUTHOR AND TRANSLATOR

*That concludes The Treatise that Perfectly Differentiates between the Middle from the Extremes written in verse form by the exalted Maitreya. It was translated (into Tibetan) by the Indian Khenpos Dschinamitra and Shilendrabodhi and edited in this form by the big group of translators Yeshe De.*

I have presented the five chapters of this great text in a rather abbreviated way. However, what I have given you is a general meaning of this text. There simply hasn't been enough time for me to go through all of it in great detail. Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche taught this text extensively to his students; they finished a translation of it (which is reproduced in English translation above). It would certainly be worth your while to read that very carefully so that you can understand this text in its entirety.

## *The Notes*

1. An explanation of Maitreya and five books and relation to Kagyu lineage.
2. Rinpoche's contention is not as unbelievable as one imagines when one considers that there have been a number of modern Tibetan lamas (such as Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche and Düdjom Rinpoche) who have received texts and transmission from the sambhogakaya.
3. We prefer to use the word "emptiness" to denote shunyata because this emptiness is not a complete voidness, but actually has the characteristic of knowing or luminosity (Tib. *salwa*).
4. For more, see Thrangu Rinpoche's *Ornament of Clear Realization* by Namo Buddha Publications.
5. For more see Thrangu Rinpoche's *Distinguishing Dharma and Dharmata*. Boulder: Namo Buddha Publications.
6. For a translation of this text and a detailed commentary on it see Thrangu Rinpoche's *The Uttara Tantra: A Treatise on Buddha Nature* by Namo Buddha Publications.
7. This is a most important concept in Buddhism. For example, water appears as a solid (ice), as a liquid (water), and as a gas (steam), but its true or inherent nature is more likely a two hydrogen and one oxygen atom in a molecule.
8. Buddhists believe that what we conventionally perceive is not the true state of affairs. For example, we may see a chair as solid, made of wood, and brown in color and that is its appearance according to its conventional or relative truth. However, a physicist would tell us a chair is made of billions of atoms moving at tremendous speeds with 99.99% of the chair being empty space between these atoms and that the "brown" is just a radiation of energy that our eyes see as "brown." This is more like the absolute or ultimate truth of the chair.
9. Rangjung Dorje is the third Karmapa.
10. In Tibetan there is another word for conceptuality. The difference between completely conceptualized and conceptuality is that the first is more vivid, more energetic.

11. These three natures are described in *The Samdhinirmocana Mahayana Sutra* and are described in Khenpo Tsultim Gyatso Rinpoche's *Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness*.

The imaginary nature exists on the relative or conventional level and refers to things that are completely imaginary to the person. For example, our dreams or the ideas we may have are by themselves imaginary nature because what is in the dream is unreal and ideas we have are completely imaginary. The imaginary is obviously empty because what it refers to is completely unreal. The imaginary nature does not have any true essence because an imaginary fire, for example, does not have the characteristics of fire which is hot and burning.

The dependent nature also exists on the relative level, but not on the ultimate level. For example, in a dream of a tiger, the tiger itself has imaginary nature but this leads to dependent nature because the person who is dreaming sees the tiger and begins to feel fear. In other words, it has an effect on the relative level, but of course, ultimately the tiger does not exist. So dependent nature exists on the relative level, but not on the ultimate level.

The perfect existing nature, on the other hand, truly exists. This nature is nonconceptual and is empty of mind distinguishing outer phenomena and inner mind. It is also empty of the eight consciousnesses, and is the absolute emptiness of the dharmakaya. This nature is empty on both the conventional and the ultimate level.

12. Thrangu Rinpoche describes this in much more detail in his *Distinguishing Consciousness and Wisdom*. To greatly simplify, for thousands of lifetimes we have been storing latencies (Tib. *bak chak*) in our eighth storehouse or alaya consciousness. These are not just the results of our actions (i.e., karmic results of our positive and negative deeds), but also sensory impressions that the phenomena of the world is solid and real.
13. For more details see Thrangu Rinpoche's *The Twelve Links of Interdependent Origination* by Nammo Buddha Publications.
14. Thrangu Rinpoche explains this in greater detail in his *Distinguishing Wisdom and Consciousness* in which he presents the argument that through countless lifetimes we have developed

these latencies so that when we see or hear or smell, etc. an external object through the six consciousnesses, these are recognized through the latencies stored in the eighth consciousness, and these latencies tell us that the impressions of the six consciousnesses are solid and real. Yogis, however, who have worked through all these habitual latencies can do what Milarepa did and put their hand through a rock, which is truly empty.

15. Thrangu Rinpoche did not actually discuss these similes here, so this discussion comes from his commentary in the *Uttara Tantra*.
16. For this chapter we use the translation of the root text by Michelle Martin.
17. This word adventitious means that it is not essential to the real nature of an object. Michelle Martin translates this word as temporary.

**Table 6**

**The Ten Paramitas and Their Obstacles**

<i><b>The Bodhisattva Levels</b></i>	<i><b>Emphasis on</b></i>
1. The Joyous One (Tib. rab tu dga' ba)	generosity (Tib. sbyin pa)
2. The Stainless One (Tib. dri ma med pa)	discipline (Tib. tsultrim)
3. The Illuminating One (Tib. 'od byed pa)	patience (Tib. bzod pa)
4. The Flaming One (Tib. 'od 'phro ba)	exertion (Tib. bzod pa)
5. One Difficult to Conquer (Tib. shin tu sbyang dka' ba)	stability of mind (Tib. sam ten)
6. The Manifest One (Tib. mngon du gyur ba)	wisdom (Tib. sherab)
7. The Far Going one (Tib. ring du song pa)	skilful activity (Tib. thabs la mkhas pa)
8. The Unshakable One (Tib. mi gyo ba)	aspiration prayer (Tib. smob lam)
9. Good Discrimination (Tib. legs pa'i blo gros)	power (Tib. stobs)
10. Cloud of Dharma (Tib. chos kyi sprin)	Attaining wisdom (Tib. ye shes)



## *The Glossary*

**afflicted consciousness** (Tib. *nyön yi*) The seventh consciousness.

See consciousnesses, eight.

**aggregates, five** (Skt. *skandha*, Tib. *phungpo nga*) Literally "heaps," These are the five basic transformations that perceptions undergo when an object is perceived. First is form which includes all sounds, smells, etc. everything that is not thought. The second and third are sensations (pleasant and unpleasant, etc.) and identification. Fourth is mental events which actually include the second and third aggregates. The fifth is ordinary consciousness such as the sensory and mental consciousnesses.

**alaya consciousness** (Tib. *kunshi namshe*) According to the Yogacara school this is the eighth consciousness and is often called the ground consciousness or store-house consciousness.

**arhat** (Tib. *drachompa*) Accomplished hinayana practitioners who have eliminated the klesha obscurations. They are the fully realized shravakas and pratyekabuddhas.

**Asanga (tokme)** A fourth century Indian philosopher who founded the Cittamatra or Yogacara school and wrote the five works of Maitreya which are important mahayana works. He was also the older brother of Vasubhandu.

**ayatanas** (Tib. *kyen che*) These are the six sense consciousnesses and their sensory objects.

**bhumi** (Tib. *sa*) The levels or stages a bodhisattva goes through to reach enlightenment. Also called the bodhisattva levels. Usually comprised of ten levels in the sutra tradition and thirteen in the tantra tradition.

**bodhicitta** (Tib. *chang chup kyi sem*) Literally, the mind of enlightenment. There are two kinds of bodhicitta: absolute bodhicitta, which is completely awakened mind that sees the emptiness of phenomena, and relative bodhicitta which is the aspiration to practice the six paramitas and free all beings from the suffering of samsara.

**bodhisattva** (Tib. *chang chup sempa*) Literally, one who exhibits the mind of enlightenment. Also an individual who has committed him or herself to the mahayana path of compassion and the practice of the six paramitas to achieve Buddhahood to free all beings from sa'sara.

**bodhisattva levels** (Skt. *bhumi*, Tib. *sa*) The levels or stages a bodhisattva goes through to reach enlightenment. These consist of ten levels in the sutra tradition and thirteen in the tantra tradition.

**buddha nature** (Skt. *tathagatagarbha*, Tib. *teshin shekpe nyingpo*) The original nature present in all beings which when realized leads to enlightenment. It is often called the essence of Buddhahood or enlightened essence.

**buddhadharma** The teachings of the Buddha.

**Chittamatra school** (Tib. *sem tsampa*) A school founded by Asanga in the fourth century and is usually translated as the Mind-only School. It is one of the four major schools in the mahayana tradition and its main tenet (to greatly simplify) is that all phenomena are mental events.

**completion stage** (Tib. *dzok rim*) In the vajrayana there are two stages of meditation: the development and the completion stage. The completion stage is a method of tantric meditation in which one attains bliss, clarity, and nonthought by means of the subtle channels and energies within the body.

**conditioned existence** (Skt. *samsara*, Tib. *khorma*) Ordinary existence which contains suffering because one still possesses attachment, aggression, and ignorance. It is contrasted to liberation or nirvana.

**consciousnesses, sensory** (Tib. *namshe*) These are the five sensory consciousnesses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and body sensation.

**consciousnesses, eight** (Skt. *vijñana*, Tib. *namshe tsok gye*) These are the five sensory consciousnesses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and body sensation. Sixth is mental consciousness, seventh is afflicted consciousness, and eighth is ground consciousness.

**convention wisdom** (Tib. *kun dzop*) There are two truths: relative and absolute. Relative truth is the perception of an ordinary

(unenlightened) person who sees the world with all his or her projections based on the false belief in ego.

**creation stage** (Skt. *utpattikrama*, Tib. *kyerim*) In the vajrayana there are two stages of meditation: the development and the completion stage. This is a method of tantric meditation which involves visualization and contemplating deities for the purpose of realizing the purity of all phenomena. In this stage visualization of the deity is established and maintained.

**dharma** (Tib. *chö*) This has two main meanings: Any truth such as the sky is blue and secondly, as used in this text, the teachings of the Buddha (also called buddhadharma).

**dharmadhatu** (Tib. *chöying*) The all-encompassing space, unoriginated and without beginning, out of which all phenomena arises. The Sanskrit means “the essence of phenomena” and the Tibetan means “the expanse of phenomena” but usually it refers to the emptiness which is the essence of phenomena.

**dharmakaya** (Tib. *chöku*) One of the three bodies of Buddhahood. It is enlightenment itself, that is wisdom beyond reference point. See kayas, three.

**dharmata** (Tib. *chönyi*) Dharmata is often translated as “suchness” or “the true nature of things” or “things as they are.” It is phenomena as it really is or as seen by a completely enlightened being without any distortion or obscuration so one can say it is “reality.”

**emptiness** (Skt. *shunyata*, Tib. *tongpa nyi*) Also translated as voidness. The Buddha taught in the second turning of the wheel of dharma that external phenomena and the internal phenomena or concept of self or “I” have no real existence and therefore are “empty.”

**eternalism** (Tib. *tak ta*) A belief that one’s self has concrete existence and is eternal. The opposite is nihilism. The middle way rejects these two extremes.

**five aggregates**, see aggregates, five

**five paths** See paths, five.

**four noble truths** (Tib. *pakpe denpa shi*) The Buddha began teaching with a talk in India at Saranath on the four noble truths. These are the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path. These truths

are the foundation of Buddhism, particularly the Theravadin path.

**Gampopa** (1079-1153 C.E.) One of the main lineage holders of the Kagyu lineage in Tibet. Known also for writing the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*.

**Gelug school** One of the main four Tibetan schools of Buddhism founded by Tsong Khapa (1357-1419 C.E.) and is headed by His Holiness the fourteenth Dalai Lama.

**generation stage** (Skt. *utpattikrama*, Tib. *kyerim*) In the vajrayana there are two stages of meditation: the development and the completion stage. This is a method of tantric meditation which involves visualization and contemplating deities for the purpose of realizing the purity of all phenomena. In this stage visualization of the deity is established and maintained.

**geshe** (Tib.) A scholar who has attained a doctorate in Buddhist studies. This usually takes fifteen to twenty years to attain.

**Guhyasamaja tantra** (Tib. *sanwa düpa*) This is the “father tantra” of the anuttara yoga which is the highest of the four tantras. Guhyasamaja is the central deity of the vajra family.

**hinayana** (Tib. *tekpa menpa*) Literally, the “lesser vehicle.” The term refers to the first teachings of the Buddha which emphasized the careful examination of mind and its confusion. Also known as the Theravadin path.

**hungry ghosts** (Skt. *preta*, Tib. *yidak*) A type of being who is always starved for food and water. See the six realms of samsara.

**insight meditation** (Skt. *vipashyana*, Tib. *lhak tong*) Meditation that develops insight into the nature of mind. The other main meditation is shamatha meditation.

**interdependent origination** (Skt. *pratityasamutpada*, Tib. *trendrel*) The twelve successive phases that begin with ignorance and end with old age and death.

**jñāna** (Tib. *yeshe*) Enlightened wisdom which is beyond dualistic thought.

**Kagyu** (Tib.) One of the four major schools of Buddhism in Tibet. It was founded by Marpa and is headed by His Holiness Karmapa. The other three are the Nyingma, the Sakya, and the Gelupa schools.

**karma** (Tib. *lay*) Literally “action.” Karma is a universal law that when one does a wholesome action one’s circumstances will improve and when one does an unwholesome action negative results will eventually occur from the act.

**kayas, three** (Tib. *ku sum*) There are three bodies of the Buddha: the nirmanakaya, sambhogakaya and dharmakaya. The dharmakaya, also called the “truth body,” is the complete enlightenment or the complete wisdom of the Buddha, which is unoriginated wisdom beyond form and manifests in the sambhogakaya and the nirmanakaya. The sambhogakaya, also called the “enjoyment body,” manifests only to bodhisattvas. The nirmanakaya, also called the “emanation body,” manifests in the world and in this context manifests as the Shakyamuni Buddha.

**khenpo** (Tib.) A title of someone who has completed ten year’s study of Buddhism. It can also mean an abbot of a monastery.

**klesha** (Tib. *nyön mong*) The emotional obscurations (in contrast to intellectual obscurations) which are also translated as “poisons.” The three main kleshas are (passion or desire or attachment), (aggression or anger); and (ignorance or delusion or aversion). The five kleshas are the three above plus pride and (envy or jealousy).

**klesha consciousness** (Tib. *nyön yi*) The seventh of the eight consciousnesses. See consciousnesses, eight.

**luminosity** (Tib. *salwa*) In the vajrayana everything is void, but this voidness is not completely empty because it has luminosity. Luminosity or clarity allows all phenomena to appear and is a characteristic of emptiness (Skt. *shunyata*).

**Madhyamaka** (Tib. *uma*) A philosophical school founded by Nagarjuna in the second century. The main principle of this school is proving that everything is empty of self-nature as usually understood using rational reasoning.

**mahamudra** (Tib. *chak gya chenpo*) Literally means “great seal.” As in all phenomena are sealed by the primordially perfect true nature. Lineage began by Saraha (10th century) is a method of examining mind directly.

**mahayana** (Tib. *tekpa chenpo*) Literally, the “great vehicle.” These are the teachings of the second turning of the wheel of dharma,

which emphasize shunyata, compassion, and the conduct of a bodhisattva.

**Maitreya** (Tib. *champa*) A bodhisattva at the time of Buddha and is presently residing in Tushita heaven until the coming of the fifth buddha of this kalpa.

**Mañjushri** (Tib. *Jampal*) A meditational deity representing discriminative awareness (prajña) known for knowledge and learning. Usually depicted as holding a sword in the right hand and scripture in the left.

**mental consciousness** (Tib. *yi kyi namshe*) The sixth of the eight consciousnesses. See consciousnesses, eight.

**middle way** (Tib. *uma*) or Madhyamaka School. A philosophical school founded by Nagarjuna and based on the Prajnaparamita sutras of emptiness.

**Mind-only school.** See Chittamatra. This is one of the major schools in the mahayana tradition.

**Nagarjuna** (Tib. *ludrup*) An Indian scholar in the second century who founded the Madhyamaka philosophical school which emphasized emptiness.

**nihilism** (Tib. *cheta*) The extreme view of nothingness, the nonexistence of a mind after death.

**nirmamakaya** (Tib. *tülku*) There are three bodies of the Buddha and the nirmanakaya or “emanation body” manifests in the world and in this context manifests as the Shakyamuni Buddha. See kayas, three.

**nirvava** (Tib. *nya ngen len dep*) Literally, “extinguished” in Sanskrit and “transcendence of suffering” in Tibetan. Individuals live in samsara and with spiritual practice can attain a state of enlightenment in which all false ideas and conflicting emotions have been extinguished. This is called nirvana.

**noble truths, four** (Tib. *pakpe denpa shi*) The Buddha founded Buddhism with a teaching at Sarnath, India on the four noble truths. These are the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path. These are the foundation of Buddhism, particularly the hinayana path.

**Nyingma** (Tib.) The oldest school of Buddhism based on the teachings of Padmasambhava and others in the eighth and ninth centuries.

**paramitas, six** (Tib. *paroltu chinpa*) Sanskrit for “perfections” and the Tibetan literally means “gone to the other side.” These are the six practices of the mahayana path: Transcendent generosity (*dana*), transcendent discipline (*shila*), transcendent patience (*kshanti*), transcendent exertion (*virya*), transcendent meditation (*dhyana*), and transcendent knowledge (*prajña*). The ten paramitas are these plus aspirational prayer, power, and *prajña*.

**paths, five** (Tib. *lam nga*) Traditionally, a practitioner goes through five stages or paths to enlightenment. These are (1) the path of accumulation (Skt. *sambharamarga*) which emphasizes purifying one’s obscurations and accumulating merit. (2) The path of junction or application (Skt. *prayogamarga*) in which the meditator develops profound understanding of the four noble truths and cuts the root to the desire realm. (3) The path of insight or seeing (Skt. *darshanamarga*) in which the meditator develops greater insight and enters the first bodhisattva level. (4) The path of meditation (Skt. *bhavanamarga*) in which the meditator cultivates insight in the second through tenth bodhisattva levels. (5) The path of fulfillment (Skt. *ashaiksamarga*) which is the complete attainment of Buddhahood.

**prajña** (Tib. *sherab*) In Sanskrit it means “perfect knowledge” and can mean wisdom, understanding, or discrimination. Usually it means the wisdom of seeing things from a high (e.g. non-dualistic) point of view.

**Prajñaparamita** (Tib. *sherap kyi paroltu chinpa*) The Buddhist literature outlining the mahayana path and emptiness written mostly around the second century.

**pratyekabuddha** (Tib. *rang sanggye*) Literally, solitary realizer. A realized hinayana practitioner who has achieved the knowledge of how it is and variety, but who has not committed him or herself to the bodhisattva path of helping all others.

**rinpoche** Literally, “very precious” and is used as a term of respect for a Tibetan guru.

**Rangton School** (Tib.) The Madhyamika or middle way school divided into two major schools: the Rangtong which maintains voidness is devoid of inherent existence and Shentong which maintains voidness is indivisible from luminosity.

**Sakya** (Tib.) One of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism. It was established by Drogmi Lotsawa in the 11th century.

**samadhi** (Tib. *tin ne zin*) Also called meditative absorption or one-pointed meditation, this is the highest form of meditation.

**Shamatha** or tranquility meditation (Tib. *shine*) This is basic meditation in which one usually follows the breath while observing the workings of the mind while sitting in a cross-legged posture.

**sambhogakaya** (Tib. *long ku*) There are three bodies of the Buddha and the sambhogakaya, also called the “enjoyment body,” is a realm of the dharmakaya which only manifests to bodhisattvas. See the three kayas.

**samsara** (Tib. *khorma*) Conditioned existence of ordinary life in which suffering occurs because one still possesses attachment, aggression, and ignorance. It is contrasted to nirvana.

**sangha** (Tib. *gendun*) These are the companions on the path. They may be all the persons on the path or the noble sangha, which are the realized one’s.

**secret mantrayana** Another term for the vajrayana.

**shastra** (Tib. *tenchö*) The Buddhist teachings are divided into words of the Buddha (the sutras) and the commentaries of others on his works (the shastras).

**Shentong school** (Tib.) The Madhyamika or middle way school divided into two major schools: the Rongtong which maintains voidness is devoid of inherent existence and Shentong which maintains voidness is indivisible from luminosity.

**skandha** (Tib. *phungpo*) Literally “heaps.” These are the five basic transformations that perceptions undergo when an object is perceived: form, feeling, perception, formation, and consciousness. First is form which includes all sounds, smells, etc. everything we usually think of as outside the mind. The second and third are sensations (pleasant and unpleasant, etc.) and identification. Fourth is mental events which actually include the second and third aggregates. The fifth is ordinary consciousness such as the sensory and mental consciousnesses.

**skillful means** (Skt. *upaya*, Tib. *tap*) The skillful means used by enlightened beings to present the dharma taking the person’s capabilities and propensities into account.



**shravaka** (Tib. *nyentö*) Literally “those who hear” meaning disciples. A type of realized hinayana practitioner (arhat) who has achieved the realization of the nonexistence of personal self.

**shravakayana** The path of a shravaka.

**suchness** (Tib. *te kona nyi*) This is things as they really are, not as they appear.

**sugatagarbha** (Tib. *deshek nyingpo*) Buddha nature or that enlightened essence present in all beings that allows them to have the capacity to achieve enlightenment. It is closely related to tathagatagarbha.

**sutra** (Tib. *do*) These are the hinayana and mahayana texts which are the words of the Buddha. These are often contrasted with the tantras which are the Buddha’s vajrayana teachings and the shastras which are commentaries on the words of the Buddha.

**tantra** (Tib. *gyü*) One can divide Tibetan Buddhism into the sutra tradition and the tantra tradition. The sutra tradition involves primarily the academic study of the mahayana sutras and the tantra path is primarily engaging in the vajrayana practices. The tantras usually means the texts of the vajrayana practices.

**tathagatas** (Tib. *teshin shekpa*) Literally, those who have gone to thusness. A title of the Buddha and bodhisattvas.

**tathagatagarba** (Tib. *deshin shekpai nyingpo*) This is the seed or essence of tathata (suchness) and is also called buddha essence or enlightened essence.

**Three jewels** These are the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha.

**tirthikas** Religious people who believe in a personal self. Also referred to as icchantikas.

**tranquility meditation** (Skt. *shamatha*, Tib. *shi ne*) A basic meditation practice aimed at taming and sharpening the mind. It is also called basic sitting meditation.

**Tushita realm** (Tib. *ganden*) This is one of the heaven fields of the Buddha. Tushita is in the sambhogakaya and therefore is not located in any place or time.

**vajra** (Tib. *dorje*) Usually translated “diamond like.” This may be an implement held in the hand during certain vajrayana ceremonies, or it can refer to a quality which is so pure and so enduring that it is like a diamond.

**vajrayana** (Tib. *dorje tekpa*) There are three major traditions of Buddhism (hinayana, mahayana, vajrayana) The vajrayana is based on the tantras and emphasizes the clarity aspect of phenomena and is mainly practiced in Tibet.

**Vajrayogini** (Tib. *Dorje Najorma*) A female meditational deity belonging to the anuttarayogatantra who is often red in color and dancing with a semi-wrathful facial expression.

**vipashyana meditation** (Tib. *lhak tong*) Sanskrit for “insight meditation” This meditation develops insight into the nature of mind. The other main meditation is shamatha meditation.

**voidness** (Skt. *shunyata* Tib. *tongpa nyi*) Usually translated as voidness or emptiness. The Buddha taught in the second turning of the wheel of dharma that external phenomena and internal phenomena or concept of self or “I” have no real existence and therefore are “empty.”

**wheel of dharma** (Skt. *dharmacakra*, Tib *chökyi khorlo*) The Buddha’s teachings correspond to three levels: the hinayana, the mahayana and the vajrayana with each set being one turning of the wheel.

**wisdom of nature of phenomena** (Tib. *ji tawa*) This is transcendent knowledge (jñāna) of the true nature of reality, not as it appears to individuals in samsara.

**wisdom of multiplicity or variety** (Tib. *ji nyepa*) This is the transcendent knowledge (jñāna) of the variety of phenomena.

**yana** (Tib. *thekpa* ) Literally means vehicle but refers here to level of teaching. There are three main yanas (see hinayana, mahayana, and vajrayana).

## Glossary of Tibetan Terms

Pronounced	Transliterated	English
bak chak	bag chags	latencies
chang chup chi sem	byang chub kyi sems	bodhicitta
chang cup sem pa	byang chup sems pa	bodhisattva
ché ta	chad lta	nihilism
chem che	skye mched	ayatanas
chenpo	chen po	great
chö	chos	dharma
chö ku	chos sku	dharmakaya
chö nyi	chos nyid	dharmata
chö ying	chos dbyings	dharmadhatu
dezhin shekpa	de bzhin gshegs pa	tathagata
do	mdo	sutra
dorje tek pa	rdo rje theg pa	vajrayana
dorje	rdo je	vajra
dra chom pa	dgra bcom pa	arhat
dzo rim	rdzogs rim	completion stage
gan dan	dga' ldan	tushita
ge wa	dge ba	virtue
gen dun	dge 'dun	sanga
geshe	dge bshes	scholar
gyu	gyud	tantra
Jampa	byams pa	Maitreya
Jampyang	'jam dbyangs	Mañjushri
ji nye pa	ji shyed pa	wisdom variety
ji ta ba	ji lta ba	wisdom phenom
kham	kham	dhatu
khenpo	mkhan po	abbot
khom	sgom	habituation
khör lo	'khör lo	samsara
ku sum	sku gsum	three kayas
kun sop	kun rdzob	conventional truth
kün shi nam she	kun gzhi' nam shes	alaya consciousness
kye rim	bskyed rim	creation stage
lam	lam	path
lam nga	lam nnga	five paths
lay	las	karma
lhak thong	lhag mthong	vipashyana

*Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes*

long ku	longs sku	sambhogakaya
ludrup	klu sgrub	Nagarjuna
nam she tsog gye	rnam shes	consciousness eight
nyangenledep	myang 'das	nirvana
nyen thö	nyan thos	shravaka
Nyingma	rnying ma	Nyingma
nyön mong	nyon mongs	disturbing emotion
parol tu chinpa	pha rol tu phyin pa	six paramitas
phung po nga	phung po lnga	five aggregates
rang sang gye	rang sangs rgyas	pratyekabuddha
rinpoche	rin po che	"precious one"
Rongton	rong stong	Empty of self
sa	sa	bhumi
salwa	gsal ba	luminosity
sang pa dus pa	gsang ba 'dus	Guhyasamaja tantra
sem tsampa	sems tsam pa	Chittamatra
Shentong	gzhan strong	empty of others
sherab	shes rab	prajña
shi nay	zhi gnas	tranquillity med
sonam	bsod nams	merit
tak ta	rtag lta	eternalism
tan chö	bstan bcos	shastra
tek pa chen po	theg pa chen po	mahayana
tek pa chung wa	theg pa chung ba	hinayaya
ten drel	rten 'brel	interdependence
thab	thabs	skillful means
theg pa	theg pa	vehicle
thok me	thogs med	Asanga
tin ne zin	ting nge 'dzin	samadhi
tong pa nyi	strong pa nyid	emptiness
tulku	sprul sku	nirmanakaya
u ma	dbu ma	Madhyamaka
yeshe	ye shes	(higher wisdom)
yidak	yi dvags	hungry ghosts